

Prison to Palace **(Genesis 40:1-41:57 July 13, 2008)**



Our passage this morning leads us to one day in the life of Joseph that can only be described as incredible.

He woke up in a prison cell – as he had done for years. His clothes in tatters. Hair and beard knotted and probably lice infested. Sleeping on the floor – eating gruel.

Then the cell door was swung open. Some palace officials arrived and took Joseph – he bathed, shaved his beard and probably his head and put on clean fine clothes.

He was then taken for an audience with Pharaoh himself.

This day ends with Joseph in a suite within the palace. Surrounded by his own servants. The finest food, clothes and bedding. As his head hits the pillow he is wearing Pharaoh's signet ring marking him as the second most powerful man in the most powerful nation on the face of the earth.

He awoke a prisoner – he went to bed a king.

Many men and women have risen from humble origins to positions of wealth and power – but I doubt any rose from such depths to such heights and I doubt any rose from prison to palace in the space of mere hours.

But perhaps the most amazing fact about Joseph's rise to power is that he is totally unaffected by it.

The picture of the man in prison is exactly the picture of the man in the palace.

He is a faithful man serving the Lord in prison – and he is a faithful man serving the Lord in the palace. No doubt – he preferred to be out of the prison – but it is clear that Joseph was content to serve wherever the Lord has him – prison *or* palace.

But what also becomes clear is that it is this testing as a slave and in the prison that prepared Joseph to be the man in the palace who could save his nation.

Recently, I was praying for my children that the Lord would make them great men and women of faith and use them mightily for the Kingdom – when I was struck by a thought.

Every man or woman I could think of who had been used mightily by God had been shaped and moulded in the fires of deep trial.

I found myself mentally ticking off the great names of the Bible – and thought about the trials of their lives.

Moses – fleeing Egypt, forty years in the wilderness.

David – his years of fleeing from Saul and hiding in caves – even feigning madness to survive.

Ruth and Esther – shaped by tragedy.

The great prophets – losing wives, rejected, scorned, imprisoned, killed.

Daniel – sold into slavery.

The Apostles – all persecuted, eleven of the twelve martyred. Paul – incredible sacrifice and pain and finally martyrdom.

I thought of the great men of the faith.

Luther – his struggles and persecution by the Catholic church. His health problems.

Tyndale – years as an outlaw for daring to translate the Bible into English.

The Maryan martyrs.

Bunyan – the persecution, the twelve years in prison, his family's struggles.

Edwards – rejected by his own church.

Spurgeon – hounded for his faith in the Bible, incredible personal struggles, health issues.

Let alone the missionaries – Carey, Judson, Taylor.

And I found myself sitting there thinking – is this really what I want for my son or daughters? To become a great man or woman of God their faith would have to be shaped by persecution and trials.

There is a part of me that would love my children to have easy lives. No health problems, no financial problems, marry well, many children, good church lives, live to a ripe old age and die surrounded by loving family. Some fatherly part of me wants to shield them from *any* of the pain of this world.

But the more I thought about it – the more I realised that I actually wanted more for my children. Life without testing leads to weak Christians. I want more for them. I long for them to have real faith – to be godly saints the Lord can use in powerful ways. Yet I know that if my prayer is answered – it will mean some brutal times of testing.

That is the way of God. To make a man or woman of faith – He chips away the dross bit by bit – He tempers their faith in the furnace of trial – and the result is a man or woman who He can use in remarkable ways.

In his book, *The Root of the Righteous*, A. W. Tozer says this:

The devil, things and people being what they are, it is necessary for God to use the hammer, the file and the furnace in His holy work of preparing a saint for true sainthood. It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply. p. 157

Spend a couple of hours meditating on that sentence:

It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply.

In fact, the record of the Bible and church history suggests that the greater the task the Lord has in mind for his servant – the deeper the testing and trials needed to prepare them.

Brothers and sisters. Most of us have it too easy. Our greatest trial is whether our superannuation fund is going up or down – or whether our kids are doing well at school.

We fear pain and trial. Illness, relationship trouble, financial mess – these send us over the edge.

Don't fear trials – embrace them – God uses suffering and trials to shape us in remarkable ways. And one prime example is Joseph.

In Genesis 37 – we met Joseph – a brash, somewhat arrogant seventeen year old. But God took that raw material and tested him in the fires of suffering.

A decade of slavery. And then when his integrity faced the sternest of tests and he stood firm – yet his reward was to be cast into prison where more years of testing awaited.

I am sure there were dark times for Joseph in prison. I am sure there were many questions about what the Lord was doing. But the end result is a man who comes to tower over the pages of the Old Testament.

Testing and trial turned Joseph into a man of incredible spiritual power who was used by God in stunning ways.

The great saints all have times of preparation through trial before they are raised to power. Moses spent 40 years in Midian. Dave spent years in the wilderness fleeing from Saul.

But when they were ready – God used them. Today we come to the passage that describes Joseph’s rise from prison to palace.

As chapter 40 opens – we don’t know how long Joseph has been in the prison. But two men join him there – Pharaoh’s chief cupbearer and chief baker.

These titles make us think of them as something equivalent to a butler and a chef – but they are far more than that. These men are close confidants of Pharaoh – men with real power – one of the few men with access to Pharaoh.

These men are high ranking officials. Think of Nehemiah who was the cupbearer to Artaxerxes – this position is one of an advisor with significant authority.

But one of the tasks for these men was to take responsibility for the food and drink given to Pharaoh. Royal courts were notorious for their intrigue and attempts to poison kings. They had to make sure the food and drink Pharaoh consumed was not poisoned. He trusted them with his life.

The word used for ‘offended’ or ‘sinned’ is a very broad word – whose use includes being involved in coup attempts or murder attempts.

Most likely Pharaoh is not angry with these men because they gave him a bad wine and a poor pastry – no – almost certainly word came to Pharaoh about an attempt on his life and that one or both of these men were implicated. So while the truth was being sorted out – they were put into the king’s prison – which ‘just happened’ to be run by Potiphar – the captain of the guard – where they ‘just happened’ to be put into the care of Joseph.

Some time later – the men each had a dream – a troubling dream.

Egyptians placed great emphasis on dreams. And Egypt was filled with wise men who made a living interpreting dreams. But there in prison – these men were cut off from any interpreters – whatever the dreams meant would not be made clear to them – so they were dejected.

Joseph noticed this – asked what the problem was – and when he found it was dreams – said – tell me your dream.

The cupbearer relayed his dream – I saw a vine with three branches which blossomed into grapes. I squeezed the juice into Pharaoh’s cup.

Joseph says – good news – three days and Pharaoh will lift up your head and you will be restored. But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. For 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.

Like you – I am innocent – you know what it is like to be imprisoned unjustly – help me please.

Now the baker has been listening to all of this. The impression is that he didn't speak up immediately – because most likely he was guilty. But when he heard the favourable interpretation – he thought he would give it a try.

I had a dream too: On my head were three baskets of bread. 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.

At this point – I need to tell you a little about dream interpretation.

Years ago there was a radio program on the ABC – Jane Anderson – who described herself as a dream analyst and dream alchemist – would go on the radio and people would ring up with their dreams and she would interpret them.

I listened to a few of these calls – You know the type of thing. I dreamed I was flying and purple pigs came out of the sun and spat black ink at me – what does it mean?

But one thing that struck me is that regardless of the dream – pretty much all of the interpretations were positive. The purple pigs are long lost friends – the black ink is saying you have neglected them – but the sun indicates that when you make contact again you will enjoy great fellowship.

It was like that in Egypt – people don't want to pay to hear bad news. And if it was a powerful official – I doubt anyone would dare give them a negative interpretation.

But Joseph actually has a God-given ability to interpret those dreams sent by God. He knows that for the baker this is bad news.

Still the baker is a powerful official – he is going to die anyway – so why anger him?

But Joseph is a man who tells the truth and acts with integrity regardless of the potential cost.

You want men like this – men who will tell you the truth even if it hurts.

He says to the baker – sorry, but this is not so good news. Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and hang you on a tree. And the birds will eat away your flesh.

That prison must have been a really cheery place for the next three days. But at least the baker had the chance to get right with God. Maybe he even asked Joseph about the one true God – we don't know.

What we do know is that in three days – the fates of the men went exactly as Joseph said. It seems Pharaoh came to the truth about who was innocent and who was guilty and the chief cupbearer was restored and the chief baker was executed.

But, the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.

Two full years pass.

And then Pharaoh has a dream – two dreams – disturbing dreams.

He is shocked as he sees seven fat cows by the Nile eaten up by seven ugly gaunt cows. He wakes up in a sweat and finally falls off to sleep again. Another dream – seven fat heads of grain swallowed up by seven thin heads of grain.

The Egyptians believed that Pharaoh was a god-man – the link between men and the gods. And the dreams of Pharaoh were thought to be very significant.

Two dreams that were deeply troubling to Pharaoh – so he called in all the magicians and wise men of Egypt and told them the dream.

Let's be clear here. The interpretation is not that difficult. This is happening next to the Nile – the dreams clearly have to do with Egypt. And fat animals and grains swallowed up by thin gaunt ones – doesn't take too much to see that famine is coming.

So why does it say in chapter 41 verse 8?:

Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him.

Most likely these men all gave interpretations – but favourable ones.

Something like – the dreams mean that Pharaoh will wage seven wars against seven nations and devour them.

No one is brave enough to say – My Master – I suspect this is bad news – a dire famine is coming.

We know Pharaoh can get angry and imprison or kill those who displease him – so most likely no one wants to run the risk of speaking plainly.

But Pharaoh *knows* this is bad news – the dreams disturbed him greatly and no one will interpret this dream for him.

Finally, the tension is broken as the cupbearer clears his throat and speaks up.

Today I am reminded of my shortcomings. In my unfortunate spell in prison I met a Hebrew slave who can interpret dreams. He interpreted mine and the baker's and they came to pass exactly as he said.

So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh.

Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams:

God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads of grain are seven years; it is one and the same dream. The seven lean, ugly cows that came up afterward are seven

years, and so are the seven worthless heads of grain scorched by the east wind: They are seven years of famine.

But Joseph does more than interpret – completely unsolicited he gives Pharaoh advice about what to do.

Let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. ... This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine.

Pharaoh is impressed. Joseph had correctly interpreted the baker's and cupbearer's dream. He had spoken forthrightly to Pharaoh and even given a wise plan.

Clearly the spirit of the God of the Hebrew's was in this man. Here is a man who would speak the truth – even if it cost him his life. Pharaoh could trust this man – he had presented a good plan and Pharaoh decided that he should lead the effort.

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you. I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt." Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and men shouted before him, "Make way!" Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt." Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah and gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, to be his wife.

He is given an Egyptian name which probably means – *the god has spoken, he will live* – he is married into a priestly family – he is raised to be second only to Pharaoh.

While some might think it strange that Pharaoh would appoint a foreigner to such a position. But we know that at this time – Egypt was actually ruled by a dynasty of people known as the Hyksos. They were not Egyptians – they were Semitic people who for many centuries ruled Egypt.

We know that they often promoted Semitic people to high office in Egypt. So it is not at all unusual for Joseph a Hebrew – a Semitic man – to be promoted like this.

So what a day – prison to palace! Imprisoned slave to empowered ruler.

Those are the general brushstrokes of the story – we know them well – but if we look a little deeper – there are *two* interlocking themes that just jump out of the pages of this account that teach us some crucial truths. These two themes are:



What the Hand of God Looks Like

Guiding from Prison to Palace

What the Man of God Looks Like

Faithful in Prison or Palace

First:

What the Hand of God Looks Like

When you read through this account – it is *impossible* to miss that it is the hand of God which is involved in guiding Joseph from Prison to Palace. God was with Joseph in every step of the journey.

The cupbearer and baker offend Pharaoh – and end up in the same prison at the same time as Joseph and were put into his care. This is not mere chance. We are meant to see the hand of God in this.

Then on the same night – the two men have similar dreams – while they are in prison with Joseph. Again – this is God at work. The Lord sent those dreams.

Chapter 40, verse 22 – it came to pass exactly as God revealed through the interpretation given to Joseph. God is at work.

Then, verse 23 – the chief cupbearer, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him. Even his failure to remember Joseph is divine providence.

What if he *had* remembered Joseph when he was released? What if he had mentioned Joseph to Pharaoh when he returned to the palace? At best Pharaoh would have said – fine free the Hebrew slave – and we would never hear of Joseph again. Most likely he would have said – so? – do I care about a Hebrew slave who interprets dreams – I have a court full of Egyptian wise men. And then two years later I doubt the cupbearer would dare mention Joseph when Pharaoh did have his dreams.

No, God had some more work to do on Joseph in prison – and in the fullness of time – when Pharaoh was deeply troubled by his dreams – then the cupbearer remembered Joseph.

And Pharaoh – having his troubling dreams – two on the one night. In case we miss the significance it is pointed out for us – Chapter 41 verse 32:

The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon.

This is of God. When we get to verses 47 to 57 – and we see seven years of plenty and then seven years of harsh famine – we are meant to grasp that God orchestrated this.

Throughout this whole episode – chapter 37 to chapter 50 – we are left in no doubt – **God is at work**. This is not mere chance. Every detail is of God.

The slavery, the prison – this is of God.

Brothers and sisters – every one of us goes through some dark valleys. But remember Psalm 23:4:

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil – why? – for You are with me.

Whatever the trial – just as God was with Joseph – He is with us. A sparrow does not fall to the ground but God wills it. Everything that happens is woven together into a divine tapestry – that God uses to shape us and to work His ends.

God takes the evil of men and the good of men – and uses it all for His purposes.

Don't get me wrong. It hurts – Paul cried three times for the Lord to remove his thorn in the flesh. Joseph asked the cupbearer to help him get out of jail.

But these men understood that the plan of God can go beyond what we can see – and they trusted. When the dark times come – like them – we have to live in trust.

But equally important for us to see is:

What the Man of God Looks Like

Joseph is Faithful in the Prison or in the Palace.

I want you to put yourself in the place of the chief cupbearer for a moment. Joseph notices he is sad and asks, “Why are your faces so sad today?” And he tells Joseph about the dream.

And Joseph says, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams.”

Here is a Hebrew slave – abandoned in a foreign prison. And he testifies to the power of his God. Interpretations belong to the true God – my God.

What if the cupbearer had asked – “Maybe that is so – but look at you – your God doesn’t seem so powerful or if He is – he seems to have abandoned you. Why do you still give glory to your God?”

Remember, at this stage Joseph has no idea he is headed to the palace. At this stage faithfulness seems to have led him into more and more trouble.

He is faithful in obeying his father and going out to see how his brothers were doing and he ends up a slave.

He is faithful in Potiphar’s house and faithful with Potiphar’s wife and ends up in prison.

He is faithful in prison and he is still in prison – years of prison.

Joseph cannot be certain if he will ever get out. Clearly he wants out and thinks he should not be in prison.

Yet, amazingly he is not angry at God or bitter.

I would imagine that Joseph might have said something like this to the cupbearer:

Yahweh – the one true God – created this world and each of us. He controls everything. He knows the end from the beginning. A bird does not fly from east to west but God wills it.

A man is not in prison or the palace – but God wills it.

I have done nothing to deserve my imprisonment – but clearly – for some reason God wills it.

I long to be released – to be free – to return to my family – but for whatever reason – the one true God has me here.

I will serve Him with all my heart – for he has a purpose in this that I cannot see.

Mine is not to question – but to obey and be faithful.

John Newton tells this story:

If two angels were to receive at the same moment a commission from God, one to go down and rule earth’s grandest empire, the other to go and sweep the streets of its meanest village, it would be a matter of entire indifference to each which service fell to his lot, the post of ruler or the post of scavenger; for the joy of the angels lies only in obedience to God’s will, and with equal joy they would

lift a Lazarus in his rags to Abraham's bosom, or be a chariot of fire to carry an Elijah home.¹

The true servant of God does not serve in order to get – the service is its own reward.

Wherever God has you – serve faithfully – missionary, mother, banker, student, prisoner.

Whatever your gift – teaching or serving – elder or maintaining the church – use your gift to His glory.

Wherever He has you – trust Him, love Him and serve Him.

I am sure Joseph had questions – why am I in prison Lord? Will I ever get out? What am I supposed to learn?

But when we read through this account – his faith does not fail. He determines to serve God faithfully where he is planted.

And the years as a slave and a prisoner turn him into a powerful man of God.

Joseph is relentless in placing his faith in God.

He shows no sign of anger toward God. You could forgive Joseph if the officials told Joseph they had dreams last night and Joseph rolled his eyes and cried:

Dreams – I don't want to hear about dreams. Talk to the hand.

I had dreams once. In them I was raised to rule over my brothers and even my mother and father.

But look at me now – imprisoned in a foreign land – I wouldn't pay too much attention to any dreams. Probably this bad prison food boys.

No – he says – interpretations belong to God – it **will** come to pass.

At some level there is faith that in ways he can barely understand – God will somehow bring his dream to pass. The crushing disappointments have not quelled his faith.

Our faith cannot depend on our life going as we think it ought – our faith must be rooted in the character and nature of God.

So Joseph acts in faith. He tells the cupbearer – while I can't interpret dreams – God can.

He tells the baker – an important official – you will die in three days – I know this – God has revealed it.

¹ E.M. Bounds, *The Essentials of Prayer*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 19.

Then there was a flicker of hope. When the cupbearer left the cell – and Joseph asked him to remember him – I am sure he listened to each approaching footstep each day with hope – did the cupbearer talk to Pharaoh – am I to be freed? And as each day and then week and then month passed – hope died again.

Two full years pass. That is enough to make anyone bitter. But not Joseph. He still trusts God.

We see this in the remarkable discussion that takes place when he is taken before Pharaoh. In chapter 41 verse 15 – Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of *you* that when *you* hear a dream *you* can interpret it.”

Joseph is no fool. He only has to look around the throne room. There is an army of magicians and wise men in that room – and *none* of whom are willing to speak up and tell Pharaoh the bad news.

He knows that Pharaoh sent the cupbearer and baker to prison. He knows he had the baker executed. He is standing before the most powerful man in the world – and he knows that the interpretation is bad news.

How will Pharaoh take the news? Clearly all the courtiers think it won't go well – maybe Joseph should play it safe and give a good interpretation.

But he won't do this – if God sent the dream and God gave him the interpretation – he would deliver it regardless of the consequences.

He is the same man in prison and in the palace.

Notice that Pharaoh says – I have heard it said of **you** that when **you** hear a dream **you** can interpret it.

Maybe Joseph would think this is his chance to get out of prison and get back to his family. Here is the moment to strike.

Pharaoh has heard correctly. I am your man – dreams are **my** thing.

But first, perhaps Pharaoh has heard of **my** plight. Wrongfully imprisoned on the word of Mrs Potiphar – I am sure Pharaoh knows her reputation. And I was left to languish because your cupbearer forgot me.

This dream is crucial. Perhaps Pharaoh would consider a little justice as a fee for the interpretation. Free me and punish those who are guilty?

Not one word like this. He says:

“I cannot do it, but **God** will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.”

I cannot do it – is one word in the Hebrew – literally – not in me! Instead of taking the opportunity to promote himself – he says – no – I can't do it – **but** – the true God – my God can.

Remember who Joseph is speaking to. Pharaoh was considered to be the son of the sun god Ra. He was thought to be an incarnation of the god Horus.

He was a divine god-man – the link between man and the gods. Joseph says this – Pharaoh – you got a dream – but it was not from your so-called gods – it was from the one true God – the God of the Hebrews – and the interpretation has to come from Him. You want the truth – listen to my God.

Joseph had to know that he was treading a dangerous path here.

This is like standing before some militant Hindu extremists and saying – the only truth is in Jesus Christ.

But God is with Joseph. Pharaoh sees that Joseph is an exceptional man – filled with the spirit of His God and he raises him up to be ruler over Egypt.

What does a man of God look like? He is faithful to serve in the prison or the palace. He testifies to the true God no matter the consequences. He gives the glory to God and does not take it for himself.

Finally, in verses 45-57 – the rise from prison to palace is completed.

God brought to pass the events as he revealed in Pharaoh's dream. Seven years of incredible abundance. So great that the one fifth levy was too much for even the Egyptians – the master record keepers of history to record the amount. The grain was like sand on the seashore – so great it would sustain Egypt and the lands through the coming famine.

And the famine did come – crippling and devastating. Then Pharaoh told all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph and do what he tells you." Go to Joseph and live. He saved not just his own nation – but also the Egyptians and even the nations of the area came to buy food.

But perhaps the great measure of the man is seen in verses 50-52:

Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering."

Pharaoh gave Joseph an Egyptian name and an Egyptian wife – but he is a son of Abraham. He is still a man of faith. He could easily have given himself to Egyptian culture.

He doesn't. He gives his sons *Hebrew* names – Manasseh – *he who makes to forget* – because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household.

And Ephraim – *fruitful* – because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.

He is not bitter – God has taken away the pain of the betrayal and the slavery and the imprisonment and the pain of being away from his family – and made him fruitful.

He knows that God was with him and God has done this.

What an incredible man of faith.

So, what do we learn from this?

There are *three* ways in which you and I are like Joseph.

First of all – Like Joseph – God uses trials to shape and purify us.



Slavery and prison shaped Joseph into a man of God.

And as we will see – God uses famine to bring His chosen nation out of Canaan where they are being polluted by the nations – and they will endure slavery and suffering in Egypt – to turn them into His people.

Every one of us has tough times in our life – some have times that try our very souls to the point of breaking. But when trials come – have faith. Never forget – God is with us. Even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil, for God is with us.

Don't fear trials and pain – see them as the hand of God shaping you for service.

If God is going to bless you greatly He has to hurt you deeply.

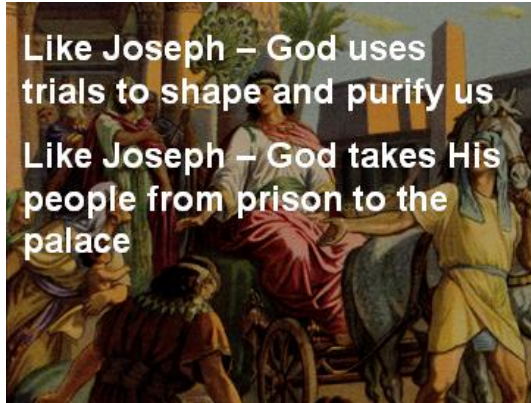
The great hymn – *How Firm a Foundation* puts it so well:

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply:
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design

Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.

When trials come – know God is simply making a man or woman He can use in great ways.

There is a *second* lesson – *Like Joseph – God takes His people from prison to the palace.*



Don't misunderstand me. When you read this account of Joseph – his rise from prison to palace – we might be tempted to think that the lesson is that if we are faithful – God will *finally* bless us – *in this life*.

If we keep doing what is right – if we love God and honour Him – eventually our blessing will come in this life. We will be vindicated and rewarded.

But that is *not* the lesson.

Read the Bible – look at church history. How many saints were martyred, imprisoned and never released, afflicted and never found relief?

Listen to Hebrews 11:36-40:

Some [men and women of faith] faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, **yet none of them received what had been promised.**

In this life *none* of these great saints received the blessing.

Why? Verse 40:

God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

God asks us to serve Him faithfully – in prison, in the palace, in good times, in life's famines.

At times – His purpose is to raise a saint from prison to the palace.

At times – His purpose is for a saint to suffer in prison for years and die in obscurity.

Our task is to be faithful – no matter the path God sets before us.

So why do I say that the *second* lesson is that – like Joseph – God takes His people from prison to the palace?

Because *ultimately* – that *is* true for every saint. From the prison of sin to the palace of heaven.

Joseph is not the ultimate prison to palace story. In one sense his rise looks forward to one who is greater. Philippians 2:8-9:

[Jesus Christ was] found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,

Jesus came in humility. He suffered unjustly. He was imprisoned. But His rise to exaltation came not through release – but by death.

And because He died – all of us who have died with Him will rise with Him.

His death washes away our sin – His resurrection means we will rise – and we will join Him in the palace of eternity for heaven.

As Joseph was clothed in fine robes – so we will be clothed in the robe of Christ's righteousness.

As Joseph was given Pharaoh's ring and gold chain – so we will receive the crown of life.

As Joseph reigned with Pharaoh – so we will reign with Christ.

We may or may not rise to the power of a Joseph in this life – but the promise is that every single man or woman of faith will rise to be greater than Joseph – to reign with Christ forever.

When the trials come. When we cry out – How long O God? When we are tempted to give up. Remember – the Day of the Lord *is* coming. The day when He will vindicate and reward His faithful servants. Prison to palace is coming for every one who loves Christ.

There is a *third* and final lesson from this passage – *Like Joseph – God calls us to dispense life.*



Like Joseph – God uses trials to shape and purify us

Like Joseph – God takes His people from prison to the palace

Like Joseph – God calls us to dispense life

In chapter 41 verses 55 to 57 – the Egyptians and the nations were starving. And Pharaoh said if you want to live – go to Joseph. And Joseph opened the storehouses and gave them grain to make bread and live.

Brothers and sisters – the world is starving. Not physical bread – but spiritual bread. And we have the words of eternal life. We can point them to the bread of life. We can open the storehouse of the gospel and tell a starving world of Jesus – the true bread – the bread men will eat and live forever.

God raised Joseph up to save His nation.

God has raised us up and put us where we are to be a voice of salvation to those around us.

May we become the men and women God called us to be and may we fulfil the task given to us.