

Reading: Genesis 40:1-23

Theme: Dreams of Jailbirds

All over the world top athletes were in training for the Tokyo Olympics in 2020, which has been moved to 2021 or even 2022. Training schedules and regimes are now gone out of the window! Some may retire before then as it was their last year; others will adjust their schedules for whenever... It will still be hard work, hurt them, take their time and dominate their lives, yet as they prepare it will be worth it to win, to be the best or improve on their best.

In the Christian life we are always being prepared and yet we don't know exactly what for! If God had come and said to us *"This is what I have in mind and this is part of your preparation"* we would be able to bear situations the easier. God doesn't do that with us, but He often leads us into situations and trials that seem to have no purpose to us, hurts us and makes us feel that we can't go on, maybe feel it's not worth going on. In such times God is refining us, shaping us and preparing us for future usefulness.

We know God had an extra ordinary plan and purpose for Joseph and for him to be ready, he has to go through extra-ordinary preparations – but he did not it at the time! Although Joseph seemed to be trodden down and crushed, God was not mocking him, but preparing him. It would have been too great a quantum leap to go from being daddy's favourite boy to the governor of Egypt, to go from A to Z in one go; God was preparing him step by step, taking him through the ABC of preparation and all according to God's design, time and way.

Part of Joseph's experience was this prison time. He had been falsely accused of attempted rape, imprisoned, harshly treated initially and mixed with the prisoners there. Yet in it all, God is preparing Joseph for future service. Let's look to see what we can learn, not only about Joseph, but for us too, using a number of headings which are taken from verses of NIV in the chapter:

1. "the cupbearer and the baker of the king" v 1.

We are suddenly introduced to these, no names, no crimes specified, but they and Joseph are thrown together in God's wisdom. They were not just a cupbearer or baker, but the chief cupbearer, the chief baker and had offended Pharaoh and been thrown into prison. Joseph was set aside to care for them and ordered to do so by the captain of the guard (*used of Potiphar in 39:1. Was he still saving face, but allowing Joseph privileges, but not freedom?*) It seems a trivial event - two court officials imprisoned; they meet a Hebrew prisoner. Yet the meeting began a direct connection between Joseph, his promotion, to meet his brothers and father. It may seem insignificant, but not to God, who worked all things according to His own plan and purpose.

I hope this is a comfort, even a challenge to us. Realise it is not by accident or by chance we are hearing this message. There is a purpose in it - either to encourage and prepare us for our lives and service as a Christian and then heaven; or to establish us in our unbelief and condemnation to hell! That may startle shock or offend you! If we become or grow as a Christian our time here, or in other Christian meetings would have been used to bring us, point us to Christ as well as grow as a Christian. If we never become a Christian, then they will be used to show us how we hardened our heart, that we would not believe, and be used in evidence to add to the condemnation we already deserve. The sun that softens the wax also hardens clay - what is our heart like at the gospel's preaching?

2. "had a dream the same night" v 5.

These two both had a dream the same night. It wasn't a fanciful dream, or an ordinary dream, but the dreams made such an impression on each of them. They were different dreams, but both of them were affected. The Egyptians set great emphasis on dreams. There were many interpreters of dreams in Egyptian society. If they'd been free, they would have either gone to one of these soothsayers in the place they lived, or seen one of the palace soothsayers or

astrologers. Sadly, for them they were imprisoned and had no access to such, were sad and they complain about this to Joseph (v 8a) - because he'd noticed that their faces were sad.

They were sad, not at the dreams, but because they longed to know their meaning, to know the future. Many in our confusing days are concerned to know the future! They look to astrology, crystal balls, fortune tellers, Ouija boards, tarot cards and the like. They become captivated by what these things say. Many become concerned over dreams – Freud and psychologists after him, stress that dreams are exposing some inner wish or fear...

How much stress can we place on such things? Why do many take such things so seriously? We have to say that God has forbidden that we use any means to find out the future - categorically forbidding Israel to use witchcraft, mediums etc and trying to see what would occur. This obviously rules out the use of astrology, crystal balls, fortune tellers, Ouija boards etc. These things are not linked to God - whose ways are past searching out, but to the devil. These things can be used to snare lives and souls, are means by which the devil will work - irrespective of the practitioner's title of good or white. The devil will seek to bring into bondage all that use such things.

We have seen looking at Joseph's life that God in ancient times often spoke through dreams, but now we have His revealed word and will as found in the Bible and we are not to expect regular revelations through dreams as His revealed will and all that is necessary for salvation and living the Christian life is there in the word of God. We are to be cautious of those who will place an emphasis on dreams and visions. Yes it is true God may condescend to a person's weakness, infancy and allow a dream to be used in a person's life, but very rarely should we take dreams seriously, as so many factors can affect our dreams - as I said previously, a late meal in the evening can affect people! Yet here the dreams the cupbearer and baker had

were of God and they were troubled and when they poured out their complaint to Joseph, he said:

3. "Do not interpretations belong to God?" v8b

These two men wanted a dream interpreter. It seems Joseph had received the gift of interpretation as a young man and it had rarely been used, if ever, since his slavery. Here was Joseph's big chance; his opportunity to make a great impression; this young man could he boast about his ability! But not so, Joseph did not parade his abilities because he had learnt to take his eyes off himself and put them on God - the God who had kept him, had granted him success and favour both in Potiphar's house and there in prison and so he said "*Do not interpretations belong to God?*" Daniel did so 1,000 years or later!

Here, Joseph gives the honour of any subsequent interpretation, away from himself and on to God. He no longer looks at his abilities or gifts, but to God and he used the opportunity to point these Egyptians to God. We often think we have few opportunities to witness to our God and Saviour, but if we keep our eyes and ears open with a prayerful attitude, there will be an amazing number of opportunities we can use - not in a forced sense, ramming the gospel down peoples throats getting up their noses with it, but using God-given opportunities and openings. It is our message and not our method that should cause people to think or to take offence - "*We must be winsome to win some!*" The truth must be spoken, but in such a way so people are prepared to listen because of our presentation. It should be the truth that people should react against and not our personalities or presentation as we seek to witness.

Joseph having proclaimed the truth that interpretation of dreams belong to God, asks them to tell him their dreams. This they do and the cupbearer's dream is interpreted (v 12 & 13). Here the Holy Spirit immediately gives Joseph understanding as to what the dream exactly meant. The cupbearer's dream spoke of favour and

restoration to office. It must've been a pleasant thing to interpret this dream and Joseph faithfully tells him the meaning.

No doubt, encouraged by the interpretation of the cupbearer's dream, the baker tells his dream (v16 & 17), but Joseph had to proclaim a solemn interpretation. We don't know if Joseph favoured either of them - this was irrelevant anyway. He proclaimed what he had revealed to him. He didn't manipulate the dreams and certainly couldn't manipulate the outcome. Out of necessity Joseph had to speak the truth, whether it was good or bad. I suspect he gave the baker's interpretation with a heavy heart.

If I had a choice, I think I'd rather have been the cupbearer as suddenly in his troubled situation he has this great hope, but the poor baker - he'd hoped for a good interpretation and his hope is suddenly extinguished and he had the prospect of three days of life and then his death. For three days he had to live with the thought *"I'm going to die"*. There was no hope, no rest - every time a bird sang or flew past - he could picture in his mind the birds pecking at and eating his rotting carcass. Yet he had one in his company who could speak to him of God, of the God of all the earth and the hope that was to be found in Him. I wonder if the baker used his last days to prepare for eternity.

We don't know the future - not 10 min, not 10 hours, certainly not three days. What if we were going to die in three days' time? How would we spend the time? Yet any of us, or all of us, may have a short time to live. It could be by this time next week we could be dead and even buried at whatever age we are. Trouble is we have no direct warning as did the baker, but we do have the solemn warnings of Scripture that today we are alive and tomorrow we may be cut down and so we are urged to make our salvation sure while it is still today; for now is accepted time of salvation. If we have not made our peace with God through the Lord Jesus as our own Saviour then the Bible commands us, urges us to do so even today, now. The baker

had opportunity to prepare for the day of his death for three days. They were either wasted or he prepared to meet his God. We also see from this passage Joseph saying

4. "Remember me" v 14.

Here Joseph tries to take things into his own hands. Yes, he is sure and certain of the outcome of his interpretation and so he asks to be remembered by the cupbearer. He briefly pours out his tragic life story. Here is Joseph trying to manipulate events, to vindicate himself, to try and do his bit to get out of prison and possibly to a new job by having a glowing reference from someone in a high up position. It could very well have worked if it had been God's way, but it wasn't. Joseph had to learn a deeper lesson that God would promote Joseph in His time and surprising way.

In this instance God didn't want Joseph interfering with short-sighted plans, with self-defence and vindication. It seems like Joseph still had rough edges to knock off, things to learn. God knew Joseph had need of further preparation and it turns out to be a further two years in the school of prison life. Joseph may have felt at the end of his tether, may have thought he'd suffered enough and couldn't go on, but God knew he could and had to do so to remove any self-righteousness or self trust.

What about us? We may feel we cannot go on, but if God were to remove the burden or we were to give in, we would miss out on the greater blessing God has planned for us. Is it right for us to ask for the burden removed or for the strength to bear it? That is a tricky question to answer! Joseph asked to be remembered, but we see the cupbearer

5. "did not remember Joseph" v 23.

For whatever reason the cupbearer did not present Joseph's case. It could be he intended to, but on release it wasn't the best time; as he had to catch up with his job, his family, the decorating and

gardening, the news, this that and the other - well it slipped his mind... He should have remembered Joseph, but he didn't. Poor Joseph was left in prison. Every time soldiers came to the prison; Joseph may have thought "*This is it - freedom!*" He had to learn not to put his hopes and trust in men - who are mortal and to learn to trust in his God totally. He is cast utterly and completely on God.

Who or what are we trusting in this day? Our strength, health, wisdom, husband, wife, loved ones, the state, society, our abilities, wealth, finances – all these are useless illusions and will fail us. We are not to put our source of comfort or trust in any man or woman, not any Christian whether a leader or not. Our trust must be in the Lord and in Him alone. Yes, He does provide many things for our help, comfort and encouragement, but the ultimate source must be the Lord Himself. We're certainly to stop trusting in ourselves, in other men and women. We expect too much from them. Our trust is not to be in princes, kings, politicians and statesman, but in God.

When many were dying, they renounced their useless ways of life, regret their wasted lives and cry to God to forgive and help them. I don't think I've ever heard of a Christian regretting living for God too much as they were dying, or renouncing Christ and wanting the world which is quickly passing away from them. Christians have a sure hope and trust in all the changing scenes of life and especially as they come to leave this life.

Joseph asked a man of influence to remember him, to put in a good word and this one forgot to do so. An innocent man asks a prisoner for remembrance and was let down. This contrasts with another historical incident, when an innocent one and two criminals were suffering. One criminal says to the innocent one "*Lord Jesus remember me when to come into your kingdom*" (Luke 23:42). The 3 were dying just feet apart, each suffering the agonies of crucifixion, but the one thief sees his need of remembrance by Christ, saw He was the holy One of God, saw that He was the King going to His

majestic glory and he wanted a favour, a small favour from Him. The penitent thief was remembered - not in a small way, but from the throne the King was nailed to, the Lord Jesus made him a solemn promise of a place in heaven that day.

Would you trust your immortal soul to man or to the Lord Jesus? We need to see our need to trust Him, to ask Him to remember us and to save us. Amazingly He will do so; He will make us His child, give us new life, new hope, and put His Spirit within us to enable us to live the life we could not in our own strength. Then we will be remembered for all eternity and it will spill over into our day by day lives as this God will care for us, work all things together for good according to His purpose for those who love Him.

My desire is that each of us would know the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and that we would not only be remembered by Him all our days, but we would live our lives remembering the Saviour who died to save us.