

From the Pit to the Palace

I. Slide1 Intro: From the Pit to the Palace

- A. Slide2a Are you *Looking for your big break*? Many of us go through life waiting for the *one big break* that will turn our life around and that will give us riches/fame, or prosperity/power.
1. For some, that break is thought to come from Wall Street. Others, Nashville or Hollywood. Most of us tend to think of our success as coming from some life-changing, momentous event.
 2. It is very easy to misunderstand Gen.41 by superimposing **this false conception of success** on the experience of Joseph when he was exalted to the 2nd highest position in all of Egypt.
 3. We may look at the dreams of Pharaoh and the mention of Joseph by the cupbearer as **the lucky break** of Joseph's life, which broke the chain of frustrating turns of events which had previously plagued him.
 4. Someone has even suggested that Joseph may well have been aware of **Murphy's Law: "Whatever can go wrong probably will."**
 - a) But we know, a **lucky break**, or **luck** doesn't have any **power**. **Not a chance** :)
- B. Big difference between the **Providence of God & fortune, fate, or luck**:¹
1. The key to this difference is found in the **personal character** of **God**:
Slide2b Fortune is **blind** while God is **all-seeing**. **Fate** is **impersonal** while God is a **Father**. **Luck** is **dumb** while God can **speak**.
 2. There are **no blind, impersonal forces** at work in human history. **All** is brought to pass by **the invisible hand of Providence**.
 3. **Slide3** R.C.Sproul, *There is no such thing as chance. Chance does not exist. It is merely a word we use to describe mathematical possibilities. But chance itself has no power because it has no being. Chance is not an entity that can influence reality. Chance is not a thing, It is nothing.*

¹ R. C. Sproul; Essential Truths of The Christian Faith; pg.62.

- C. **Slide4 Providence** teaches: God is continually involved w/all created things in such a way that...
1. He uses **Preservation**: (God sustains His creation)
 2. He uses **Concurrence**: (we have a will of our own, **but** He works out **His will** through the actions of **human wills**)
 3. He uses **Government**: (He rules His creation w/absolute sov & authority). *He governs everything that comes to pass, from the greatest to the least.*
 - a) Do you see how *little superstitions* **won't prevent** or **bring** good luck? Like, walking under a ladder; worrying when a black cat walks across your path; stepping on a crack in the sidewalk; or carrying a certain good luck charm?
 - b) How does this doctrine increase your **trust** in God?
 - c) How will this changed the way you think about the **future**?
 - d) Do you sometimes think of **luck** or **chance** as **causing events** that happen in your life? Does it increase or decrease your **anxiety** about the **future**?
- D. In **Him** (God) **we live, move & have our being**. Acts 17:28
1. So God uses here, in our story: a prison, acquaintances, dreams, weather & right time/right place...**all for His glory!**

II. **Slide5 FROM THE PIT TO THE PALACE (1-36) *Read Story***

- A. **Slide6a** Ever have reoccurring dreams? (or, repetitive dreams) - **Gestaltist/pattern dream theory** views recurrent dreams as representing the person's current state of *psychic imbalance*. **Freud** believed that recurrent traumatic dreams showed expressions of *neurotic repetitive compulsions*. **Jung** believed that recurrent dreams played an important role in *the integration of the psyche*. **Culturalist dream theory** holds that recurrent dreams represent a *lack of positive change or development* in a person's personality. **Lucid dream theory** holds that some people dream in recurrent form and it is a *normal phenomenon*. **Slide6b** I'd like to add one to the list...**God-Dreams**.
- B. **The 2 dreams** - *7 skinny cows eat 7 fat cows. 7 thin heads of grain devour 7 hearty one's.*
- C. (1) (Cows) **came up out of the Nile** - they like to stand almost submerged, at refuge from the heat and flies, in the papyrus beds.

- D. (7) **Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream** - a **Kings** dreams were often assigned special importance in the ancient Near East, **as monarchies were usually considered to have a divine origin.**
- E. (8) **The magicians** - were the king's **usual** source of information, **but they were totally baffled, as was Pharaoh.**
1. These men should not be confused with *magicians of our own day.* **They didn't wear tuxedos and pull rabbits out of hats.** They were the wisest, best educated men of Pharaoh's kingdom, schooled in the art of interpreting dreams.
 - a) Lets remember, these 2 dreams were *a revelation from God,* and the things of God can only be grasped through His Spirit.
 2. Since the dream *does not conform to reality* (**cows do not** eat cows; **stalks of corn do not** eat stalks of corn), Pharaoh calls for his magicians to interpret it.
- F. (8) **Wise men** - refers to people in the king's immediate circle who were **either skilled in divination - discerning** the will of deities based on using objects, omens or particular methods - **or served as advisers.**
- G. (14) **Joseph shaved himself** - it's likely that both Joseph's head and beard were shaved. Egyptians were generally clean shaven. Joseph was hurriedly brought out of Potiphar's dungeon, **but** he did not face Pharaoh until he had shaved and changed his clothes.
1. This was not just **cleaning up**, which surely was needed; *it was a cultural concession.*
 2. To the **Hebrews**, a beard was a mark of **dignity**, **but** for the **Egyptian** it was an **offensive thing.**
 3. Joseph took the time to shave himself so as *not to unnecessarily offend the king of Egypt.*
- H. (16) The exclamation, *It is not in me*, is a single word in Hebrew. With hasty brevity he points from **himself** to **God.** *Contrast the polished speech of Daniel...*
1. *Slide7 Dan.2:27-30 Daniel replied, "There are no wise men, enchanters, magicians, or fortune-tellers who can reveal the king's secret. 28 But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and he has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in the future. Now I will tell you your dream and the visions you saw as you lay on your bed. 29 "While Your Majesty was sleeping, you*

dreamed about coming events. He who reveals secrets has shown you what is going to happen. 30 And it is not because I am wiser than anyone else that I know the secret of your dream, but because God wants you to understand what was in your heart.

- I. All Glory to God - God will do this (16). God has revealed to Pharaoh what HE is about to do (25,28). The thing is fixed by God/doubling of dream/gonna happen (32).
 - 1. God was overseeing: the Pharaoh (dreams). Magicians & wise men (not understanding) [yet, gave another group of *magicians/wise men* understanding]. God overseeing: Egypt, Israel, Weather patterns, Famine. Cupbearer memory/timing.
- J. (33) Famine - was not a judgement (not a repent issue). See chart.

III. Slide8a LESSONS LEARNED

- A. Joseph invested in people's lives. He just serves the people in front of him.
 - 1. How would things be diff if he didn't minister to the needs of the Cupbearer?
- B. Slide8b Joseph guarded himself against bitterness.
 - 1. Who could have he been bitter towards? Cupbearer. God. Potiphar. Brothers.
- C. Slide8c Joseph was not a schemer. If this was his dad Jacob, *the schemer, wheeler-dealer*, there probably would have been *bargaining & negotiations*.
 - 1. *"You see, Pharaoh, I would really like to help you with your problem, but my mind is so troubled with my circumstances just now, that I can't think."*
 - 2. *I'll interpret your dreams, you let me out of jail.*
 - a) As much as Joseph desired to be released from his captivity, he **never** brought up the subject. His first concern was not with his own comfort, but with God's glory.
- D. Slide8d Joseph was more than a Prophet; he was an Administrator (33-36)
 - 1. Not only was he able to **foretell things to come**, but he was also competent to analyze the situation and determine the best course of action in order to minimize its *detrimental effects*.

- E. **Slide8e Looking Back & Forward.** This episode in the life of Joseph brings us to a vantage point from which we may look **backward** and **forward**.
1. **Looking back**, we realize that Joseph's **elevation** is not the result of **one lucky break**, but rather of a **chain of painful but divinely purposed events**.
 2. Had Joseph **not** said **no** to Potiphar's wife **and** been unjustly cast into prison with the **cupbearer**, he could never have been recommended to **the king**. **And** had Joseph not been **cruelly treated** by his brothers **and** **sold into slavery**, he would never have been **in Potiphar's house**.
 - a) What a beautiful illustration of Romans 8:28. *And we know (not guess) that God causes (not us) all things (not somethings) to work together for good (not evil) to those who love God (to God-lovers, not to everybody), to those who are called according to His purpose.*
 - b) **Work together for good**, **not necessarily feel** good; **not necessarily seem** good; **and not necessarily** that they **are** good.
 - (1) But it does tell us that they **will work together for His children's good**.
 - (2) It's **learning to live** like Joseph, in a **constant state of confidence** that **God is in control**.
 3. **Looking forward**, While there is a sense in which **Joseph** was **blessed** because of his faithfulness, there is the **even broader perspective** that Joseph's promotion was **not for his own prosperity as much as for his brothers' preservation**.
 - a) We must be humbled by the fact that while God cares for us as **individuals**, He often has **a broader purpose** for what He gives to us.
- F. **Slide8f God uses more than 1 method.** God's purposes are not achieved through only **one method** or **pattern** for all men.
1. A **contrast** between the lives of **Joseph**, who lived out these events, **and Moses**, who recorded them for us.
 2. **Joseph** began in the land of Canaan and ended up in the land of Egypt with the nation Israel under his care. **Moses** began in the land of Egypt and ended up in the land of Canaan with the nation Israel under his care.

3. **Joseph** began his life as a shepherd in the pastures of his father and was exalted to the palace of Pharaoh. **Moses** was taken as an infant into the palace of the Pharaoh, but later he became a shepherd among the flocks of his father-in-law.
4. **Do you see how very differently God used these two men to accomplish His purposes?** While it was necessary, in the purposes of God, to elevate **Joseph** from the pasture to the palace in order to save the people of God, **it** was necessary for **Moses** to step down from the palace in order to lead the people of God out of bondage.

G. **Again, God's purposes are not achieved through only one method or pattern for all men.**

1. He **raises** some up, giving them power & prosperity, **while** He **humbles** others.
2. We have no right to demand that God treat us just as He did **Joseph**, **for** He may choose to deal with us as He did **Moses**. **Or, more likely, He may deal with us in some way that is *entirely different* from the way he directed either Joseph or Moses.**
3. **Joseph**, then, is no guarantee that **faithful obedience** will always lead to **position, prosperity, & power in this life**. One need only recall the life of **Job** to correct such *shallow thinking*.

H. ******* (other points if time...)**

- I. **Joseph was skillful and knowledgeable.** Joseph was not promoted by Pharaoh (in human terms) because he was *spiritual*, **but** because he was *skillful and knowledgeable*.
 1. Pharaoh recognized Joseph to be a man who had divine enablement, but he could have cared less who his "god" was. He was only concerned with finding a man who could do the job which needed to be done.
 2. ***Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before obscure men.*** Proverbs 22:29
 3. Joseph did nothing different in **Pharaoh's palace** **than** he did in **Potiphar's penthouse** **or** in **his prison**. In every instance Joseph exercised his *God-given ability to administrate*.

J. **Faithful now, Greater Responsibilities later.** Only those who are **faithful** with **present opportunities** and **duties** have any basis for **expectation** of **greater responsibilities and privileges**.

1. Our primary duty is **not** to *dream of what the future may hold*, **but** to do what the **present** provides us.
2. He is a fool whose **eyes are on the ends of the earth** (Prv.17:24), always waiting for **his ship to come in**, **for that one lucky break**, **but** doing nothing in the **present**.
3. The biblical principle which we must practice is, **Commit your works to the Lord, And your plans will be established**. Proverbs 16:3
 - a) The 1st line of Prov.17:24 is literally, *In front of a man of discernment is wisdom*.
 - b) A wise person finds wisdom in obvious places **whereas** a fool's eyes wander and never discover it.

K. **A Message of HOPE.**

L. Some of us, as Christians, would do well in the matter of **prophecy**. We are great **prophets of doom**. We love to stand up and proclaim to the world that **the world is going to Hell on a bobsled**. **And** we stop just at this point, with only **the bad news**.

1. Joseph did not stop here; he had **a message of hope**, a message which provided **a solution for the problems of that day**.
2. The ultimate solution to the problems of mankind is **a spiritual one**. **The crises** of our lives are, at bottom, **a result of sin**. And the **solution** to the problem of sin is one that only God, through **the death of His Son on the cross of Calvary**, has the answer to.
3. Let us be faithful to offer men **hope** **and** not just **despair**. *It is in man's darkest hours that the message of the gospel is most desperately needed and when godly men and women are turned to.*
4. **But** let us not stop with this, as fundamental and primary as it is.
 - a) We live in days of *tremendous difficulty*. It takes little wisdom or ability to confirm the fact that **things are bad**, **but** it takes the **wisdom** which only God gives to offer **solutions** to *the practical problems* of **hunger and injustice**, of **energy and ecology**.

Let us, like Joseph, speak to these issues too, with **wisdom** and **skill**, and by this *add credibility to the faith which we proclaim.*