

Place: Lurgan Baptist 7:3:2010

GOD MEANT IT FOR GOOD (JOSEPH)

Reading: Genesis 41v1, 9-16 28-45

6. FROM THE PRISON TO THE PALACE

David Jeremiah tells us that in her book, “ **Triumph for God,**” Corrie ten Boom describes what her feelings were the day she was miraculously released from a Nazi concentration camp. “ *One week before the order came to kill all the women of my age, I was free. I still do not understand all the details of my release from Ravensbrook, all I know is, it was a miracle of God. The gate swung open, and I glimpsed the lake in front of the camp. ‘ Follow me,’ a young girl said in an officer’s uniform. I walked slowly through the gate, never looking back. Behind me I heard the hinges squeak as the gate shut. I was free. And flooding through my mind were the words of Jesus to the church of Philadelphia ‘ Behold I have set before thee an open door and no man can shut it.’*” Surely something similar to Corrie ten Boom’s emotions have must flooded the heart and mind of Joseph the day he walked out of the king’s prison in Egypt. He was free. Now whether these two years refer to the entire Joseph was in prison or to the time following the cup bearer’s release we don’t know for sure. But either way, the point is that Joseph was in the dungeon a lot longer than he would ever have imagined.

I am sure that this morning dawned like every other morning of his long and dismal imprisonment. He was a prisoner, a favoured prisoner but a prisoner. The confines of his world were four walls. He could and go as he pleased within those walls. Doubtless he had a brighter and bigger room and better food than the other prisoners. He was not chained or beaten. But he was a prisoner. Nothing could be more deadening than the dreary round of the prison routine. *But all this was about to change.* Joseph heard a hammering at the door. High officials from the palace had come to get him. He hastily shaved, changed his clothes, followed the messengers and stood before Pharaoh. Can you imagine it ? There he was surrounded with magnificence. There was the Pharaoh on his ivory throne, lions chained at his feet. Slave girls with fans attended him. Members of the high court in their costly robes, chief priests of the various orders of Egyptian religion, and guards to line the wall, all were there. Joseph’s old friend, the butler was there, Joseph’s old master, Potiphar was there. Pharaoh told Joseph his dreams. Dreams were important in Egyptian culture, a medium for messages from their gods.

He described the fat cows and the lean, the thin corn and the full ears of corn. There were seven good things and seven bad things in each dream. The dream was a message from God. (41:25) The solution was simple to Joseph. Seven years of plenty followed by seven years of fearful famine. The result was a reversal. *In one day Joseph goes from the prison to the palace.* Think of it. He had been *abused* by his brothers, *auctioned* as a slave, falsely *accused* by a woman, and *abandoned* by a butler who

should have remembered him. But now, he is *acclaimed* by a Pharaoh. Why ? Because God suddenly steps into the situation in a dramatic way. My if any chapter in the Book of Genesis reveals the sovereignty of God, it's this one. It is God, God, God, all the way through. Indeed we begin by noticing,

(1) GOD'S PROVIDENCE OVER JOSEPH

Now remember “ *Providence is that work of God in which He preserves all His creatures, His active in all that happens in the world and directs all things to their appointed end.* ” Berkhof. You see, while Joseph was in prison, God was at work, and Joseph was keenly aware of God's providential dealing with him. The imprint of God's hand was everywhere in Joseph's life. So it is no surprise that in the matter of Pharaoh's dreams, God was the first word on Joseph's lips. (41:16) Joseph recognized that God determines what is going to happen according to His will, for His glory and for the good of His people. “ *I'm in charge,* ” that's what God is saying. He was in charge of Joseph's circumstances and Pharaoh's dreams and my He is in charge today. “ *God is still on the throne and He will remember His own.* ” Is it not an encouragement to us to know that whether we are in chains or in the king's chariot, God is working all things out for His glory and our good ? Now God's providence is seen in two ways here. Notice,

(a) HIS PERFECT TIMING:

Look if you will at (41:1) Two years seemed a long time from Joseph's interpretation of the butlers dream to Pharaoh's hearing of him. But at the very moment Pharaoh had a need that no one his royal court could meet, the only man in the world who knew Joseph could interpret dreams was standing right there. Do you recall that Pharaoh had the baker killed, which left only the butler who knew Joseph and his gift ? Do you ever think of the number of things that had to take place to bring Joseph face to face with the Pharaoh of Egypt and they all happened.

- 1. Potiphar's wife had to accuse Joseph wrongly.**
- 2. Joseph had to be sent to prison.**
- 3. The keeper of the prison had to like Joseph and give him free access throughout the prison.**
- 4. Pharaoh's butler and baker had to put in prison.**
- 5. Joseph had to meet and be there the exact day they were both anxious about their dreams.**
- 6. Joseph had to be able to interpret their dreams.**
- 7. The butler had to remember the experience for two years.**
- 8. The butler had to be present the day Pharaoh's dreams went unexplained.**
- 9. Pharaoh had to be willing to bring a prisoner into his court to try to interpret his dreams.**
- 10. Joseph had to receive the interpretations of Pharaoh's dreams from God.**

Yet like clockwork the pieces of this puzzle fell into place all at the right time. “ *And it came to pass at the end of two full years.* ” (41:1) Isn't God's timing perfect ? God

is on schedule. God never runs ahead. God never lags behind. God is exactly on time. These two years were neither eventful or exciting. The Bible does not try to glorify these two years, it was a matter of wait, wait and wait. This was time to wait for God's time. For waiting is God's way. The Bible says "*And therefore will the Lord wait that He may be gracious unto you.*" (Is 30:18) You see, we are being strengthened, we are being established, we are being refined. Refined into pure gold. Joseph is being shaped for greatness but he has to learn to wait on God's time. Someone came across Philips Brooks one day pacing backward and forward across his study. They said, "***Dr. Brooks, what's the matter ? " The matter ?" " The matter is I am in a hurry but God isn't.***" Waiting on the Lord is very difficult for the flesh, but those who wait on the Lord obtain God's best. Like Joseph, have the years passed for you, with no word from the Lord ? Perhaps you're saying, " When will God's promise for my life be fulfilled ? When will the answer come ? I want to believe God but I'm not sure if I can hang there if its not going to happen soon." Do you need to be reminded this that God is on schedule for His timing is always perfect ? (a)

(b) HIS PERFECT TACTICS:

I mean, how would you get the most powerful ruler in the world at that time to listen to God ? The way God did it was to give him a problem he couldn't solve through his normal methods. His normal methods seemed to be " the magicians of Egypt and all the wise men thereof." (41:8) The term rendered "*magicians,*" means "*men versed in the sacred writings.*" These men were very intelligent,

they were considered the wisest men in the land. But wise as they were they could not tell Pharaoh what his dream meant. The intellects of Joseph's day did not know, and the intellects of our day are no better. They can tell us a lot of things, but they cannot tell us the answers to the basic problems and questions of life, for that wisdom is beyond anything found in a textbook. A cleaner sweeping the steps on the university campus, if he knows Christ, knows more about life and how to live it, than the professor who walks by him will ever know. Do you recall what the Lord Jesus said, "*I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.*" (Matt 11:25) You see, God gave Pharaoh two dreams that troubled him so deeply that he was willing to listen to a prisoner who claimed that his God could interpret them. My God's ways of orchestrating events are always amazing. I remember in my early years in Carryduff a young married woman unconverted, coming to the gospel meetings, who seemed to show a measure of concern. I started to visit her for a while. Then something strange happened.

Each time I called at her bungalow she was not there. It was not until sometime later that I discovered that everytime she saw me coming up the drive of her bungalow she hid. Can you imagine someone doing that to me ? Then God stepped in and so orchestrated events that one day she not only opened the door of her bungalow to me but she opened the door of her heart to the Lord. I can't explain that other than to say, the events

that had transpired in her life by that specific time had made her ready to receive the Lord. Those events are the “*tactic’s*,” of God, the things that He does in his perfect time and way to bring about the fulfillment of His will. Aren’t that God is in control ? That’s He in control of your life, and that in His time, and in His way, He will fulfill His purposes for you. (1)

(2) GOD’S POWER IN JOSEPH

Did you notice that telling phrase in (41:38) ? Pharaoh said, “ *Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the spirit of God is ?* ” (41:38) Now the Egyptians did not understand about the third person of the triune God. They probably meant that God had assisted Joseph. But we know better. Indeed this is the first time in the Bible it mentions any man who has the Spirit of God in him. Now of course there is a difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament in relation to the Spirit of God. John Walvoord says, “ *The presence of the indwelling Spirit in the Old Testament must, be regarded as sovereign, a rare rather than usual gift, and often associated with some specific task for which enablement was necessary.* ” You see, the Spirit of God indwelt Joseph giving him the power to interpret dreams, to offer counsel, and to guide Egypt. Now I want you to see that when God’s power is operative in a man he is marked,

(a) BY HUMILITY:

Look if you will at (41:15) Would Joseph succumb to the temptation and say, “ *Sure, no problem, you have got the*

very one you need. ” This was his chance to take credit. This was his chance to make himself look good. Instead,

1. JOSEPH EXALTS GOD:

“ *It is not in me, God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.* ” (41:16) Isn’t that great ? I mean Joseph could have really got a bargain with the monarch. But he didn’t. He said, “ *I don’t have anything to do with interpreting dreams. Everything I have is God’s. He does it. It’s not in me, it is God.* ” God, God, God, all the way through the answer Joseph refers to God. (41:25, 28, 32) Instead of calling attention to himself he points Pharaoh to Jehovah. It isn’t I, it’s the Lord God. God in His preparation had burned all the pride and the self, and humble Joseph gave God the glory and the courts of heaven rang with the joy of it. *Whether you raise children, teach school, run a company, man a check out desk, will you do it all to the glory of God ? What about your service ? Is it for the honour of God ?* Did that you know that 25% of the average speech is made up of only six basic words. A mere fifty words make up 60% of our speaking vocabulary. The most common words are “*you,*” “*the,*” and “*A,*” but the word we use most often is “*I.*” My here’s the secret of his life. One sentence that sums up Joseph’s attitude to all the fame he was to be given. Do you what it is ? “ *It is not in me, God,* ” (41:16)

*Not in me to lift the weary spirit
Not in me to save a precious soul
Not in me to make a day seem brighter
Not in me to set a nations goal*

*Not in me to move a congregation
Not in me to heal a broken land
Not in me to tell the secrets of the future
Not in me to turn the tide upon life's sand*

*All in Him the power to change a nation
All in Him to break the Satanic sword
All in Him for love and life and future
Jesus Christ, my Master, King, and Lord*

2. JOSEPH EXPLAINS DREAMS:

Every time you turn around in the life of Joseph, someone is having a dream. I heard about a fellow who dreamed he ate a ten pound marshmallow and he woke up and his pillow was gone. I heard about this man who was going with this girl for about twenty years. One night he was leaving her to the garden gate as usual. He said to her, “*Mary I had a dream last night. I dreamt I was leaving you as usual to the garden gate, when suddenly I fell on my knee's and asked for your hand in marriage. Mary, what do you think of that ?*” She said, “*John I think you talk more sense when you are sleeping than when you are awake.*” Of course today, God speaks to His people through His Word, not through dreams. Pharaoh has a dream. He dreams that there were seven fat cattle and out of the Nile River came seven skinny cattle that ate up the seven healthy animals. Then he dreams again, and this time seven skinny, scorched bits of corn, devour seven plumb healthy ears of corn. He sensed the dreams were important, because they involved what ? *The crops of Egypt and the cattle of Egypt, and that involved all the*

economy of the land over which he ruled. Joseph explained Pharaoh's dream. Seven years of plenty to be followed by seven years of fearful famine. Not a word of connivance passed his lips. He gave the interpretation of the dream and the practical application and left the results with God. Will you do the same in your life ? Will you do the will of God and leave the repercussions with Him ? (a)

(b) FIDELITY:

Think of this. God gave Joseph eighty years of ministry in Egypt with only thirteen years of training. And throughout these years in whatever situation Joseph found himself he was faithful. You see, its not our circumstances that are important. It is who we are. Whether Joseph was in the pit, in Potiphar's house, in the prison, or in the palace, he was faithfully the same in all four situations. My the principle Joseph proved can come true for you, “*Seest thou a man diligent in his business ? he shall stand before kings*,” (Prov 22:29) A call may one day come to represent your Lord in the corridors of power in this country. Will you be found as faithful as the man who shaved himself and changing into new clothes moved out into a day of service for the Lord ? There are one hundred geysers in Yellow Stone National Park. But there is one geyser that stands out from the rest. It is not the largest geyser, nor does it reach the greatest height, yet it is by far the most popular geyser. Its popularity is down to one thing, dependability. For once every sixty five seconds its shoots a stream of boiling water over 170 feet in the air, you can set your watch by it, they call it “*old faithful.*”

My here was “*young faithful*,” for wherever Joseph was he was faithful. (a) (b)

(c) AUTHORITY:

Who would have thought that a little Hebrew slave would have the solutions to the problems of a great nation ? Twenty four hours before Joseph was languishing in a prison. Now he is telling the king, “ *This is what you need to do.* ” You see, he not only *predicted* Egypt’s future, he also *proposed* a solution. He said to Pharaoh “ *Look out a man.* ” (41:33) The typical approach in many local churches is “ *Start a committee.* ” Isn’t that right ? Old Vance Havner said “ *A committee is a group appointed by the unwilling to do the unnecessary.* ” But God’s way of doing things is summed up in the book of Ezekiel, which says “ *I sought for a man.* ” (22:30) Joseph suggested a man to administer the following program. Store up 20 % of Egypt’s output of produce for the next seven years, and then use those reserves to live off the seven years of famine. Joseph was saying you need to prepare for the years of material famine ahead. My are you preparing for the days of spiritual famine that may lie ahead ? Who knows what the future holds for us as believers ? (Amos 8:11)

Even now there is a spiritual famine in our land. You can’t just go anywhere and be fed on the milk and meat of the Word. If that is true now, what about the future ? Tell me, are you allowing the Word of Christ to dwell in you richly ? So that should there come days of spiritual famine you will be able to draw from your reserves ?

(3) GOD’S PROMOTION OF JOSEPH

Do you what the Bible says ? “ *Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in due time.* ” (1 Pet 5:6) Do you know God says, “ *Them that honour me I will honour.* ” (1 Sam 2:30) Can you see Pharaoh sweeping his hand out wide, so as to include all the land of Egypt and say, “ *Its all yours Joseph.* ” Do you know what that meant ?

(a) NATIONAL PRESERVATION:

Some time later Joseph said to his brothers, “ *God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.* ” (45:7) Think of the beginning and end of God’s will in the grand scheme of things. The beginning is to preserve the family of Jacob through whom the promises of Abraham will be fulfilled. The end is to isolate Jacob’s family in a protected environment so that they can grow into a nation for 430 years. (Ex 12:40) Can I hasten to add, God is still preserving Israel. But there is something else here.

(b) PERSONAL EXALTATION:

1. Can you see the Authority of Joseph ?

The signet ring and the gold chain were symbols of Joseph’s authority as second in command in Egypt.

2. Can you see the Apparel of Joseph ?

For Pharaoh arrayed him in vestures of fine linen.” (41:42) These were considered the most elegant in Egypt. Do you recall how Joseph started out ? With the multi-colored coat, then there was the blood drenched coat, then there was the prison garment, the unspotted garment of purity and now the vestures of honour.

3. Can you see the Acclaim of Joseph ?

For Pharaoh made to ride “ *in the second chariot and they cried before him, Bow the knee.* ” (41:43) Can you imagine Pharaoh saying to Joseph “ *Come on I'll show you around, where would you like to go ?* ” And Joseph might have said, “ *Your Majesty I'd like to go by the prison. I spent long years there and the jailor was good to me.* ” Can you see that royal entourage stopping at the prison gate, the officials come running. Pharaoh points to Joseph “ *Bow the knee.* ” And down they go. “ *Now my lord Pharaoh, I would like to go by the house of Potiphar to whom I was sold as a slave.* ” Can you picture it ? The astonished residents run out, among them Potiphar's wife that lied about Joseph. She knew him at once and when the Pharaoh demanded “ *Bow the knee,* ” she was down in fear of her life. I think that night when Potiphar got home he said to his wife, “ *Dear, I hope you told me the truth about that young man Joseph for Pharaoh has made him Prime Minister and I am to report to his office in the morning.* ” My Joseph has gone all the way from the prison to the palace.

You just be patient. Do you think you are forgotten ? Faithfully serve God where you are and God might use

you in a bigger place somewhere. Do you know something ? ***Joseph points us to Jesus.*** Who maintained purity in the face of temptation ? Joseph. Who did no sin neither was guile found in his mouth ? Jesus. Who suffered under a lie ? Joseph. Who was crucified on the testimony of false witnesses ? Jesus. Who had two fellow prisoners once raised to life and the other to death ? Joseph. Who was crucified in the presence of two thieves one who went to Paradise and the other to perdition ? Jesus. *Who became the saviour of a nation ? Joseph. Who became the Saviour of the world ? The Lord Jesus.* Who met the material need in Egypt ? Joseph. Who meets the spiritual need in the hearts of men and women today ? Jesus. And do you know what he is saying to you this morning, “ *Come to me with your famine, with your emptiness and if you come you'll never hunger and if you believe you'll never thirst.* ” **Christ is the answer to your need.**

