

33. From pit to pinnacle

10/23/2005

Who hasn't heard and got excited about the story of Cinderella when we were kids? Cinderella who was mistreated by her step mother and ugly step sisters for a long time received helps from her animals and a fairy-godmother's magic to meet a prince and they danced a night away. Well, almost. You all know the story.

We have a better story than Cinderella. Actually it is not a fairy tale, but a part of the Jewish history. It is about Joseph whom we've been studying.

He was betrayed by his own brothers, sold to the slave traders, was taken to a foreign land Egypt when he was only 17 years old. Then he was sold to Mr. Potiphar, the captain of the guard of Pharaoh. He was falsely charged by Mrs. Potiphar and thrown into a prison and was forgotten by his cell mate Chief Butler of Pharaoh for a long two years period. Yet God was with Joseph in every step.

Joseph must have wonder if he is ever going to see the daylight outside of the prison. But when God is in the plan, we never know what is going to happen next. When God acts in an impossible situation, He becomes greater to us. The more impossible the situation, the more honor that is given to Him. Therefore, in spite of prevailing prayer, He often waits until the last minute before He intervenes. Thus He teaches us to "hold on in faith".

Since the Scripture texts repeat the Pharaoh's dreams for a couple of times, we will start our study from v9.

A. OH YEAH, I FORGOT

Genesis 41:9-13 Then the chief butler spoke to Pharaoh, saying: "I remember my faults this day. 10 When Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, both me and the chief baker, 11 we each had a dream in one night, he and I. Each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his own dream. 12 Now there was a young Hebrew man with us there, a servant of the captain of the guard. And we told him, and he interpreted our dreams for us; to each man he interpreted according to his own dream. 13 And it came to pass, just as he interpreted for us, so it happened. He restored me to my office, and he hanged him."

Pharaoh woke up one morning disturbed over two strange dreams. He had first dreamed that there were seven fat, sleek cows who came up out of the Nile and were followed by seven gaunt, ugly cows who devoured them. After this, he dreamed of seven plump, good grain heads growing on a single stalk, which were then swallowed up by seven thin, scorched heads.

When Pharaoh awoke, he called for all his magicians and wise men to interpret these dreams for him. But none of them could. Suddenly, the butler remembers another interpreter of dreams and immediately begins to pour out a long-forgotten favor.

Obviously, this chief Butler had a major Green Valley Moment for two years. Now, he is remembering what he was supposed to do.

Why did God let that happen? Because He wasn't through with a refining process with Joseph. Joseph wasn't quite ready to handle the promotion that God was preparing for him.

What happened during those two years? Nothing on the outside. Joseph lived out monotonous hours that stacked up into days, months and finally two long years. Humanly speaking, waiting is one of the most difficult tasks we can be assigned. During the times we think God isn't doing anything, He is doing the work most important: developing our character and transforming us into the image of Jesus Christ.

B. FROM THE PRISON TO THE COURT OF PHARAOH

Genesis 41:14-16 Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him quickly out of the dungeon; and he shaved, changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh. 15 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that you can understand a dream, to interpret it." 16 So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace."

Just for a moment, put yourself in Joseph's sandals. Why has he been down in a dungeon for the past two years? Humanly speaking, it was because the butler forgot him. Now, suddenly, he's released and standing in front of Pharaoh, the butler's boss. But you won't hear one word of resentment spoken against the butler. Why? Because Joseph kept his eyes on the Lord, not the butler.

Pharaoh gave Joseph a golden opportunity to glorify himself, but Joseph will have none of it. He did not use this as an opportunity to glorify himself before Pharaoh, but only to glorify God.

Joseph seems much wiser and perhaps more humble than he did before, considering the way he told his brothers his previous dreams in a self-glorifying way.

Joseph wants it clearly understood that if truths comes, it will come from God, and He alone deserves the glory. The years of suffering have purged him, and now he has come forth as gold – having the kind of character that refuses to use God's gift of interpreting dreams as a bargaining chip to secure his own freedom.

C. THE INTERPRETATION OF PHARAOH'S DREAMS

Genesis 41:25-32 Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do: 26 The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads are seven years; the dreams are one. 27 And the seven thin and ugly cows which came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty heads blighted by the east wind are seven years of famine. 28 This is the thing which I have spoken to Pharaoh. God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do. 29 Indeed seven years of great plenty will come throughout all the land of Egypt; 30 but after them seven years of famine will arise, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine will deplete the land. 31 So the plenty will not be known in the land because of the famine following, for it will be very severe. 32 And the dream was repeated to Pharaoh twice because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

Even to the end of the interpretation, Joseph keeps Pharaoh's focus on the Lord, not himself.

D. A SOLUTION TO THE UPCOMING FAMINE

Genesis 41:33-36 Now therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. 34 Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, to collect one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years. 35 And let them gather all the food of those good years that are coming, and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. 36 Then that food shall be as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land may not perish during the famine."

Joseph shows both his boldness and his gift of administration. No responsible administrator would present such news without also suggesting a plan to meet the coming crisis.

E. A SUDDEN PROMOTION

Genesis 41:37-41 So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. 38 And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?" 39 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. 40 You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you." 41 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt."

When Joseph counseled Pharaoh, he spoke directly, honestly and for God's glory. He wasn't interviewing for a job, nor he was not handing out his resume to the Pharaoh or posting his resume in Monster.com web site.

1Peter 5:6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,

But the refined qualities of discernment and humility shone through in what he was saying, and Pharaoh came to his own conclusion that there is not one person who is more qualified than Joseph to handle this gigantic task.

V38 is the first mention in the Bible of the Holy Spirit coming upon a man. Pharaoh saw that Joseph was filled with the Spirit of God.

Genesis 41:42-45 Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. 43 And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, "Bow the knee!" So he set him over all the land of Egypt. 44 Pharaoh also said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." 45 And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-Paaneah. And he gave him as a wife Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On. So Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt.

So in a matter of a few hours, Joseph is given a promotion that will take him from pit to the pinnacle of Egypt, from rags to riches and from the dungeon to the steps of the throne.

1) Pharaoh gives Joseph blank check financial authority by giving him his signet ring.

It was like unlimited credit card of that day, with all the wealth of Egypt behind it. And now it belongs to Joseph, to make any transaction he deems necessary. The

hands that were hard with the toils of a slave are adorned with a signet ring from Pharaoh himself. The feet are no longer tormented by fetters from the prison.

2) Joseph also receives a whole new wardrobe to match the new royal authority given him.

The coat of many colors was torn from him by violence and defiled by sheep's blood, and the garment was left in the hand of the adulteress, are exchanged for the royal wardrobe.

3) Joseph is given his own company car with body guards.

He was once trampled upon as a common slave. Now all Egypt is commanded bow before him as he ride in the second chariot prime minister of Egypt, and second only to the king.

From the outside, Joseph looked like an "overnight success," but it was more than 13 years in the making. Joseph is a good example of a man who seemed to have all the gifts and talents for leadership, but God developed his character and talents over many years. Gifts and talents may be impressive and immediate, but character is what God looks for and always takes time to develop.

F. JOSEPH'S LIFE AS PRIME MINISTER

Genesis 41:46-49 Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt. 47 Now in the seven plentiful years the ground brought forth abundantly. 48 So he gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities; he laid up in every city the food of the fields which surrounded them. 49 Joseph gathered very much grain, as the sand of the sea, until he stopped counting, for it was immeasurable.

If I were Joseph, as soon as I walked into my new Prime Minister office, I would bark an order to bring that Mrs. Potiphar in a pair of heavy duty handcuffs and shackles, so that I could revenge on her stinky old false rape charge. But we don't find it anywhere Joseph taking a revenge on her.

We used to call names to those nerds and geeky people in high schools, now we have to call them, 'Boss.' You never know what the table is going to turn.

G. JOSEPH'S NEW FAMILY

Genesis 41:50-52 And to Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On, bore to him. 51 Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: "For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house." 52 And the name of the second he called Ephraim: "For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction."

From his Egyptian wife, Joseph fathered Manasseh, whose name means "forgetfulness." This was because God made Joseph to forget all the previous pain and trial in his life. His second son is Ephraim, which means "fruitfulness," because God made Joseph fruitful in Egypt.

We can't be truly fruitful until we are also forgetting our hurtful past. Hell on earth would be wherever we are, if we constantly reminding ourselves of those hurtful past – remembering every slight, every cruel exchange of words, every wrong ever done

to us, and coupled with unforgiving hearts. But we can have a small portion of heaven on this earth by putting away all these things because Jesus can make all things new.

H. JOSEPH'S FAITHFUL EXECUTION

Genesis 41:53-57 Then the seven years of plenty which were in the land of Egypt ended, 54 and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. The famine was in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. 55 So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do." 56 The famine was over all the face of the earth, and Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians. And the famine became severe in the land of Egypt. 57 So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine was severe in all lands.

Because Joseph believe God's prediction and was faithful in the execution of his job, Egypt and all the world benefited.

I. APPLICATIONS

1) During the waiting period, trust God without panic.

We must learn to count on the Lord to handle those who may forget and abandon us.

2) During the time of afflictions, let God encourage our hearts without fear.

Thirteen years of unrelenting affliction! And yet Joseph didn't allow discouragement to imprison his heart and make him lose hope. How did he do it? The only way possible – he focused on loving God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength.

3) During the time of reward, thank God without pride.

Oftentimes the night of our suffering seems as if it will never pass. We feel as if we can't even remember what the dawn was like. In our hearts, we pray for endurance and promise to thank God and give Him the glory when the dawn comes. But that thankfulness, that humility, often vanishes like morning mist when God rewards us. The best way to guard against this is to thank Him even during the difficult times.