

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

3-4-20

Genesis 40

The Cupbearer and the Baker - Verses 1-8

¹Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master, the king of Egypt. ²Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, ³ and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined. ⁴ The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them. After they had been in custody for some time, ⁵ each of the two men—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in prison—had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. ⁶ When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected.⁷ So he asked Pharaoh's officials who were in custody with him in his master's house, "Why do you look so sad today?" ⁸ "We both had dreams," they answered, "but there is no one to interpret them." Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams."

40:1-3 The cupbearer and the chief baker were two of the most trusted men in Pharaoh's kingdom. The baker was in charge of making the pharaoh's food, and the cupbearer tasted all of Pharaoh's food and drink before giving it to him, to make sure it was not contaminated or poisoned. These trusted men must have been suspected of a serious wrong, perhaps of conspiring against Pharaoh. Later the cupbearer was released and the baker executed.

40:8 When the subject of dreams came up, Joseph focused everyone's attention on God. Rather than using the situation to make himself look good, he turned it into a powerful witness for the Lord. One secret of effective witnessing is to recognize opportunities to relate God to the other person's experience. When the opportunity arises, we must have the courage to speak, as Joseph did.

The Good News and the Bad News - Verses 9-19

⁹ So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream. He said to him, "In my dream I saw a vine in front of me, ¹⁰ and on the vine were three branches. As soon as it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes. ¹¹ Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup and put the cup in his hand." ¹² "This is what it means," Joseph said to him. "The three branches are three days.¹³ Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position, and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer. ¹⁴ But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. ¹⁵ I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I

have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon.”¹⁶ When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given a favorable interpretation, he said to Joseph, “I too had a dream: On my head were three baskets of bread.”¹⁷ In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head.”¹⁸ “This is what it means,” Joseph said. “The three baskets are three days.”¹⁹ Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and impale your body on a pole. And the birds will eat away your flesh.”

40:9 A man in Joseph’s position could easily have taken advantage of his circumstances. Frequently men in charge of prisoners would give preferential care to those who were willing and able to pay for it (Acts 24:17,26). These two officers were eager to learn the meaning of their dreams, a service that Joseph could have rendered for payment. He did, however, request that he be remembered before Pharaoh (verse 14), for the circumstances which led to his arrival in Egypt, as well as those which brought him to prison, were a matter of injustice which Pharaoh could correct.

40:9 Joseph’s one request of the butler gave further testimony to the great faith of this Hebrew prisoner. He was so certain that his interpretation was true that he made a request of the butler which he never considered in the case of the baker. He asked to be remembered before Pharaoh when his words came to pass. It is one thing to venture an opinion on the meaning of a man’s dream, but quite another to make a request for your freedom based upon the outcome of your interpretation. Joseph was convinced that God had spoken through him. While content to remain in the dungeon so long as God willed, Joseph also made every effort to be removed from that place through the channels legitimately available to him.

The butler was encouraged to share his dream with Joseph on the basis of God’s ability to interpret dreams and because of his confidence in Joseph’s relationship with his God. The baker, however, was motivated only by the fact that Joseph’s interpretation was good news to the butler. He, too, is now eager to report his dream to Joseph and thus to have an optimistic forecast of his future.

40:9-19 These two dreams and their interpretations contain a striking parallel to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Both the butler and the baker had “sinned” against their master and had rightfully incurred his wrath. Both awaited the condemnation they deserved. One was pardoned and granted a restoration of fellowship and function at the hand of his master. The other received the punishment that he was due and paid the penalty of death.

The Bible declares to us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). As guilty sinners we deserve the penalty of our sins, which is eternal death and separation from God, but there is for us the offer of forgiveness through the provision of Jesus Christ. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:23).

Prophecies Fulfilled, But Promises Forgotten - Verses 20-23

²⁰ Now the third day was Pharaoh's birthday, and he gave a feast for all his officials. He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of his officials: ²¹ He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh's hand— ²² but he impaled the chief baker, just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation.

40:23 When Pharaoh's cupbearer was freed from prison, he forgot about Joseph. Two full years passed before Joseph had another opportunity to be freed (41:1). Yet Joseph's faith was deep, and he would be ready when the next chance came. When we feel passed by, overlooked, or forgotten, we shouldn't be surprised that people are often ungrateful. In similar situations, we should trust God as Joseph did. More opportunities may be waiting.

40:23 Joseph believed in a God who is not only all-wise and all-loving, but all-powerful. The God he served did place his servants in circumstances that were difficult and unpleasant, but He also gave a sufficient measure of His grace to endure it. The testimony of Joseph in these dark days is a reminder to every Christian that even the righteous will suffer and that such suffering is in the will of God to accomplish His purposes. No promise is more comforting to the suffering saint than this: I will never leave you, nor will I ever desert you (Deuteronomy 31:6; Joshua 1:5; Hebrews 13:5).