

From Prisoner to Prime Minister

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn back now to Genesis 41, and for some time, short time, let's look at the passage we read, looking at the main features of this passage, chapter 41, verses 1 to 36.

Those who become prime ministers have usually had a fairly long period of training, you might say. They're usually expected to have university degrees, mostly in something like economics or politics. They usually serve in whatever party they belong to for a good number of years, working their way up the political ladder, as it were, until finally they become leader of the party, and then become, if the party is elected to power, they become prime minister of the nation.

How would you feel if that whole pattern that's the usual way were broken, and the prime minister today had been in prison last week?

Take him straight out of prison, placed above the whole nation. You'd be amazed, for one thing, that such a thing could happen, but it did happen.

[1 : 15] It happened in Egypt, of all places, where the most powerful man in the world at the time, the Pharaoh of Egypt, chose, having met Jacob for a short time, actually then selected him and chose him and said, You're the man we want. You're the person next to me that's going to lead this nation for 14 years during this crisis.

That's what happened. It's the next stage of Joseph's interesting and significant life. We've looked at it up to now, looking at him over the last couple of studies in prison.

And what we want to find, to look at today, as it comes from this passage, are two things really. First of all, the failure of worldly wisdom, as we've called it, as that's represented in Pharaoh's magicians or wise men, or these special people that Egypt and places then had, where they were able, so-called anyway, to interpret things like visions and dreams and so on.

The failure of worldly wisdom, in contrast to Joseph, the man of God, who actually came to divulge to Pharaoh the meaning of his dreams. And the second thing we want to note is Joseph's witness for God in the presence of Pharaoh.

Because, as we'll see, it was itself a remarkable witness, something in which he continued his faithfulness to God, his uprightness, but doing it just as before, very openly, without in any way trying to hide who he actually was, what he stood for, and where his strength lay.

[2 : 53] Joseph's witness for God. But look at the failure, first of all, of worldly wisdom. Now, we need to notice that the passage begins after two whole years.

And might tend to skip over that as being really of not much significance. Okay, it's a time reference. It tells us another two years past since what we read in the previous chapter.

But just imagine where Joseph is. And just imagine the letdown that he had experienced when this chief cupbearer had forgotten him, despite all the help that Joseph had been to him in the prison. And been the means of securing his release and interpreting his dream. He forgot him. And two whole years went by.

You might think, having read in the previous chapter, that this man had been released and gone and given his account to Pharaoh, restored back to being the chief cupbearer.

[3 : 51] And knowing the rest of the story as we do, the story of Joseph and what he would become, that God would very soon bring about Joseph's release from prison. But God is not in a hurry.

That would be our timetable. That would be a way we would actually arrange things. We wouldn't leave Joseph in prison after this event of the cupbearer forgetting him after he'd gone back to Pharaoh.

So we would make sure that Joseph wasn't left too long after that in the prison. But God left him for two whole years. Still being tested. And still waiting for God's time.

And that's what is important to us today. That God has his own timetable for each of our lives. That God does things according to his plan. And that during that time, Joseph's faith is being tested. Joseph's commitment is being tested. And you and I are being tested. When things drag out longer than we would like, longer than we would think appropriate. Why doesn't it happen sooner what you're praying for?

[5 : 00] Why doesn't your life develop in a way that you would think more appropriate rather than leaving things as they are? Why do all the problems seem to just spend so much time on our agenda rather than God just clearing them away and starting again and giving us a new program?

Because God knows what he's doing. And God tests our faith in the things of this life. And arranges our life in a way by which the things of our faith and our commitment to him are indeed tested in a way that's ongoing.

And he does that by very often not bringing us so that we avoid the suffering bits of life. That we actually don't have to spend too long in prison if you want Jacob in Joseph's position.

God will just leave us there sometimes longer than we would ourselves want it to be. But you see faith is strengthened by that.

There's a remarkable thing said about Joseph's great grandfather, Abraham. He was given a promise by God that he would have a son. That he would have a son who would be his heir proper spiritually.

[6 : 13] A son in whom the promises of God would come to be fulfilled or through him would come to be fulfilled. The promises of salvation through Isaac.

Now Abraham had other sons before Isaac was born. And Abraham had to wait at least 20 years from the day of the promise given to him until Isaac was born.

And all of that time he had to depend upon the word of God. He had to depend upon the truth of God's promise.

Whatever he might be told by other people. Whatever his own reason might say to him. However long he might feel the time. And however much he might have wished. Lord we don't know he did. That time would pass more quickly. He had to wait for God's timetable to be fulfilled. And the interesting thing is that in Romans chapter 4. We read about that time in Abraham's life.

[7 : 15] That the promise of God is realized through faith. And that the promise that came to Abraham was realized through faith on his part as well.

If you look at Romans chapter 4. Especially from verse 17. The middle of verse 17 there. And he believed in the God who gives life to the dead.

And calls into existence the things that do not exist. In other words. When Abraham was given the promise. He was a very old man. And his wife was past childbearing age.

And yet God says. Sarah will have a son. You will have a son by Sarah. That's what I'm saying to you. And so he believed in the God.

Who calls things into existence that do not exist. In hope he believed against hope. That he would become the father of many nations. As he had been told. So shall your offspring be.

[8 : 15] And then you see the next bit. He did not weaken in faith. When he considered his own body. Which was as good as dead. Or considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.

No distrust made him waver. Concerning the promise of God. And listen to this. But he grew strong. Or he was strengthened in his faith. As he gave glory to God.

Now sometimes we think of that passage. As if all it's saying is that he was strong in faith. Yes that's part of it. He was strong in faith. He had a strong faith. But what the passage really is telling us.

That all of this waiting time. All of this actually waiting for God's timetable to be fulfilled. Was a time when his faith was being strengthened. His faith was strong.

But it still requires strengthening. As all faith does. How did God strengthen his faith? He strengthened it through giving Abraham. Periods like this of testing.

[9 : 11] And that's what Joseph also learned. I'm sure it's true. We're not told specifically in the Bible of course. But looking at the Bible's teaching overall.

On this particular theme. Can we not actually say that. Joseph learned at least as much about God. Possibly even more. About God and about himself.

In that prison. Than he did later. When he was in Pharaoh's palace. Because that is where God. In testing him. Strengthened his faith.

In other words. The great thing is. You see. The cup bearer forgot him. But that's part of God's remembering of him. The forgetfulness of the butler. Is a serious omission on his part.

He's responsible for that. He should have remembered Joseph. He did him a disservice. In forgetting him. But the forgetfulness of the butler. The sin of the butler.

[10:08] The cup bearer. Whatever you call him. It's part of God's program for Joseph. It's within God's remembering of him. In his need. In his situation. In the context in which he's placed him.

Little does the cup bearer know. That his forgetting about Joseph. Was one of God's main means. Of strengthening Joseph's faith. That's how it is friends.

That's how God's program sometimes is. The disappointments of life. The letdowns of life. They're just as important. Sometimes even more important.

Than the liftings. The encouragements. The rejoicings. And we need. To pray. As good old Matthew Henry.

I think it was. Who said. We need to pray to God for grace. Whether our cup is full. Or empty. We need grace to carry it.

[11:07] All right. When it's full. We're likely to spill it. When it's empty. We're likely to despise it. But God chooses both.

And we need grace. From him. To carry it. That's what Joseph. Maybe you're asking today. Why is it taking so long? I'm praying for somebody.

I've been praying for them for years. I've been praying for my family. I've been praying for my parents. For my partner. Whatever it is. And it's taking so long. And it's years since I started praying. And nothing seems to be happening yet.

And it's not working by your timetable. Remember. The timetable is God's. Even when it comes to answering prayer. And there are many things. Like that.

Where. You know. Even at times. You look into the book of Psalms. The book of Psalms. Of course. Such a great book. For. Not just singing God's praises from. But when you're singing God's praises. You come across all of these.

[12:04] Varied. Experiences. In believers lives. And Psalm 13. For example. Begins with a remarkable question. As a question. You might think.

How can any believer. Ask such a question about God. And it says. How long. Will you forget me Lord. His heart is so pained.

He's so caught up. Emotionally. And mentally. In the anguish of his circumstances. That he regards God. As just. As if he had forgotten him. How long.

Will you forget me Lord. How long shall it be. How long will this go on. Maybe that's your cry today. And you go to Isaiah. 49. One of the great passages. In the Bible.

In terms of rich. Encouraging promises. Where God is saying. I have graven you. On the palms of my hands. Can a woman forget. Her sucking child. Yes.

[13:00] She may forget. But I will not forget you. I have graven you. On the palms of my hands. But there's a question. There's a statement. Before that. Why is God saying that.

Because Israel has said. My Lord has forgotten me. And this is God's answer. To such a statement. How can I forget you.

Haven't I graven you. On the palms of my hands. You try. And inscribe. No don't try it. But if you were to try it. And even if you get. A cut or something.

On the palm of your hand. You know how sore it is. Because it's on that part. One part of your body. That you constantly use. And you're constantly reminded. Of that cut. On the palm of your hand.

Whenever you try and do something. It hits you. The pain hits you. Until it heals. And God is saying. On the palms of my hands. I have engraven. My people.

[13:59] It's as if God has taken. An engraving tool. And as if he had physical hands. He has just. Engraven and inscribed. And cut into the flesh of his hands.

His own people. Their names. Their needs. Their future. Their present. Everything about them. They're there. Therefore he's saying. How can I forget you.

How can you accuse me. Of forgetting my people. When that's what they mean to me. Yes. The question will come into our mind.

Has God forgotten me. As part of our. Broken. Incomplete. Sin affected vision.

In this life. But we come back to the Bible. With it. The Bible here. In Joseph's experience. And elsewhere. Tells us. God.

[14 : 56] Cannot. Not just will not. But cannot. With all due respect. God cannot respect. Cannot. Forget. His people. After all.

When you take it into the New Testament. I've spent. Much more time on this. Than I had. Anticipated. But. That's God's timetable. Isn't it? It's not mine. Uh. When you go into the New Testament.

With it. And you realize. The extent to which God has gone. If you think of. What did it take for God. To inscribe. His people on his hands. What does that really mean.

In the outworking of God's plan. In the course of history. It means the cross. It means what happened at Calvary. It means. God the father. Giving his beloved son. To that accursed. Death of the cross. To bear the sin of his people. To pay the price of their sin. Are we actually going to say. Whatever our experience might be. However deep it might be.

[15 : 50] However long it might seem. To us to last. However much it might be different. To what we would desire ourselves. Are we really going to think. For one moment. That the God who did that.

Could forget his people. How can I forget you? You see. Look at what I've done for you. When I've given my son. To that death.

How could I ever forget you? Well that's the first thing. God is in no hurry. Because he has a planned program. For his people. To bring them. To the kind of people.

He wants them to be. Secondly. In the failure of worldly wisdom. You can see the experts here. In Egypt. Have no answer. To Pharaoh's problem. Pharaoh awakens.

And he's troubled. That itself makes a point to us. Here's the most powerful man in the world. And the one thing he cannot actually lay his hands on. Whatever he can requisition at that moment.

[16 : 47] He could give a command. Such a person would be killed. Give a command. For anything he likes in the kingdom. But he has no answer. To the troubles of his heart. He has no solution.

To the way he feels in himself. And deep in his soul. He's really troubled. About what he has actually. It's not just troubled about. Not having. An interpretation to the dreams.

There's something about these dreams. That Pharaoh understands is unusual. There's something about. The characteristics of these dreams. The vividness of these dreams.

The very nature of these dreams. There's something about them. That troubles him. And he's disturbed. On that new day. So he sends. For the professionals.

These experts. Who were in Egypt. And other places like it at the time. Full time interpreters of dreams. We saw that last time. They would be called in by Pharaoh.

[17 : 42] To answer problems like this. Or various similar things. They were reckoned to have. Access to the solutions of life. And so he summons them in.

But they can't. Give him any help. They were not able to interpret. The dream or its meaning. And that itself.

Is profoundly important for us. The best that Egypt had to offer. At the time. Is stumped. You just can't get access. To any meaning. Of Pharaoh's dreams.

That's what you get. When. Human reason alone. Or pagan philosophy. Or anything alternative. To God's own way. To God's own word. To the revelation.

God has given of himself. In our Bibles. Any alternative to that. Even if they can go so far. And even if there are some elements. In them that are like. The truth of the Bible. As far as providing a definite.

[18 : 44] And lasting. And permanent. Answer to human problems. To the human problem. Of sin. And our relationship to God. It's failure. It's futility.

It's the same with all. Alternatives to the gospel. And it's sad isn't it. That. The leadership of our nation. Both in Scotland. And in Westminster. Are themselves.

So committed. To looking for answers. To the country's problems. Everywhere but in the Bible. Everywhere but in what God.

Has laid down. As the standard. And the precepts. And the laws. And the promises. For human life. This is not just a Bible. For individuals.

This is not just. For churches. This is not just. For congregations. This is for human society. This is for nations. God gave this.

[19 : 42] Firstly to Israel. As a nation. And as the gospel. Went out into the world. In the days of the apostles. And since then. This word. Has come to be.

A word recognized. As a word. That is there. For human society. Wherever it's found. And for transforming. Human society. From mere human wisdom.

Guiding things. Into the wisdom of God. How sad. How desperately serious. That any nation. Should be led.

And have so many people. That would think. That this word. This Bible. Is totally irrelevant. Nowadays. And you have to put it aside.

And when you find even. Well. Well. When you find even. The church. Or groups in the church. Or some. Elements in the church. It doesn't matter. Whether they're. Professional theologians.

[20 : 35] Or bishops. Or ministers. Or pastors. Whatever. But when you find them. Teaching publicly. That actually. Secularism. Is quite right. In some things. The Bible is outdated.

In some things. We can't really think. In terms of Paul's teachings. Literally. Or just apply that. As if we were back in. The days of the apostles. Is this God's word or not?

And if it is God's word. Then it's God's word. For every generation. God's not going to change his mind. And change his plan. Or adapt his word. Do we actually think. For one moment. That God did not anticipate.

The situation of our day. The conditions of our society. When he caused this book. To be written. By the various people. That wrote it. Physically. And in human terms.

That God inspired. To write it. Do we actually think. That God was not capable. Of taking account. Of every generation. Of human society. So as to give us a book.

[21 : 34] That was adequate. To our needs. Whatever age we live in. That's what people will tell you. That's what Pharaoh's experts represent.

The failure and the futility. Of mere human reasoning. You apply that. To the secularism. To the humanism. To the atheism. To the liberal theology.

Of our day. That's what you find. That's why we're in this gate we're in. And that's why it's such a terrible thing. Because this spiritual blindness. As it increases.

Then. Unless God intervenes. Things are getting worse. That's why. We stand alongside. P. WAM. And every gospel. Honoring ministry. Because. My. How our days need. But the plain.

[22 : 29] Message. Of God's word. Is laid. Before the philosophies. Of our age. And let's pray. That God uses his word. To sweep them away. And that God will use.

His people. As he used. Joseph. Before Pharaoh. Just to get through. To those in authority. To see. How futile it is. To live without God.

And how serious it is. To take God on. And to oppose. God's wisdom. As it is in the Bible. Well that's what they represent. For us. And the futility.

And the. Hopelessness. Of that situation. Is really brought out. In Pharaoh's situation there. You can find the same thing. You can follow this out. In other places. Go for example. To. First Kings.

The account of. Elijah's life. You go to the contest. There. On Mount Carmel. And there's a brilliant description. The Bible is a brilliant book. Even for. Describing things. In the way that it uses words.

[23 : 27] And. When you go to. The description of. That contest. Between Elijah. And the prophets of Baal. And the way that Elijah. Tells them to go about. Their sacrifices to Baal.

He knows it's going to fail. But he's saying to them. Do the best you can. Make sure it's absolutely. The best you can. Call upon your gods. Call upon them. And if they don't answer.

Well cut yourselves with knives. Go through all the rituals. You think of. And see what happens. And the God that answers by fire. Let him be God.

So they do that. And we're told specifically. In the wonderful description there. There was no sound from heaven. And if you're into music.

And classical music. If you haven't listened to it before. Listen to Mendelssohn's Elijah. That oratorio. Mendelssohn. Or Felix Mendelssohn.

[24 : 26] When it comes to that bit. The music portrays. The meaning of that passage. So superbly. I know there are musicians. Amongst the team. Who probably know this far better. Than I do.

But. You really appreciate. When you come to listen to that bit. There's all the noise. And the clashings. Of these prophets of Baal. Representing them. As they're. In the frenzy. Calling out. To Baal. To Baal. To answer them. Then the music stops. There's silence. And the silence is deafening. Because it's portraying to us.

The futility. Of seeking an answer. To human problems. From other than God. You meet with silence. And then of course.

Elijah calls upon God. And how does he refer to him? O God of Abraham. Isaac and Israel.

[25 : 22] The covenant God. The living loving God. Let it be known today in Israel. That you are God.

And that I am your servant. And then the fire from heaven fell. What a contrast to the silence. That went before it. And see.

That's the same thing. As you find. Represented here in Joseph. Pharaoh has a problem. He has no answer to it. He's the most powerful man in the world. He just can't deal with this problem.

He sends for all the experts in the land. All these philosophies. All these things that they gather together. They have no answer to it. And he takes this young man out of prison. On the word of his chief cup bearer.

And he puts him before him. And there's the answer. Now let's just look briefly. Because I want to come to a conclusion. But Joseph's witness for God. There's this sudden summons.

[26 : 21] Pharaoh sent after the chief cup bearer. Told him about this young Hebrew. He sent and called Joseph. They quickly brought him out of the pit. When he had shaved himself and changed his clothes. He came in. Pharaoh said to Joseph.

Now look at this. Verse 15. I have had a dream. There is no one who can interpret it. I heard it said of you. That when you hear a dream. You can interpret.

What a glorious opportunity. For Joseph to promote himself. Here's the most powerful man in the world. And saying to him. I've heard about you young man.

And I've heard that you can do. The thing that I need done for me at the moment. If Joseph hadn't been as true to God. He would just have said. Well yes.

I can do that for you. But you see. Immediately. Joseph. Brings in God.

[27 : 16] Oh no. He says. I. He says. No. It is not in me. This is not about me. I don't have this ability myself.

God. Will give Pharaoh a favorable answer. You see. He's concerned immediately. To draw the mind of this great powerful man. The ruler of the world.

If you like. At the time and time of his power. He's concerned to bring him to see. That's not about me. I'm just. A Hebrew boy. It's my God that does this.

And that's. What Joseph does. And you see. It's amazing as well. That. When you look at this. These verses. There's absolutely.

No evidence at all. That. Joseph is. Overawed. After all. Just think of yourself. You were in prison. For all these years. You were summoned quickly. You didn't. Hardly have time to dress and shave yourself.

[28 : 20] Make yourself presentable. You brought in before the most powerful man in the world.

You were likely to be a bit overawed. In the presence of Pharaoh of all people. This man who's just been plucked straight out of prison.

And set before Pharaoh. And there's no evidence whatsoever. The evidence is elsewhere. As otherwise. He's not in the least overawed. Why was Joseph not overawed. In the presence of this great king.

Because he was used to a greater king. He was used to being in the presence of a king. The presence of God. No human king.

Is going to overaw this young man. When he's so used to being with God. He knows what it's like to be in the presence of a king. A much greater king than Pharaoh.

That's what it will be for your life and mine. The more used you are to being with God. And to being in the presence of God. The more you're not going to be overawed. By the big powers of the world.

[29 : 19] You're not going to be greatly impressed. By the most pompous human being you've ever met. Because you're impressed with God. And with the glory of God. With the greatness of God.

With the majesty of God. With the wisdom of God. So he puts that aside. And he says. It is not in me. It's in God. Now remember.

Pharaoh was regarded as a god in Egypt. The Pharaoh in Egypt. As each passing Pharaoh gave way to another one. But the Pharaoh. The position of the Pharaoh.

Whoever was the Pharaoh. He was regarded as the son of Ra. The chief son god of Egypt. And just put that in your mind. And think about what the Bible is telling us here.

Here is the son of Ra. In Egyptian thinking. In Egyptian religion. This god of Egypt. This chief god of Egypt. The son of Ra. And he's being lectured.

[30 : 18] And given in sight. By a Hebrew slave. Because that Hebrew slave. Is the son. Of the living God. He is an adopted child of God.

He has the insight that God gives to his people. Superior than any earthly king. And just think too. About Pharaoh.

The son of Ra. Compared to God. The God of Jacob. Pharaoh. The son of Ra. The Egyptian god. Hopeless. He can't solve his own problem.

Never mind what's coming on the nation. And just look at the contrast. Between. That impotent Pharaoh. And the mighty god of Joseph.

Brilliant. Contrast. And so it is right down to today. And. It shows that Pharaoh. Didn't have. Himself. The capability of managing.

[31 : 18] A country. Let me just finish with this point. Ask the question. What is history? What is history? What do you think of. When you think of the word history? Well.

History. Is not. A series. Of events. Created by human beings. However important. However powerful. They might have been in their day. History. Is not. A series.

Of events. In human life. Created by human beings. History. Is the unfolding. Of God's plan. With human beings in it.

He. Is the master. He's the architect. He's the one whose planet is. He's the one whose planet is. And whether you're Joseph.

Or Pharaoh. You have your own place in that plan. The important thing for you. And for me today. Is that. You have Jacob's. And Joseph's God.

[32 : 13] As your God. That you are united to him. And then it doesn't matter. Whether you're in prison. Or in a palace. All things.

Are you. Let's pray. Gracious God. Bless to us your word. Lord we pray. Help us in our application of it.

To do so with the conviction that comes. Of your own spirit. And enable us to. Apply it to the world in which we live constantly. We thank you that it is relevant. For this great purpose.

Bless us now in the rest of this day we pray. For Jesus sake. Amen.