

Osaka International Church
Date: August 31st, 2008
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Series: Patriarchs
Title: Joseph, the Dreamer
Scripture: Genesis 37-41
Key Verse: Proverbs 29:18

I. Introduction

Good morning! We will be talking about Joseph today, but let's begin with a more contemporary story.

James Tillis left the cowboy town of Tulsa, Oklahoma to go to the big city of Chicago and pursue his dream of becoming a heavyweight boxing champion. Years later he told this story about the day he arrived in Chicago. *"I got off the bus with two cardboard suitcases under my arms in downtown Chicago and stopped in front of the Sears Tower. I put my suitcases down and I looked up at the Tower and I said to myself, 'I am going to conquer Chicago.' When I looked down, the suitcases were gone."*



Tillis was a powerful boxer and many people thought he had a chance to go all the way. But things never went quite as well as he had hoped. First, his suitcases were stolen, and later, on May 9th of 1986, his dream of becoming heavyweight champion was stopped by rising star Mike Tyson. Tillis went ten rounds with Tyson and lost on decision. Since Tyson knocked most of his opponents out, that was pretty good. But pretty good wasn't good enough, and Tillis eventually had to give up on his dream. Where did James Tillis go wrong? Tillis had a vision of what he wanted to accomplish, and he was strong and he trained hard. But somehow it did not work out.



Today and next week also, we will focus on the story of Joseph. Like Tillis, Joseph had some big dreams, and Joseph also knew both loss and victory. But unlike the dreams and visions of so many men, Joseph's dreams came from the Lord. And at the right time, the prophetic visions Joseph saw in his dreams were all fulfilled. The dreams of men often fail. But when the Lord gives the vision, it will surely come true.

II. Joseph's Story

The story of Jacob's son, Joseph, begins in **Genesis 37:2-3**, **"This is the account of Jacob.**

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him." This painting shows Joseph's, "coat of many colors," as it was painted by Ford Madox Brown. But we don't know what the coat really looked like and it doesn't matter, because the point here is not about fashion, the point is about authority. In giving Joseph this coat, Jacob elevated young Joseph above his brothers and so Joseph's brothers hated him; they were very jealous.



Then Joseph had a dream in which each of the brothers had a sheaf of grain, and the sheaves of the other eleven brothers bowed down to Joseph's sheaf. The brothers were definitely not happy about this dream, because it seemed to confirm that Joseph would have authority over them. But that was not the end of Joseph's dreams.



Genesis 37:9, **"Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. 'Listen,' he said, 'I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.'"** This dream seemed to mean that not only Joseph's eleven brothers, but even Joseph's father and mother would bow before Joseph, and Jacob rebuked Joseph. But the scripture also says that Jacob, "kept the matter in mind."



These dreams would be fulfilled many years later after Joseph had become a ruler in Egypt and at the time of a famine when his family came to ask for food. But the dreams made Joseph's brothers even more angry and jealous. Apparently, even if your dreams are from the Lord, it is not always wise to tell everyone about them immediately.

Later, when Joseph's brothers got a chance, they decided to put an end to the dreams of their little brother. At first they planned to kill him, but then they decided to sell him into slavery instead. So, the brothers sold Joseph to a caravan of Ishmaelites for 20 pieces of silver, and he was taken to Egypt where he was sold to a man named Potiphar, who was captain of the guard for Pharaoh.



Meanwhile, Joseph's brothers bloodied Joseph's robe and showed it to their father, convincing him that Joseph had been killed by wild animals. Jacob went into mourning, and Jacob, who had deceived his own father, Isaac, many years earlier, was deceived by his sons in turn.



In the years that followed, Jacob's sons married and had children, but all the while they had the guilt of their terrible secret. The Scriptures tell us very little about this period, except for the sad story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38. That is a story with many lessons, but we will pass by it for now, so please read it and think about it on your own.

Joseph prospered in Egypt and he was soon placed in charge of Potiphar's whole household, and was once again he was wearing a coat of authority. But Potiphar's wife was attracted to the strong, young man, and she tried her best to seduce him. Joseph refused and fled, leaving his coat behind in the woman's hands. Angry at being refused, Potiphar's wife accused Joseph of attempting to rape her, and Joseph was thrown into jail.



Even in jail Joseph prospered, and he was soon put in charge of the other prisoners. Some time later, Pharaoh, king of Egypt, had his cupbearer and chief baker jailed, and they also came under Joseph's charge. One day Joseph found them looking very sad, and he asked what was wrong. **Genesis 40:8, "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."** Many years had passed since Joseph had his own dreams, and those dreams had not yet been fulfilled. In fact, with Joseph in jail in Egypt, in human terms there would seem to be no chance for Joseph's dreams. But Joseph was not focused on human thinking, Joseph was focused on God's power and he trusted in the Lord, giving us a powerful example of faith during a time of adversity.

The Lord gave Joseph the interpretation to the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker, and everything happened just as Joseph has said. The cupbearer was forgiven and his position at Pharaoh's side was restored. But the baker was not forgiven and was killed. Two years later, Pharaoh had dreams which deeply disturbed him, but none of the Egyptian wise men could interpret the dreams. It was then that the cupbearer finally remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh about the Hebrew man who could interpret dreams. Pharaoh then gave the command for Joseph to be brought from prison to the court. Let's pick the story up in Genesis 41:15.



III. Scripture Genesis 41:15-30 (NIV)

[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." [16] "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." [17] Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "In my dream I was standing on the bank of the Nile, [18] when out of the river there came up seven cows, fat and sleek, and they grazed among the reeds. [19] After them, seven other cows came up--scrawny and very ugly and lean. I had never seen such ugly cows in all the land of Egypt. [20] The lean, ugly cows ate up the seven fat cows that came up first. [21] But even after they ate them, no one could tell that they had done so; they looked

just as ugly as before. Then I woke up. [22] "In my dreams I also saw seven heads of grain, full and good, growing on a single stalk. [23] After them, seven other heads sprouted--withered and thin and scorched by the east wind. [24] The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven good heads. I told this to the magicians, but none could explain it to me." [25] Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. [26] The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads of grain are seven years; it is one and the same dream. [27] 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. [28] "It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do. [29] Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, [30] but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land.

IV. Teaching

Nearly thirteen years had passed since Joseph was sold into Egypt by his brothers. During those years Jacob had prospered in Potiphar's home, and he had been falsely accused and jailed, but in jail he prospered again, at least as much as is possible in such a place. Now Joseph is standing in Pharaoh's presence and we have the first hint of why God has led Joseph down this very difficult path in life. Joseph has provided an interpretation to Pharaoh's dreams, but that is not all that he has accomplished.



Joseph spoke with humility and he told Pharaoh clearly, **Genesis 41:16**, **"I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."** What is Joseph doing? Joseph is giving a testimony about the power and wisdom of the One True God. The Pharaohs of Egypt often claimed to be gods, but now Joseph tells Pharaoh about the Creator God. And Joseph testifies that all things are in God's hand saying in **Genesis 41:28**, **"It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do."** God Almighty, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, has spoken, and what He says will come to pass.



Genesis 41:29-30, **"Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land."** Pharaoh is impressed with this young man of thirty years who speaks with humility and yet with unshakeable authority. In fact, Pharaoh is so impressed that he immediately puts Joseph in charge and tasks Joseph with preparing the country for the coming years of famine.

Genesis 41:39-41, **"Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. [40] 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." [41] So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt."**

We will speak more about Joseph, the ruler of Egypt, next week. But now let's stop and consider the journey that God has brought Joseph on and see what we can learn from it. When Joseph was 17 years old, he was elevated above his brothers and dressed in a fine coat. Now Joseph is 30 years old, and he is once again dressed in finery and raised up above the others. The dreams that the Lord gave Joseph in his youth got Joseph in trouble with his family, but those same dreams must have sustained him during the long hard years in between. Joseph knew that God had spoken to him and promised him a wonderful future, and I think that must have given him the confidence to keep going during all of those years of hardship.

The Lord spoke to Joseph directly through dreams and also through prophetic words that allowed Joseph to interpret dreams. The Lord was with Joseph and all that happened to Joseph was part of God's perfect plan to place Joseph in charge of Egypt. Through this plan, a testimony about the Creator God reached the ears of Pharaoh and all of the land of Egypt. In fact, God used the seven years of famine to bring

the nations to Joseph's feet, where I am sure they also heard Joseph's testimony of faith in the One True God.

V. Conclusion

We all need to hear the voice of the Lord. **Proverbs 29:18**, tells us, **“Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law.”** The word, “revelation,” here refers to God's message given to us, whether through dreams, visions, or His written Word. When Joseph lived, the Bible had not yet been written, so God spoke to Joseph through dreams. And God can still speak that way to people today and sometimes He does. But the primary way that God speaks to us today is through His Written Word, the Bible. Through reading and studying the Bible, we can learn to walk in obedience to the Lord and we can stay on the right path. When people do not hear the Word of God, they, **“cast off restraint,”** and soon wander off into many paths of error and sin.



Joseph was able to endure all kinds of hardship and injustice, because he knew that God had a wonderful plan and purpose for his life. The promise of **Jeremiah 29:11**, was originally given to the nation of Israel, but the Lord has the same love for all of His people. **“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”**

James Tillis wanted to be the heavyweight champion of the world. But that was his plan and not the Lord's plan. I don't know what Tillis is doing these days, but I wish him well. He did some movies for a while, like, “Percy & Thunder,” a boxing film. And then he dropped out of site, his dreams left unfulfilled. We often have the same problem. Things don't go the way we want, and we end up down and defeated.



But the Lord's plans are not like that. The Lord's plans are certain and we can trust in them completely. And the Lord fought a far bigger fight than a boxing match. The Lord fought against and defeated sin and death. He did it at the cross, and He did it for us because He loves us, each and every one of us. And when we trust in Him for our salvation, then we, like Joseph, can be certain that the Lord's good plans for our lives will one day be fulfilled. Sometimes our plans may fail. But no matter what, we always have hope and confidence, because God has given us a revelation; a revelation of victory in Jesus. Amen.



VI. Let's Pray