

Joseph's Prison Ministry

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Date: 02 June 2013

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[0 : 0 0] Now for a short time let's turn back to Genesis chapter 40. We're going to look at Genesis 40 today as we continue looking at the life of Joseph. In the previous chapter remember we saw Joseph in prison and how even in prison because the Lord was with him he was actually given charge over the other prisoners because as the Lord was with him obviously his qualities as a man came through and as somebody reliable and trustworthy that even in the prison came through so strongly that he was given the charge of the other prisoners.

And we read whatever he did the Lord made it to succeed. And that continues now into chapter 40 because still in prison we find that Joseph was actually given a ministry for God in this prison.

His ministry, his witness to God, his ability to present God to these men and to be used of God for their benefit is something that you find mentioned in the chapter.

Now we've been seeing something also of the fact that there are parallels between the life and the experience and indeed the ministry of Joseph and the ministry of Jesus.

Although Joseph is not specified as a type or a representative of Christ specifically or explicitly in the Old Testament or indeed in the New there are so many features of his life nevertheless that are parallels and reminders of Christ that it's impossible to read the life of Joseph and not actually give attention to these parallels to that connection with the ministry of Christ and to the way that so much of Joseph's ministry and life remind us of what happened with Christ himself.

[1 : 5 7] So today we're looking at some of that as we conclude today's study but let's look firstly at his ministry in prison and we'll look at the ministry of Jesus from what we see here and on previous passages as well.

There are two new prisoners here we're told that came to occupy the prison with him the cup bearer of Pharaoh and also his chief baker they committed some offence against the lord their lord against the king Pharaoh we're not told what it was but because of it Pharaoh had them thrown into prison.

Now these were two important positions maybe nowadays we wouldn't think too much of a chief cup bearer and a chief baker but remember in those days there was a distinct possibility through the intrigue and jealousy and attempts to overthrow the ruling power and various things poisoning was a very obvious and constant threat it was a danger that people like Pharaoh always had to live with so if you had a chief cup bearer he was responsible to see that the things that were handed to Pharaoh for him to drink had not been polluted or poisoned a very responsible position the same thing would be true of the chief baker to make sure that nothing went into the food the bread or other items like that that were prepared for Pharaoh for his household, for his family that none of that was contaminated or poisoned both very important, significant positions both needed people who could be relied upon people that Pharaoh could trust and the least stepping out of line if there was the least hint that they couldn't be relied upon that there was a danger to Pharaoh or to any of his family that was it and some offence probably something to raise suspicions of that kind but in any case the offence was serious enough for Pharaoh to have them thrown into prison and they were thrown into the same prison as Joseph that's not accidental of course because we're seeing all the way through that the Lord is in charge of Joseph's life every single thing that happens in the life of this man has been prearranged by God however difficult it is unless you know the rest of the story of course which we do but if you are looking at it from the beginning without really knowing how the story of Joseph finishes it would be very difficult to come to this chapter itself for example and say well how is this going to benefit Joseph how is he actually going to benefit just another couple of prisoners two unreliable people they are thrown into prison with him and yet you can see from the detail that God is very much involved in arranging this yes it was the captain of the guard who arranged things actually in the prison but you can see the way that things happened that God was obviously in charge why this prison why in the same area of the prison as Joseph why people who had access to Pharaoh because all of this was proving

God's way of ultimately bringing Joseph back into favor and ultimately into power in the land of Egypt it doesn't seem that this was going to be very useful and it doesn't seem that this would be a way out of prison for Joseph to begin with but that is how it is and it reminds us nothing in our lives is accidental if our trust is in the Lord particularly if we put our trust in God if we are under the leadership of Jesus if he is the Lord of our lives if we committed our life to him and trust him to guide us and to keep us and to be our security then nothing in our lives is going to be accidental not even the difficult bits not even the trial bits not even the afflictions the difficulties the uncertainties the disappointments the times when you might feel that you are in a prison none of these things are accidental they are all within God's program and because of that we have to like Joseph let him guide our lives not try and work our own way through it not apply simply our own unguided minds or intellect to it not taking advice from all the resources that you find out with the Bible and out with God we will see in a minute how useless that was to these two men and their dreams in relation to their dreams but just like Joseph whatever things come into our way today on our lives and the course of our lives under God they are there so that we will seek his guidance that we will further put our trust in him and ask him to take us through these things and indeed to make us better people through that but it means also like Joseph that we will want to be seen as God's people in these circumstances you see

Joseph didn't in any way try to hide who he was we've seen he didn't try to do that earlier now he continues with that same conviction I have to live for God I have to live in a way that makes it clear who I serve who my God is that I'm not a pagan that I'm not an Egyptian that I'm actually a Hebrew that I'm someone who worships the true God who has revealed himself to his people to my father to my grandfather to my ancestors that's the God I serve and the fact that Joseph is in prison has not in any way altered that or deflected him from that you see that's the possibility that sometimes our trials and our afflictions our difficulties our times even if they feel like Joseph being in prison and confined of our disappointments and our circumstances in life or something like that there's the danger that we will use them to somehow try and get back at God or be angry with God and Joseph is a lesson to us because

[8 : 12] Joseph is saying well these things are from God they are part of his program for my life and I have to listen to him and I have to keep on serving him and even here my responsibility is to witness for him so that these two prisoners will see who my God is and what he can do for them that's so important for your own life and for my life as well yes there will be times when that is difficult times when it's hard to keep going even as a believer to put your trust 100% in God when you don't understand some of what's happening in your life and why it's happening and why it's so difficult but Joseph is telling us there's no other way really if we're true to God and if we want to really be the kind of people we should be in these circumstances and also through these circumstances and after these circumstances then we have to actually be concerned to live for God in them so the two new prisoners were thrown into prison with him but this is how

Joseph was in relation to them and then we read that they had two dreams each of them had a dream on the same night and each dream had its own interpretation now you also see God behind all of this because it's not a coincidence they both have a dream the same night the dreams in some ways are quite similar or have similar details some similar numbers in them the number three features in them dreams in Egypt and indeed further in those times of Joseph in the ancient Near East dreams were important because especially in paganism like Egypt was a pagan country paganism had its own way of dealing with dreams and Egypt would have professional you might call them professional interpreters so that people would come with their dreams and these interpreters would actually set out or try to set out the meaning of their dreams now it doesn't mean that every time we have a dream there's a specific spiritual meaning to it we mustn't go too far in pushing what the Bible tells us about situations like this it doesn't mean that if you have a dream tonight there's bound to be an important spiritual meaning attached to very often there's not but in this case in those circumstances these two people realized having had these dreams that they needed an interpretation and when Joseph went into them the next day after the morning after they dreamed he saw that they were troubled it actually showed in their faces because he said why are your faces downcast today you could see in these two men as Joseph went in he could immediately see these men have a problem they're troubled they've got a different disposition to that yesterday not just the prison conditions

Joseph knew there's something here that's happened overnight something that's making these men troubled what is it why are your faces troubled they told him it wasn't just that they'd had a dream but they said there's no one to interpret them for us we can have no access we have no access to those who would interpret the dreams for us and so we're troubled because we're looking for the meaning of these dreams and we don't have access to the means of telling us what they actually represent what the meaning is and you see Joseph's reply do not interpretations belong to God please tell them to me there are two things in that the first thing is that Joseph is actually concerned to present God his God as the only source of giving meaning to life of giving meaning to human beings and the development and the experiences of their lives these two men are used to relying upon the interpretations given by professional pagan interpreters and

Joseph is telling them actually the only person that can give you the meaning of your dreams is God and I am God's representative he's more less saying that please tell them to me he's presenting himself as the one that God has placed there with them in the prison to give a proper infallible accurate reliable meaning to their dreams now that has huge significance for us today as well where do people go to look for the meaning to life what sort of what sort of interpretations do people rely upon to try and look into the future or into the past or even deal with the present well you know yourselves how the world is stuffed full of all kinds of interpretations to human life and to human experience people look to all kinds of sources even evil sources spiritism people may look to science to archaeology to sociology to anthropology to all the various disciplines which may be perfectly alright in themselves except the ones that dabble in the occult or go even further but what this is actually saying to us is where you're looking for guidance without

God you won't get it reliably where you're looking for a meaning to life out with God's own way of explaining that meaning to us in his word you're not going to get it anywhere else it doesn't matter how professional it looks it doesn't matter how reliable it looks it doesn't matter how authentic it doesn't matter how persuasive it seems it doesn't matter how good it feels to ourselves the only reliable source of information of interpreting the meaning of life is in God himself what a privilege you and I have today when God has made it clear to us what this book is why we have a Bible what our Bible is for and what it's about it's God speaking to us it's God interpreting life to us it's God telling us this is the meaning of life this is what life consists of it's God saying to us this is the future that

[15 : 12] I'm preparing for my people it's God saying this is the meaning of the past when you look at it in terms of my will and my plan and my authority and my salvation and my church and my covenant and my people and my forgiveness and my acceptance and my sanctification and the work of my Holy Spirit you see all of these things and more as the Bible sets them out for us so wonderfully so powerfully so persuasively so beautifully it's really pretty much what Joseph is saying to these two people do interpretations not belong to God where are you looking for the meaning to your own life where's the key to unlock the purpose for why you exist for what your life is about for what you want to do with your life for the various experiences you have in your life even the present day do not all interpretations belong to God aren't you concerned as well and I to bring our life into the light of scripture to use the key of God's word of God's interpretation of life to apply it to unlock our own lives by it that's why we have a bible that's why it's serious to have a bible and not use it we're leaving aside

God's interpretation to the meaning of life that's what he tells them and how hopeless it is for people to actually go to all other sources apart from God himself apart from God's word apart from the interpretation God himself gives us in his word it doesn't mean we're going to understand everything in our human experience it doesn't mean that all the things that happen in our life we're going to have an answer to but it does mean that the big issues the great principles of life the things that really are foundational and on which you build your life they are made clear to you in God's word in God's interpretation and how it's not surprising that so much of the world out there that doesn't want the gospel that doesn't want to know about God except to ridicule him that doesn't really want to have anything to do with church or with the hearing of the gospel so many sad faces yes they may be filled with the pleasures of the world but for the deep meaning of life for the real purpose to why we exist look at all the sad faces in the world when that is something that they can't get access to when they put the

Bible aside why are your faces downcast today none of us should have that question asked of us because we know better because we know that every interpretation of life is from God and for you and for me today that is really our great privilege to know God to know his word to be able to say this is what explains life to me for me to live is Christ it's all explained in him and he gave two contrasting meanings the meanings were given by Joseph given accurately as God gave it to him and the meaning of course is explained as he explained to the two men themselves the one was going to be reinstated the cup bearer he was going to again be reinstated in three days time and he would again present the cup as formerly to Pharaoh when the other one saw that this was a very positive dream that the interpretation was so positive that this is what it meant he then said to

Joseph oh I also had a dream and there were three baskets on my head as well Joseph said to him well for you Pharaoh will lift up your head too but he will lift it up and putting you to death and what a blow that would have been to this chief baker but you know that's how it is if you see in Joseph something of Jesus as we clearly do this is how people relate to him there were two thieves crucified with him one went to paradise the other didn't the one accepted him the other refused for one there was very good news for the other very bad news when they left this world that's how it always is that's what the gospel tells us without our trust in the Lord we will be like the chief baker we will meet with death without trust in the Lord we will meet promotion we will come to be exalted we will come to be in

God's presence filled with life and these are the two alternatives the two great issues of this world and its experiences for us the two matters in relation to how we are in relationship with Christ and let's come back though to verse 14 because Joseph said something to the chief cupbearer when he had said that this would be what would happen that his dream had a positive outcome only he said remember me when it is well with you and please do me the kindness of mentioning me to Pharaoh and get me out of this house for I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit then you go to the last verse yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph but forgot how could he how could this man after all that Joseph had done for him after so accurately interpreting his dream after filling him with hope when he had come on that morning to awaken in a state of hopelessness and panic and despair when there was nobody as he saw it to interpret the meaning of his dream for him there was

[22 : 14] Joseph he interpreted the dream for him the dream and its interpretation worked out exactly as Joseph said and only three days had elapsed and within three days he was back again in Pharaoh's favor putting the cup in Pharaoh's hand and he forgot Joseph how could he what a letdown but it's the letdown of human frailty that's human reliability that's your reliability and mine we forget we forget even when it's important to remember we forget people that we should remember we forget events that should be important to us and God in remembering this about us has wisely given us in his bible in his word so many times when we're told to remember because we're apt to forget remember the sabbath day to keep it holy remember the lord's death till he come this do in remembrance of me how could we forget someone who has done so much as Jesus has done for his people well God says you are human beings you are frail human beings you are sinful human beings even as my people you are still prone to forget so I'm giving you a command and I'm giving you a reminder and I'm giving you an instruction and I'm giving you in my wisdom and in my kindness means by which you will remember me and it reminds us of the ministry of Jesus that's our second main point just in closing all of this forgetting on the part of the chief cup bearer because the ministry of Jesus as we said there's so many parallels let me just run through some of the bullet points that I put there on the sermon notes for you Joseph went from a loving father and the home of that loving father to a prison as we find him in prison Joseph went from there to the prison and Jesus went if you like from the home of a loving father to the prison of this world he came from heaven into this world which to Jesus would feel like a prison a place of sin a place of all that was different to himself in this world Jesus kept his integrity Joseph kept his integrity his purity against temptation when Potiphar's wife tempted him seeking to seduce him and failed in prison when he sent into prison unjustly he kept his integrity he didn't actually in any way lose either his purity or his obedience or his faithfulness to God and Jesus is the same through every single step of his life he retained perfect integrity and then he overcame temptation Joseph overcame temptation Joseph overcame temptation in terms of the temptation that he met with in Potiphar's house you remember every temptation that put in the way of Joseph as you read of in the scripture he actually overcame and he overcame that temptation even though it was going to lead the loved and no then to

further suffering overcoming temptation for joseph led him into deeper suffering that's why he's in prison now he overcame the temptation in potiphar's house but it led to prison and jesus overcoming temptation as he went through life in this world so increasingly it meant further pain further suffering deeper suffering deeper shame yet he still continued faithful to the father and even through all his experiences joseph was owned by god as his special chosen vessel it's obvious from what we've seen even today of him in prison that god has him singled out as a special chosen person for himself and nothing of his conditions in prison has actually in any way put a damper on that you might think that in prison some or other these conditions would mean that it wasn't as obvious that god loved him or that god had him as a special chosen person for himself no it's not like that neither is it with jesus every single step of the way for christ he is the beloved of god there is no break in the relationship he has with the father where the father says this is my beloved son in whom i am well pleased and when you think of the route that jesus took you also think of the remembrance that's mentioned here joseph forgot sorry joseph was forgotten by the chief cupbearer it was a huge let down a big disappointment if you like however joseph felt about it but even joseph probably felt let down felt the pain and sting of disappointment think of the thief on the cross and how different jesus himself is to this chief cupbearer lord remember me when you come into your kingdom here is joseph saying to this cupbearer remember me please when you get out of here when you are restored when you get into your position again remember me yet the chief cupbearer did not remember joseph but forgotten the thief on the cross says to jesus lord remember me when you come into your kingdom and what do you next read jesus said today you will be with me in paradise that's reliability that's the jesus you depend upon with your very life with the whole of your eternity hanging in the balance you say to jesus lord remember me and what do you expect you expect that he will do just that because that is who he is and that is what he's like today you'll be with me in paradise he said to that thief and you put your trust in this jesus you put your own faith in him you put your life in his hands and that's your guarantee not because he finds you and i reliable because of many times we're no better than this cup bearer we forget and we forget people we should remember but jesus remembers infallibly he never forgets he never fails to answer the plea of those who say lord remember me and you know when jesus remembers you it doesn't matter who forgets you his remembrance guarantees your eternal

life but there's one other thing just to close with this verse 14 verse 14 the beginning of it where joseph said to the chief cup bearer only remember me when it is well with you you can turn that around and say that is jesus speaking to ourselves when it is well with you when i have changed your life when i have brought you into what you are as a christian when i have helped you when i have saved you when i have put you on your feet again remember me don't forget me and that means remember me to other people speak for me be my witness testify for me defend my name stand up for me but remember him to others and in our own hearts so there is some of the parallels some of the connections some of the contrast as well between jesus and joseph joseph's prison ministry and the way that it reminds us of the ministry of christ himself let's pray our gracious god and our father in heaven we do bless you today for your care and kindness of your people we thank you for the way that you look after them even in the times of their adversity and when especially you reassure their hearts that you are a god and covenant with them bless us now we pray and all we ask is for the pardon of our sin for christ's sake amen