

Genesis 41:1-36 Learning to Love Providence

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After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, ² and behold, there came up out of the Nile seven cows, attractive and plump, and they fed in the reed grass. ³ And behold, seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. ⁴ And the ugly, thin cows ate up the seven attractive, plump cows. And Pharaoh awoke. ⁵ And he fell asleep and dreamed a second time. And behold, seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. ⁶ And behold, after them sprouted seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind. ⁷ And the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump, full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream. ⁸ So in the morning his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was none who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

⁹ Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, “I remember my offenses today. ¹⁰ When Pharaoh was angry with his servants and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, ¹¹ we dreamed on the same night, he and I, each having a dream with its own interpretation. ¹² A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each man according to his dream. ¹³ And as he interpreted to us, so it came about. I was restored to my office, and the baker was hanged.”

¹⁴ Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they quickly brought him out of the pit. And when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. ¹⁵ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.” ¹⁶ Joseph answered Pharaoh, “It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.” ¹⁷ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Behold, in my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile. ¹⁸ Seven cows, plump and attractive, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass. ¹⁹ Seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and thin, such as I had never seen in all the land of Egypt. ²⁰ And the thin, ugly cows ate up the first seven plump cows, ²¹ but when they had eaten them no one would have known that they had eaten them, for they were still as ugly as at the beginning. Then I awoke. ²² I also saw in my dream seven ears growing on one stalk, full and good. ²³ Seven ears, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprouted

after them, ²⁴ and the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. And I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me.”

²⁵ Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁶ The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one. ²⁷ The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind are also seven years of famine. ²⁸ It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁹ There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt, ³⁰ but after them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt. The famine will consume the land, ³¹ and the plenty will be unknown in the land by reason of the famine that will follow, for it will be very severe. ³² And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about. ³³ Now therefore let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. ³⁴ Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plentiful years. ³⁵ And let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. ³⁶ That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine.”

(Pastor prays)

Here we are in the life of Joseph back on the rollercoaster. Chapter 40 ends with a gut punch. After Joseph helps a fellow prisoner, the chief cupbearer shows his gratitude by promptly forgetting him. And we find out in verse one of our text that it's two whole years living in some forgotten suspended animation, two years thinking about all the things he could have been doing, feeling like his time is being wasted. Like some up you, feeling like you're spinning your wheels, not knowing that it's God who's shifted your life into neutral.

Strangely enough, this new development in Joseph's life revolves around dreams, as do all of his turning points. Early on he had two dreams who put him in the “out” with his family and landed him in Egypt in slavery. Then it was two dreams, the baker's and cupbearer's, that set him up for the Pharaoh, and here are two more bizarre dreams.

And this morning I'd like to take half of this chapter to about verse 36 and look at what God did in Joseph's life and try to make an application for what God might be doing in your life. More than anything else this story is about God. I want you to see...

In Christ, Our God is Working Even if You Are Not Sure He Is

Let's go back and look at four movements in verses 1- 13. Pharaoh has two dreams. Then in verses 14 - 16, Joseph makes a declaration about God. In verses 17 - 32, Joseph gives

the interpretation and in verses 33 – 36, Joseph gives the plan. Let's look at it in verse 1. There are a few things I think we can learn from this story:

God's Providence Eventually Makes Sense

Verse 1 begins with frustration. After two whole years, after what feels like an eternity, Joseph's purpose starts to come into focus. Pharaoh has these two terrible dreams and in verse 8, in the morning when he wakes up, he's in a panic because, as superstitious as the Egyptians were, Pharaoh knew that the dreams meant something: *So in the morning his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was none who could interpret them to Pharaoh.*

Nobody could help him. There's a crisis. Now the plan is starting to come together. Finally in verse 9, the cupbearer shows up and remembers in verse 12 a young Hebrew who can interpret dreams. (By the way, only Daniel and Joseph in the Old Testament interpret dreams.) In verse 14, they get him out of the pit, clean him up and put some clothes on him. And in verse 15, the ill-treated, abused and forgotten slave is standing in front of the most powerful man in the world. Let me stop here.

Just think with me about how time and life experience gives you a better view of what God was doing through the trouble you were in. Our pain is the Lord's schoolmaster, and that's where He teaches us the most. Usually, the hard providences of God are doing one of three things.

Sometimes it's to **discipline**. The Bible says that the Lord disciplines those He loves. Our sin is paid for on the cross, so punishment and wrath have been poured out on Jesus. Sometimes our pain comes from something we've done. That's discipline; like a father disciplining a child.

The second providence could be **sanctification**. Sometimes the pain we endure is not tied to any sin or obvious correction. Sometimes it's the Lord pruning and purifying us, making us depend more and more on the Lord Jesus. This is where a right application of Philippians 4: 13 would come into play. I can do all things; walk through depression, battle cancer, survive divorce, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

The third thing would be **glorification**. We live in a fallen and disordered world, and many times God uses tragedy and sorrow to remind us that this world is not our home. I think that's what Paul was referring to in 2 Corinthians 4: 17 - 18 when dealing with the pain of the world.

Paul says, *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient...*

Sometimes the pains of earth are here to make joy of Heaven that much sweeter. And even if it's not until we are in Heaven, God's providence will eventually make sense.

God's People Were Created to Glorify Him

Let's go back to the scene of Pharaoh calling Joseph in verse 15 and telling him what he needs out of him.

Try to imagine the pressure: *And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."*¹⁶ *Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."*

Joseph's answer, "It is not in me," is actually just one word in the original that Joseph said almost explosively, disavowing any notion that he had power to interpret. He quickly and aggressively points away from himself and points to God. God is the one and only revealer, benefactor and closer! Joseph is clear that he has a realistic view of himself and a healthy view of God.

And I think these two things are a determining factor for a healthy faith. Verse 16, "it is not in me." He knew of his condition without God. If we were speaking in New Testament theology, we would put this in the category of total depravity. It's what Jonathan Edwards said about the human condition: "We bring nothing to our own Salvation but the sin that makes it necessary."

One of the first steps for you to glorify God is to come to realize, it is not in *you*. You need something from outside yourself. This brings us to the second thing Joseph said. "God will do it," only God. That's a very healthy understanding of God, that God is the holy and just creator, that He created you in His image. But because He is a just God, He must punish sin with an infinite punishment. And although He is a fully just God, He is also a completely gracious God. And in His grace He has provided a substitute for sinners to take the punishment in the place of sinners.

Jesus Christ's death on the cross was in the place of sinners and God's justice is there by satisfied. His grace is applied to all who believe in what Christ has done on the cross. You were created to glorify God and you do that through giving yourself, by faith and repentance, to Jesus Christ. God's providence eventually makes sense. God's people were created to glorify Him. That truth brings me to the last point:

God's Sovereignty Always Calls for a Response

Let's go to the dream and the interpretation. In verses 17 - 24, Pharaoh tells Joseph the dream. Listen to Joseph's interpretation, especially in three verses: 25, 28 and then again in 32. Let's read them in that order.

Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about."

Now this tells us the truth about God. He not only knows what's going to happen, He ordains what's going to happen. He not only knows the future, He holds the future. But be careful with sovereignty. Sovereignty is not a hard determinism. When God shows us something in His sovereignty, He calls us to accept responsibility and act. In this passage, God has revealed what He is going to do so that Joseph and the citizens of Egypt can respond. In fact if you read verses 33 – 36, you don't see Joseph saying,

“Well, there's nothing we can do now.” No, if you read verses 33 - 36, Joseph is giving Pharaoh a planned response.

God's revelation doesn't lead us to some kind of weird doctrine that says, “What will be will be.” God's revelation requires a response. If God reveals a warning, change course. If God reveals judgment, we repent.

God's sovereignty always calls for a response. For instance, God in His sovereignty brought you to Hickory Grove today so you might hear that He is a holy and just creator. He created you in His image, but your sinning has disfigured the image of God in you. And if you die now, you go to Hell and bear the punishment for the sin yourself.

But God in His grace has given us Jesus who took the place of sinners and died on the cross in the sinner's place. And if, by faith, you turn from your sinning and turn to Christ, you today will be saved. With that thought, let's close in prayer.

(Pastor prays)