

Genesis 40:8

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Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[0:00] They said to Joseph, we have had dreams and there is no one to interpret them. And Joseph said to them, do not interpretations belong to God?

Please tell them to me. The name Andreas Lubitz was completely unknown to any of us this time last week.

Now, everyone in Europe and most of the world has heard of the German co-pilot who appears to have deliberately crashed a passenger plane into the side of a mountain at 500 miles an hour.

Having first locked his colleague outside the door of the cockpit. It is being said that he suffered some kind of psychiatric illness or depression in his past.

And this is being blamed, according to some, for his actions. Although there are others, depending on what newspapers you read, who think that this is a red herring.

[1:26] And that these things cannot be blamed for the choices that he made on that day. It's being alleged that when the police went into his home subsequent to the crash, that they found a doctor's sick note, which he had been torn up, which he had torn up.

The sick note had signed him off work. What is absolutely clear is that 150 people died within a microsecond when the plane crashed.

The full horror of what was happening only having dawned on most of them a few minutes beforehand. Not only have we learned a new name, we have also learned this week a new German word.

Warum? The word means why. This was the single word that was posted. It was placed, written on a large placard.

And placed over the flowers and the candles. That marked the street. That marked the death outside the school. Where 15 teenagers, school pupils, were killed on that flight.

[2:53] I cannot even begin to imagine the horror and the anguish of these parents who, along with others, are trying to get their heads round what appears to have been such a senseless tragedy.

I guess that that word, warum, can be interpreted on two different levels. Firstly, the first level is why did the co-pilot choose to set his plane on a course of destruction?

And nobody will ever be sure. We can guess. We can analyze. We can search the home and try to look back over his past.

And yet, even then, with all the information that can possibly be gleaned, nobody will ever be sure. Because to answer that question, we'd have to be able to get inside the mind of the pilot.

And even then, it still doesn't answer the question, why did he do it? There are plenty of troubled people in the world.

[4:02] We live in a world full of illness of all kinds. Physical illness and psychiatric illness and mental illness. We live in that world. There are loads of people who suffer from some form of depression.

Many of you in here tonight suffer from a form of depression. And you're not going to destroy anything. Or anyone. Why does anyone, even one person, take steps to end his own life and to take 150 other innocent people with him for no apparent reason?

We will simply never know precisely the reason. And it is the height of arrogance. And only the arrogant West. Our civilized world with all our achievement that would say, as we've heard ad nauseum this week, we have to make sure that this never happens again.

Of course it's going to happen again. Because we live in a fallen world. And as long as we live in a fallen world, then if not this, then it will be something else.

I cannot understand the mindset of people that won't wake up to that basic fact. That as long as human beings are corrupt and sick and sinful, then there will be tragedy after tragedy from time to time.

[5 : 31] We can only be thankful that this is not a daily occurrence. But I suspect that whoever wrote the word, Warum, on that placard, intended to go a lot deeper than what was inside the mind of the co-pilot.

I suspect that he or she who wrote it wants to know why this happened from a wider perspective. Why the needless loss of life, hundreds of lives, many of them in their prime, in their youth.

And the question relates to this, is there any ultimate reason for a tragedy like this? Is this just a random event? Or is there any rule or control or order in the universe?

Is our future in the hands of individuals either to do good and save lives or to do bad and take lives with them? Indeed. One can even stretch the question even further and ask, who says the saving of lives is good and the taking of lives is bad?

If there is no God, what is the difference? What makes one good and what makes one bad? Who says? Who determines? Who decides?

[6 : 53] And if the taking of life is wrong in one case, is it not wrong in every case? Unless, of course, it was self-defense and it can be argued that way. You may expect that if I was going to explore this whole issue with you, that I might choose something in the New Testament to explore.

And there are plenty of places that we could go to tonight. But I want to go to this rather bizarre passage in the Old Testament, in the story of Joseph. Because this is a story that is set in the real world.

The real world, which actually, which on one level, is so different from our high-tech world, and yet, in another sense, there's quite a similarity.

Because here too, the fate, the future, of two men lay in the hands of someone else. Someone else had the power and the authority according to his decision either to save a life or to take that life away.

And I want to see tonight how God intervened in the real world and connected with the real world and spoke to the real world. Real individuals, one of them was going to die and the other one was going to live.

[8 : 17] God had something to say to them. He wanted them to know that he was there and he wanted them to know what their future, on this one occasion, this one single occasion, he wanted them to know what their future was.

God does not reveal our future to us. He did in this case and in this one case. That doesn't mean tonight that we go looking for dreams that tell us what's going to happen next week to us.

Don't do that. Don't fall into that trap. It's not going to work. It will take you down the wrong road. But on this occasion, in this Old Testament occasion, when the word of God was so rare, God chose to intervene and interact with these two men through Joseph.

Now here's the story. Joseph, we all know the story of Joseph, how he was sold by his brothers to the Midianites who took him down into Egypt and they sold him as a slave to a man called Potiphar.

And in the house of Potiphar, he did very well. He was highly respected and loved by Potiphar. And Potiphar elevated him and promoted him to a position of high authority. But Potiphar's wife had other plans.

[9 : 29] She told lies about him. Potiphar believed her lies. And he was then thrown into prison. In prison, he adopted the same policy. He accepted his situation for what it was.

And the prison warden, the prison manager, he saw him, he spotted him, and he realized that he could trust him. He elevated, promoted him to a place of responsibility, looking after other prisoners.

The Lord was with him. That's the key to Joseph's life. And it's the key to everyone who follows Jesus. The Lord was with him. Even in the most adverse of circumstances, God was with him.

And one day, there were two new prisoners, not ordinary prisoners, not the kind that he was normally familiar with, but here were two prisoners that had come to him from the palace.

One of them was the chief cupbearer. I've explained already the importance of what the cupbearer was to the king. So, who knows what had happened. Something had happened. An offense had been committed or allegedly committed.

[10 : 31] And the king had thrown these two men. The other one was the chief baker. Another person who served the king, not this time with drink, but this time with food.

And I guess both of them were in equally responsible positions because both of them had to guard against any attempt on the king's life. We have no detail as to what the offense was, what the charge was, what the, I think in those days when it was a monarchy, then it simply was up to the king himself who went to prison and who was executed and who was, who got to survive.

And that depended on the kind of king you had, whether he was a reasonable man, in which case you could probably expect justice, and if he was an unreasonable man, you could expect only the worst.

Anyway, one day Joseph gets up and he goes in one morning and he speaks to these men, these two men, as normal. and he asks them, he notices that their faces are downcast, they're despondent, and he asks them what the problem is and it turns out that they've both had dreams, dreams that have troubled them, the kind of dreams which they cannot forget, dreams that appear to be so real that they came to the conclusion that they meant something.

Now that doesn't mean that our dreams mean something always, I never had a dream that meant anything and I don't think, let me say again, I don't think we should be going looking for meanings in dreams and I don't think either that we should be asking God to speak to us in dreams.

[12 : 06] I'm thankful tonight that God has given me a far more reliable revelation of himself. He has told me exactly what he wants me to know about him in the Bible and if I spent as long reading my Bible and trying to understand it as I did trying to figure out what God is telling me through dreams and other signs and visions and everything else that people go for then I think that's, I would far rather take my message from the Bible which is always reliable.

In any case, that's how God sometimes spoke in those days. They didn't have a Bible in those days so God spoke in this way. And so, Joseph immediately stands for God and he said, look, he said, do not interpretations belong to God, please tell them to me.

So the two men began to tell Joseph their dream. The first one, the cup bearer, he told his dream. He dreamed that he had a vine, there was a vine in front of him with three branches. The branches budded and its blossoms shot forth and the clusters ripened into grapes.

Pharaoh's cup, he said, was in my hand and I pressed the grapes into the cup and then I handed the cup to Pharaoh. And the interpretation that Joseph gave, that God gave to Joseph was this.

The three branches were three days and in three days Pharaoh was going to restore him into his service. All would be well. Now the baker, when he saw and when he heard that the cup bearer had got a good interpretation for his dream, then he was encouraged, he was strengthened by that and so right away he began to relate his dream to Joseph and his dream was this, there were three cake baskets on my head.

[13:55] In the upper basket there was all kinds of baked food for Pharaoh but the birds, this is what spooked him, the birds of the air, they had gotten into the basket first and they were eating the food that was in the basket.

When it came to the interpretation of the dream, it was a very different one from the first interpretation. One good interpretation did not mean another. This time the three baskets again were three days but this time Pharaoh was not going to spare the baker or restore him back into his service.

Instead he would be executed and he would be hanged. Sure enough, three days, it's Pharaoh's birthday and Pharaoh decides to do one thing for the cup bearer and the other thing for the baker exactly, precisely as they had dreamed and as Joseph had interpreted.

What are we to make of a story like this? Well, here are three men sitting together in a prison cell.

Each of these three men has a past and they have a future. nobody knows what their future will be except that for these men for once God has broken into their world and has told them what their future would be.

[15:27] The future of one man was a good one. He was going to live for many years to come. The future of the other one was not good. He had three days left to live and yet God spoke to them both and told them what their future would be.

Which means that God controls the future. The fact that Joseph knew what the future events of each man would be was because God holds the world in his hand.

in those days of course Pharaoh was the law and he decided and it appears that what he decided as kings often did was whether you lived or died and sometimes your future lay at the whims of one man and if he decided that he was going to be merciful then you were fine.

If he decided to be ruthless then you would not survive the day. your future listen to this your future their future lay in the hands of one man.

Do you see how relevant this is to today's world where events of the last week they lay in the hands of one man and his decision meant either the salvation of 150 people or the destruction one choice meant the difference between life and death.

[17:02] One man is at the controls just like Pharaoh was at the controls of the future of these two other men. He had the power so did Andreas Lopus.

And so much of life in this world is about us placing our future our safety in the hands of others and that's the way it is.

Sometimes that power lies in someone else sometimes it lies with ourselves and the way in which we our choices can affect for good or ill the lives of other people but there's more to it than that isn't it?

They dreamed and here's where the story takes a difference it wasn't just that all of this happened but they dreamed that this was going to happen.

The fact that they dreamed and the dreams related to the future meant that there was a destiny which was determined by an outside power.

[18:07] Do you see the connection? There's a connection between the dreams and the events that took place. These dreams they indicated that there is something more than just random events that take place in this world that there's something or someone who determines these events and that something or someone Joseph very quickly immediately identified as God.

God had given them the dream and the fact that he gave them this message meant that he knew God knew what was going to happen otherwise the dreams were meaningless it was just Joseph's guess what they meant and either he was incredibly lucky or else he was telling the truth.

There's no coincidence that exactly what Joseph said was exactly what happened because God had chosen to tell them through their dreams because God had given them the dreams in the first place but we have to go further than that.

It's not just that God knew what was going to happen it was that his knowledge is what we call a sovereign knowledge that arose out of a sovereign will that arose out of a sovereign God a God who is almighty who has no beginning and no end and who knows the future from the past God was in control he knew because he had determined nothing could happen without his say so everything is subject to the sovereign will of God remember how Jesus put it when he stood before Pilate and Pilate said to him do you not know that I have authority to release you or crucify you and Jesus' answer was this he said you would have no authority over me unless it had been given you from above because whatever authority men and women have in this world is not ultimate it is subject to the over the overriding power of God well that's as far as I can say about God's control you always have to be careful when we talk about what we call God's sovereignty and the extent to which he determines the events that take place in this world we can't say we can't take it one step further and say that

God is responsible for the actions of Pharaoh we can't neither can we say that God is responsible for the actions of Andreas Lubus we cannot say that God is responsible for the destructive power of a despotic king or the choices that you and I make which are wrong and evil and sinful the death of the baker was Pharaoh's responsibility nonetheless Pharaoh can only act as he is given the authority to act and that authority belongs to God God is in control if God put it this let me put it this way this is really it's not only an interesting theme it's a really important theme because it defines God in his sovereignty if God is not in control of all things and I mean all things if he's not in control of all things then he's not all powerful and therefore he's not

[21:44] God if he's not in all overall control then there are some things you have to say that there are some things that happen outside of his control and if that's the case he cannot be fully God because God has defined us all powerful the one who knows all things and the one who determines all things for God to be God he must be completely sovereign do you understand what I'm saying you can't have it both ways you can't just talk about God who allows passively things to happen God is in control of all things and that's what gives me my utmost confidence in the God I worship this evening he really is God he's not some kind of pathetic limp power that is not really a power at all it's just a power on paper his power is absolute and it's total it goes beyond my understanding that's why we have to be very careful tonight when we're talking about a theme like this not to go too far and always to be prepared to admit that we don't have the answers to the questions that people naturally ask the question why can never be answered we don't know the reason why but at the same time as God being in control of all things he's given men and women to choose their own actions the problem is that men and women are so infected by what the

Bible calls sin that our motives become distorted and self centered and corrupt God has given every one of us the power to make and execute decisions most of us we make these choices every day we have to use that power wisely if you're Pharaoh you have to be responsible for the use that you make of your power and authority you can use it or abuse it and you can add to that the fact that the world also has become infected infected so that you have men and women who are ill and which can affect our judgment we live in a beautiful world but we live in a dangerous world a world that is unpredictable in which you don't know from one day to the next what is going to happen you can be driving along quite innocently on the barbos moor and the person coming along towards you has a heart attack and you have a head-on collision why is that because the man has had a heart attack and you've had a collision and you were there you cannot say that

God has not you cannot say that that has taken place without the knowledge and without the control of God but you cannot make God responsible for the illness that has crept into an infected world and so it goes on we live in a dangerous world the only other step we can make with this story is that God spoke he chose to say something to these two men and by speaking he intervened so as to inform them what their future was that was his word to them I don't know how the baker responded to Joseph did he ask more about God and how he knew and what God was and who God was and so on did he pray to God for mercy I don't know I don't know how he responded to God's word every one of us is responsible for how we respond to God's message to us what I do know is this that the man who enjoyed the favor of

God the one who had the good news he actually forgot God's word to him you know how I know that because he forgot Joseph Joseph specifically asked him please when you get back into the palace remember me to Pharaoh because I am here unjustly you know what happened he was restored to Pharaoh and he forgot he forgot God's word you would expect that a man like that who has received the favor and the goodness of God the least he would do is to remember what he was asked to remember and by so doing he would remember and be grateful to God for what had happened to him but he forgot yet this is what happens all the time isn't it we enjoy the favor of God you enjoy the favor of God every day of your life and yet how much time do you give him have you worshipped him have you turned to him have you surrendered to him have you listened to him no because you take what he has to give you but you don't give him a second thought that's the way we treat God isn't it you know that what

I'm saying is true that's the way we treat God the reason is the reason I know that is because you haven't turned to him you haven't listened to him you take the faith you take as much of his goodness as you want to and you forget the rest you forget the best part the best part is what I'm coming to when God intervened in the lives of these two men on that day all he did was to give them a dream and he provided someone who would interpret the dream for them he didn't reveal himself in any other way he didn't choose to reveal himself in that way that wasn't the time but I want to close tonight by talking about how God has intervened in our world not this time by way of a dream much much much greater than that he has personally intervened not only by speaking to us from afar do you not see what

[27:50] God has done for us in the person of Jesus Christ which is far far far greater than what we've read about here in this chapter all he did there was to remind the butler and the baker of who he was and that of his sovereignty over them that all the message was I am God but what he's done for us is he's given us himself he has actually personally come down into this world by being born and by growing up in the real world amongst human beings and by living amongst us and by pointing us with all the authority of heaven the way to God you know he did more than that what's the point in showing us the way to God when the way is closed as it was what Jesus did was he went all the way and he opened up the way for us to be restored to God by dying at

Calvary that was the moment when Jesus on the cross became sin for us and at that moment the righteous anger of God that we deserve because of our guilt and sin it was diverted and focused on him as our sacrifice he took it all for us he gave his life he became dead he died that is how God intervened in our world in the person of Jesus Christ but even that wasn't the end if it had been that death would have been if the cross was the end of the story then death would have had the final say death did not have the final word three days later he rose triumphant over the grave and returned to be with his father in heaven tonight if you want to know what God has said about our world and how God has intervened and what God has done for this world let me take you back to Calvary when God transformed guilt into innocence when he transformed darkness into light and when he transformed sin into righteousness and death into life and that's the only answer

I have tonight to the question warum if you spend the rest of your life trying to answer that one question you'll get nowhere psychologists will be pondering over the seemingly meaningless action of one man for many years to come what the Bible offers tonight is the answer to the most profound question ever asked at any time and that question too begins with why why have you forsaken me the question that Jesus asked on the cross as he became sin for us and as he laid down his life the answer to that question is the difference between eternal life and eternal darkness the answer to that question is God's word to a lost and a helpless world let's pray our father in heaven we ask that you will take away our sin and that you will reveal to us what Jesus did when he came into a world that was full of tears a world that was hurting and in anguish a world that was in turmoil the world we call the real world was the world that he knew more than anything else more than anyone else and we pray for a mourning world tonight we pray in the face of one more tragedy we hear tragedy after tragedy and we remember

Lord that every death is someone's tragedy every death brings us to ask those same questions and brings us to that place of darkness and for some people despair we ask Lord that you will shine your light the light of the gospel into this world and show this world what you have done in order to transform it from darkness to light save this world we pray by the gospel and by the Lord Jesus Christ for we ask in his name Amen