

The Life of Joseph

Week 3 - Where is God When It all Goes Wrong?

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WHAT WE BELIEVE

1. Read Genesis 40. The keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of the prison (Gen. 39:22-23). What additional duties did Joseph pick up in our text?
2. Why were Pharaoh's cupbearer and chief baker troubled?
3. Where did Joseph's interpretation of the cupbearer and baker's dreams come from? What was Joseph's interpretation? Was his interpretation correct?
4. What did Joseph ask of the cupbearer? Did the cupbearer do what Joseph asked?

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CATECHISM CORNER

Heidelberg Catechism

Lord's Day 40

Q&A 105

Q. What is God's will for you in the sixth commandment?

A. I am not to belittle, hate, insult, or kill my neighbor—not by my thoughts, my words, my look or gesture, and certainly not by actual deeds—and I am not to be party to this in others; (1) rather, I am to put away all desire for revenge. (2)

I am not to harm or recklessly endanger myself either. (3)

Prevention of murder is also why government is armed with the sword. (4)

1. Gen. 9:6; Lev. 19:17-18; Matt. 5:21-22; 26:52
2. Prov. 25:21-22; Matt. 18:35; Rom. 12:19; Eph. 4:26
3. Matt. 4:7; 26:52; Rom. 13:11-14
4. Gen. 9:6; Ex. 21:14; Rom. 13:4

Q&A 107

Q. Is it enough then that we do not murder our neighbor in any such way?

A. No. By condemning envy, hatred, and anger God wants us to love our neighbors as ourselves, (1) to be patient, peace-loving, gentle, merciful, and friendly toward them, (2) to protect them from harm as much as we can, and to do good even to our enemies. (3)

1. Matt. 7:12; 22:39; Rom. 12:10

2. Matt. 5:3-12; Luke 6:36; Rom. 12:10, 18; Gal. 6:1-2; Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12; 1 Pet. 3:8

3. Ex. 23:4-5; Matt. 5:44-45; Rom. 12:20-21 (Prov. 25:21-22)

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GOD SPEAKS TO US

1. Joseph noticed that those under his care, the cupbearer and baker, were troubled and asked them what was troubling them. Who has God put in your care? How do you care for them?

2. The cupbearer completely forgot to advocate for Joseph when he got out of prison, even after Joseph had shown him care. What is the appropriate response when we pour into someone who does not respond to it in kind?

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GOD SPEAKS TO OUR FAMILY

1. Joseph describes his imprisonment as being "put in the pit" (verse 15), echoing how his brothers literally threw him into a pit years earlier (Gen. 37:24). Joseph still carried the hurt of their betrayal, and it affected his other relationships. How can the church support and care for people who have been deeply hurt ("put in the pit") by their families, helping them heal and build healthy relationships?

2. How do we, as a church, "adopt" those who have been rejected by their families? How can we do this better?

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ROYAL JOBS

The narrative gives a few hints about Joseph's state of mind. He appears sympathetic, inquiring of the dreamers "Why are you looking glum today?" and pious, "Don't interpretations belong to God?" (v 8). The statement "the LORD was with Joseph and was loyal to him" (39:21) further hints that he was a man of prayer, whose prayers were partially answered in that he was given promotion within the prison. But his great hope and prayer-to-be released from prison where he bitterly reflects he had been most unfairly kept, "I was kidnapped... and have not done anything that I should have been put in the pit" (v 15) -was left unanswered. His experience of painful, apparently fruitless waiting is typical of that of the patriarchs looking for children (15:2; 25:21; 30:1), of Job praying for vindication (Job 19:7), and of numberless psalmists who cry. "How long, O LORD? Wilt thou forget me for ever?" (13:1; cf. 22:2 [1]). Such periods of desolation were experienced by our Lord (Matt 26:38-42; 27:46) and by Paul (2 Cor 1:8-10; cf. 2 Cor 11:24-29). And Jesus (Matt 5:10-12), Hebrews (12:1-11), and Peter (1 Pet 2:19-21) warn that all Christians should expect to suffer for righteousness' sake. So once again Joseph's experience may be taken as a paradigm for all disciples.

But it is more. The narrative affirms that the LORD was with Joseph (39:21-23) and proves it when he successfully interprets the two dreams. And these two dreams look back to Joseph's two dreams (37:5-10), which forecast his own ascendancy, and forward to Pharaoh's two dreams, which he will successfully interpret (41:1-32). Ultimately, his plea to be remembered will be recalled by the chief cupbearer, and the prison will prove to be a steppingstone to the palace. Then it will be clear that the suffering of one righteous man has proved to be the source of blessing not just to Egypt but "to keep many people alive" (50:20). Through Joseph, the Abrahamic promise that "all the families of the earth will find blessing in you" (12:3) is partially fulfilled.

Wenham, G. J. (1994). Genesis 16-50 (Vol. 2, p. 385). Word, Incorporated.

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DREAMER OF DREAMS

The Egyptians shared a belief, widespread in antiquity, that "sleep puts us in real and direct contact with the other world where not only the dead but also the gods dwell. Dreams therefore are a gift from the gods" (Vergote, Joseph en Égypte, 48). Their interpretation, however, was a complex science entrusted to learned specialists; while a dreamer might have a hunch whether a dream was auspicious or not, he had to rely on experts for a detailed explanation. In prison they had no access to such expertise; yet being prisoners they were most anxious to know their fate-hence, their despondency. According to Joseph, however, it is not learning but inspiration that matters. "Don't interpretations belong to God?" He was later to make the same point to Pharaoh himself: "It does not depend on me, but God will declare to Pharaoh his well-being." Joseph's attitude is consonant with the OT's rejection of occult practices and its reliance on prophecy as a means of discovering God's will (Deut. 18:10-22).

"Joseph's answer, 'Interpretations belong to God,' is completely polemic. It is again one of those splendid statements which our narrator loves and which go far beyond the situation in the programmatic, doctrinal form in which they are spoken. Spoken by a very lowly foreign slave, whom the two prisoners had not dreamed of questioning, the statement contains a sharp contrast. Joseph means to say that the interpretation of dreams is not a human art but a charisma which God can grant.... The events of the future lay in Yahweh's hand only, and only the one to whom it was revealed was empowered to interpret"

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GOD SPEAKS IN WORSHIP

1. Despite years of injustice and forgotten hope, Joseph gave credit to God for his ability to interpret dreams. How can we maintain a heart of worship and praise during prolonged waiting or disappointment?

2. God's people worship all over the world - including in prison. Most in prison are guilty, but some, like Joseph, are innocent. What purpose might the Lord have in allowing innocent people to go to prison? How could an innocent, imprisoned person, worship God while behind bars?

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THE GOSPEL CALL

1. Joseph interprets the dreams truthfully. One interpretation is hopeful, one dire (verses 9-19). How does this balance of good news and warning reflect sharing the full gospel (salvation through Christ and the reality of judgment)? In what ways should we lovingly include both grace and the need for repentance when sharing faith?

2. The cupbearer forgot Joseph, but God's plan for Joseph wasn't stalled. In fact, the cupbearer forgetting Joseph was a part of God's plan. When we share the gospel and people reject it, is that a part of God's plan? Why or why not?