

The Cupbearer and the Baker

Genesis 40:1-23

Dreams are funny things, and well beyond my ability to explain. I have been sleeping better in recent years, and along with that I have begun to dream much more and remember them when I wake up. They seem to have a recurring theme, which is a very interesting phenomena for me. For me, those dreams tend to reflect some past occasion, usually some time of frustration often in traveling. For others, dreams might even seem to foreshadow the future, giving you a glimpse of an experience that is soon to come in actual experience. And though I would never speak of such dreams as infallible revelations, still I can accept some premonition or mental foreshadowing of the future. But most often, I believe, dreams are the consequence of thoughts already in your mind, given free reign to roam about among your brain cells as the rest of your body sleeps.

But I'm not interested in giving you a neurological explanation of dreams this morning, since I have absolutely no neurological training or expertise. But I am interested in a spiritual explanation of dreams, and I do have spiritual training. In this instance in Genesis 40, with the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker, we have dreams which are prophetically interpreted. That is, the dreams and their interpretations form part of what we call revelation. Special revelation. Revelation from God. So that, obviously, is our focus. And from this example, we see that,

I. THE LORD SPEAKS THROUGH DREAMS.

v.1-5

Now, the cupbearer and the baker were high officials in Pharaoh's court, men of influence and great ability. They might roughly correspond to the cabinet members of our President.

Like Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard, they are both described here with the Hebrew word for eunuch, and they may well have been castrated to ensure their loyalty and devotion to their master.

The cupbearer was the butler, the one who would give Pharaoh his drink, overseeing the vineyards and the wine cellar, responsible to see that all drinks served the king were both safe and of the best quality. Likewise, the baker was responsible for the food which Pharaoh ate. Their offices were among the most influential in all Egypt.

They were suspected of doing something wrong and were cast into prison, into the custody of the captain of the guard, presumably still Potiphar himself. They were imprisoned with Joseph, whom Potiphar had thrown into prison upon his wife's accusation of attempted rape. Joseph was assigned to attend to them in prison.

Now, we don't know what crime they were accused of, and it's rather futile to speculate. But as we will see, one of them is vindicated and the other condemned. There is the likelihood, therefore, that they were in this prison awaiting the outcome of an investigation of some crime, and though both were accused only one was actually guilty.

While they waited, God gave them each a dream. Similar dreams in many ways, but very different in the overall meaning. And dreams which were, for them, quite mysterious. First the cupbearer,

v.9-11

Then the baker,
v.16-17

In this case, it is obvious that,

A. This dream is God's revelation of a mystery.

A mystery is something unknown. A vine and three branches. Grape blossoms. Three baskets of bread being eaten by the birds. What does all of that mean?

If you have ever had a dream, which you just couldn't figure out, you can understand the frustration of these men. It's a mystery, and I think that our natural inclination is to attempt to figure out mysteries. Actually, it's probably a direct consequence of having been made in God's image, for God's nature is to make things known, and we bear that same mark in our own souls. Some people certainly more or less than others, but all human beings seem to have an insatiable desire to solve mysteries.

When difficult things happen in our lives, the question almost inevitably comes, "Why?" "Why did this happen?" "What is God's purpose?" What is the meaning?

We even entertain ourselves with mysteries. We read books and watch movies specially designed with suspense to stimulate our desire to solve the mystery. We actually entertain ourselves with the process of figuring things out that are hidden.

And if we can't figure things out, we might eventually be led down the path to despair and hopelessness. Actually, the generation of youth today, as a whole, are experiencing such hopelessness in increasing numbers. Those generations typically labelled as millennials and Generation Z often live with an increasing despair of ever knowing any truth. In the underlying philosophy so often called postmodern, truth doesn't exist. It simply doesn't exist. People don't acknowledge the reality of anything that could be called truth. Everything becomes relative.

And therefore, they can't figure anything out.

In that context, all of life becomes a mystery, a hopeless mystery. And the root cause of that anguish is, of course, the fact that God has been left out of the picture and completely ignored. My point is,

B. Mysteries which are kept hidden cause great anguish.

These two men in prison are such good examples of the psychological state of people today whose whole lives feel like a hopeless mystery. Anguish is a good word for it.

v.6

They were sad. Dejected. Literally, that Hebrew word refers to "a storm." Their minds were in a great storm, a hurricane, a tornado. Everything was being turned upside down. Their world was turned upside down. There was no order, no reason, no hope.

The implication of this word certainly includes being sad, though I would prefer an even stronger translation. They were vexed. Perturbed. Confused. Greatly perplexed. Even embittered in their circumstances. They were without peace, without security, and therefore, obviously, without happiness or joy. Mysteries which are kept hidden cause great anguish.

Joseph spoke to them. Actually, quite compassionate words.

v.7

Why are you sad? That word sad is the word for "evil." We might translate it "gloomy." Or downcast. In our common language, we could even translate it depressed. The essence of the question was a caring request, "Why are you so troubled?" And the answer was because of the unknown mystery of their

dreams.

v.8

It's the same response that we'll see in the next chapter, with Pharaoh's dream.

Gen. 41:8 "Now it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh."

In those days, as in ours, there were many options for people seeking answers to secret things. Astrology, the magic arts, or some other form of occult intervention. Then, there were actually books written, "how to" books on dream interpretation. I guess you could probably still find them today. Now we have palm readers, psychics, horoscopes and any number of other examples.

And although some of them have sought to gain some sense of credibility, they are all worthless. The impotence of the magicians and wise men of Egypt is a good illustration of the foolishness of men looking everywhere but God.

Now, I'm going somewhere with this, and I suspect some of you might have already figured that out. I'm going down a path which leads to God, for what I'm telling you is that, without God, life is an unknown mystery. Without God, life doesn't make sense. Without God there is no hope, no purpose, no meaning. Nothing. And many people have come to that conclusion. And sadly, tragically, many people find that path to be a dead end.

Consider what we find in the book of Ecclesiastes,

Ecc.1:1 "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. 2 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of

vanities, all is vanity." 3 What profit has a man from all his labor In which he toils under the sun? 4 One generation passes away, and another generation comes; But the earth abides forever. 5 The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, And hastens to the place where it arose. 6 The wind goes toward the south, And turns around to the north; The wind whirls about continually, And comes again on its circuit. 7 All the rivers run into the sea, Yet the sea is not full; To the place from which the rivers come, There they return again. 8 All things are full of labor; Man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor the ear filled with hearing. 9 That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun. 10 Is there anything of which it may be said, "See, this is new"? It has already been in ancient times before us. 11 There is no remembrance of former things, Nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come By those who will come after."

The writer, Solomon, describes the natural consequences of such a hopeless worldview. The pursuit of pleasure and knowledge.

Ecc.2:10 "Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, For my heart rejoiced in all my labor; And this was my reward from all my labor. 11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done And on the labor in which I had toiled; And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun. 12 Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly; For what can the man do who succeeds the king?— Only what he has already done. 13 Then I saw that wisdom excels folly As light excels darkness."

So go back to my point in Genesis 40. When life is an unsolved mystery, when purpose and meaning are hidden, we

experience great anguish. And Joseph has an answer not merely to their question about the meaning of their dreams, but an answer for their despair. The answer is God.

C. God is the only one who can make known a mystery.
v.8

There it is--the ultimate answer to all the questions of life. The answer to every dilemma about the meaning of life. "Do not interpretations belong to God?" The answer is so clearly implied, "Yes." And so Joseph gives then God's answer to the meaning of their dreams. He speaks an inspired revelation from God.

We see the same thing again in chapter 41, when Joseph meets with Pharaoh.

Gen. 41:15 "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."

God is the only one who can make known a mystery. And so he does.
v.12-13

And then, for the baker.
v.18-19

Now, a couple things right on the surface. It would appear that this solution was a description of true justice. It would appear that the cupbearer would have known of his own innocence, and would have therefore been very eager to hear from Joseph the outcome of the ongoing investigation that had sent him to prison. He knew his was innocence, so he had hopes of being restored.

As prophesied by the inspired interpretation.

The baker would be more hesitant, in his own guilty conscience. And he would be bold enough to ask for an interpretation only after hearing the good interpretation that the cupbearer received. He, no doubt, saw Joseph as the bearer of good news. But, of course, his hopes were dashed. For he had failed to comprehend the chief difference between his dream and that of the cupbearer. For him, he could not fight off the birds eating the baskets of bread on his head. And two small words are added in his dream. His head would not merely be "lifted up" and he therefore be restored, as was the case for the cupbearer. Instead, the baker's head would be "lifted off" and his body hung upon a tree.

Instead of being elevated back to his office, his head would be removed from his body. He would be killed for his crime. The Lord speaks through dreams.

So let me ask the question right at this point. Does God still speak through dreams? That is, does he still give inspired revelation. A quick overview of the Bible might lead you to say, "Yes." After all, God promises that his prophets would "dream dreams." The prophet Joel even predicted great outbursts of such revelational dreams in Joel 2, a prophecy fulfilled at Pentecost and quoted in Acts 2.

Joel 2:28 "And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. 29 And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days."

But does God still give such revelations, special, infallible revelations? The simple and straightforward answer must be

“no,” for God has given his final and completed revelation. The Word which became flesh, Jesus Christ.

Here is the most powerful biblical argument to defend the belief that revelation has ceased, and I want you to grasp it, because many Christians do, in fact, believe in continuing revelation. Here is the most powerful biblical argument to prove that revelation has ceased—Jesus Christ is the final revelation. He is the final word from God. And any additional words of revelation would thereby deny the finality of his work.

The word became flesh. That is the finality of God’s special revelation. He revealed himself in the form of a man, “full of grace and truth.” There is a note of finality in that, for as we read in,

Col. 1:15 “He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. 19 For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell.”

All the fullness of God dwelt in the bodily form of Jesus! All of his glory. All of his grace. All of his truth. Nothing more was necessary. Jesus is the final word of revelation. And that is the great contrast between the days of the OT and the days of the NT is the way in which God speaks to his people.

Heb.1:1 “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir

of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 3 who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

Now, the work of the apostles was to fully describe and declare the work of Christ, to validate that work and to testify to it, so that through the Apostles, we do have continuing revelation and the completion of the Bible. We read in Hebrews 2 a warning against the...

Hebr. 2:3 “...neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, 4 God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?”

So the gospel of our salvation in Jesus is attested by signs and wonders, but with the end of the age of the apostles, that work of Jesus as the revelation of God finished. And so we read even from those apostles of the end of their work of revelation,

1Cor. 13:8 “Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part. 10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.”

So revelatory dreams have ceased. Inspired prophecy has ceased, because Jesus Christ is perfection, the perfect one. He is the perfect revelation of God, the perfect word, the final word. He is the final revelation of God, for any further revelations would deny his fullness and perfection.

I can say that in another way.

D. God has now made all things known in Christ.

So when the Bible speaks of mysteries, it now speaks of things made known! Things revealed.

Eph.3:1 “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— 2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, 3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: 6 that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, 7 of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.”

The mystery has been revealed. God’s ultimate mystery is revealed in Christ. And that mystery is this—that all the nations, all who believe in Christ, will be included in the nation of God’s people. And to make one direct reference to the dilemma and the anguish I referred to earlier, the anguish expressed by the phrase, “meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless,” the answer to that anguish is Jesus Christ.

The answer to life itself is Jesus Christ. The source of hope and purpose in life is Jesus Christ. And the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth is Jesus Christ.

So, as we study the OT, laying the foundation for the coming of Jesus Christ, we see again that,

II. THE LORD PREDICTS THE FUTURE THROUGH DREAMS.

Throughout the Bible, the Lord predicts the future. And throughout the OT prophets and the NT apostles, we see that,

A. The Lord brings to pass exactly what he predicts.

We certainly have that demonstrated here.

v.20-22

“[Just] as Joseph had interpreted to them..” “In other words, “Thus says the Lord.”

The cupbearer reports this to Pharaoh in chapter 41, also.

Gen. 41:13 “And it came to pass, just as he interpreted for us, so it happened.”

That was, of course, the main criteria for judging an OT prophet. If there is a true prophet, whatever he prophesies will come true. And if they don’t, he is no prophet at all! So we read this warning,

Deut. 18:21 “And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’— 22 when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”

And Moses has just defined what you should do with such a false prophet,

Deut.18:20 “But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.”

When the Lord speaks through a prophet, when the Lord predicts the future, what he says will happen, will happen. And if it doesn’t, the prophet has spoken presumptuously and he should be put to death for his blasphemy!

I just can’t emphasize this enough, particularly in light of the dangers of much so-called prophecy today. When the Lord

speaks, when the Lord really speaks, what he says happens. For his word is truth. And because of that, we can have great confidence that,

B. The Lord works all things together to fulfill his own good purposes.

In other words, God has a plan. All is not meaningless, meaningless.

Joseph had a sense of this when he asked the cupbearer for a favor. He likely had a sense of God's providence in putting him in that position of being able to interpret the cupbearer's dream, and presented a very understandable request,

v.14-15

Joseph never lost hope, hope in God's plan and purpose. Yet, however much he relied upon the cupbearer, he was disappointed.

v.23

Still, despite the cupbearers sinful forgetfulness, despite his failure to keep his word, God's providence provoked him to remember. Two years later. God would watch over Joseph, and God's purposes for Joseph would be fulfilled. We read in,

Gen. 41:9 "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."

That passage continues,

Gen. 41:14 "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."

Now, waiting two years in prison wouldn't normally build your confidence that the Lord works all things together to fulfill his own good purposes, but that is exactly what is happening. And this passage should be a great encouragement to you, despite the fact that Joseph spent two years languishing in prison, for the Lord rules sovereignly over all the circumstances of your life. Paul expresses that idea with the words of,

Rom. 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

In fact, God works all things out according to his plan and purpose, with love, with saving love.

Eph. 1:11 "In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory."

The conclusion is this—everything that God did in the life of Joseph points to Jesus Christ. Every prediction of the OT points to Jesus Christ. Everything that the Lord has ever said points us to Jesus Christ. For that, we have great confidence and assurance in life, and we bless him and praise him, he "who works all things according to the counsel of His will."