

Sunday June 20, 2021
 Lesson 3: What Dreams May Come
 Scripture: Genesis 41:1-16, 25-32

Context:

This week we continue our new series for the summer entitled: Respond. The focus of the lesson today will be to explore the expanse of God's grace and the ways means of grace come to us. Today's lesson continues the narrative of Joseph we began two weeks ago, found in the later half of the Book of Genesis.

Our last lesson with Joseph focused on the attempted seduction by Potiphar's wife. The result of the encounter was Joseph being thrown into prison after he would not be seduced by power and the lust of Potiphar's wife. For two years, Joseph stays in Pharaoh's prison and interprets the dreams of those imprisoned alongside him. One of the individuals granted mercy to return to court promises Joseph he will tell the Pharaoh of his unfair treatment and for potential release. Unfortunately in returning to the court, Joseph's former inmate forgets to tell the Pharaoh of Joseph's plight.

The introduction of today begins with the Egyptian empire in confusion. Pharaoh has had two dreams both involving strange symbols and no clear interpretation. Both involved seven sickly symbols, one dream with cows and another with corn, devouring the healthy symbols. As any king would do in confusing or chaotic times, he summons his courtiers including his religious experts to help him discern the meanings of the dreams. Yet they cannot interpret them as hard as they may try.

In this episode, we see how even the ways of empire are not secure. The inability of the empire to interpret the dreams is a challenge to imperial knowledge and has the potential to diminish authority.¹ This will not be the only time dreams will threaten the empire. We see as much in the gospels when Pilate's wife is tormented with a strange dream of an innocent man suffering and with Herod having the Magi warned by dreams not to return to him.² Dreams are something those in empire cannot control and when they cannot control, there is fear of the unknown and what will happen to them. Yet in this case, the dreams allow an opening for Joseph to come in and be an agent in God's story of overcoming the empire.

The dreams are disturbing especially when Joseph describes their meaning. The Nile River is not only the life source of Egypt, it is also the expression of the imperial power of fertility.³ Joseph takes the dreams and gives a way for the empire to be saved by the grace of God. This beloved son of Jacob now becomes the beloved son of the empire.⁴ Unknowingly, the dreamer who was once persecuted for his dreams becomes a

¹ Walter Brueggemann, "Genesis," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2010), 326.

² *Ibid.*, 327.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.* 334.

means of grace for multiple parties including those who betrayed him.

Application

Have you ever tied dreams and grace together? It is an odd combo in some ways. Grace is a theological term we understand as how God works and reaches out to humanity. Dreams tend to be more secular in nature; we joke about our dreams predicting our futures or what we wish may happen in our lives. Sadly, some dreams are tied to trauma and individuals have described a connection between nightmares and triggers of some awful event. At other times, dreams can connect us to what is deeply taking place within us and perhaps if we pay attention, tell us of where God's grace might be found.

In this episode, dreams lead to the redemption of Joseph in several senses. In the very physical sense, because of his dreams, Joseph is received once again in public life. His ability to both dream and interpret dreams grants him the opportunity to extend grace to the one who imprisoned him and to also challenge the ways of the empire. God is at work to remind empire of how God's grace and action is more powerful than anyone one in power could dream of becoming. And now, the empire is given a way to preserve and protect people with the preparations for abundance and the following famine.

In another sense, the dreams of Joseph also allow for his own journey of healing to continue. It was his dreaming to get him into this situation in the first place as his brothers attacked him for being a dreamer and the jealousy provoking them to seek his destruction. Now his dreaming will bring him back into favor and as we will discover, lead Joseph to face those very individuals who sought to bring him down. His interpretation of dreams will lead to the redemption of multiple parties.

To the readers of the text, we are reminded of how the grace of God can be like dreams to us. In these dreams, we are given the examples of where God is at work in our lives and how God can challenge systems, empires, and the obstacles we may face. God can work through various means to open to us new paths and directions where God may be leading us.

Do you ever analyze your dreams and perhaps receive glimpses from God speaking into your life? Just the other night my dreams included taking my dog Atticus on a walk, a regular daily routine in our sleepy little Alabama town. Yet in the dreams, as we walked, the scenery changed from the jungles to the forests to even the seaside. Through it all, my pup seemed to love all the different places, investigating everything and joyfully plowing through the different landscapes, alert and excited. Perhaps it was simply because we had walked the night before and it was on my mind.

Yet there was another part of me that felt a nudge from God of how this was about the precious gift of life. Atticus relished new experiences and seemed to enjoy the walk, finding something neat to investigate along every path. Perhaps God is doing the same thing with me inviting me to see things with fresh eyes and enthusiasm. Or maybe God is calling me to go new places and explore fun things. Who knows? Maybe another dream will come my way to clarify.

Much like dreams, God's grace comes to us and reveals new things. Sometimes it is the instant realization of God's love for us and other times it is something where God has been tugging on our hearts to pay attention and slow down. God's grace sweeps into our lives and shows us the depths of goodness found in our Lord.

Have you ever had dreams where you felt God speaking into your life? What is an allusion for you to convey God's grace? What are the ways you have felt God speaking to you in different means of grace?

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