

Introduction

1. At the heart of our passage today we see how God sovereignly controls the destinies of people and nations to accomplish His plans
2. In chapter 37 we learned of God's plans for Joseph which included ruling and reigning over his family
3. However, this was only part of a much larger and more important plan which God revealed later to Jacob (READ 46:1-4)
4. The focus of our passage today is the fulfillment of Joseph's dreams where we see:
 - a. How the Lord used Joseph's circumstances to accomplish His purpose (41:33-36)
 - b. How the Lord used Joseph's wisdom and understanding to accomplish His purpose (41:37-45)
 - c. How the Lord used Joseph's faithfulness to accomplish His purpose (41:46-53)

A. The Lord used Joseph's circumstances to accomplish His purpose (Genesis 41:33-36)

1. Before we read these verses it's important to remind ourselves on how Joseph got here; how was it that this young shepherd boy found himself standing before the most powerful man in the known world?
 - a. It obviously wasn't by chance, but rather God's sovereignty
 - b. Back in chapter 37, when Joseph was a 17-year-old shepherd boy, God revealed to him that he would one day rule and reign
 - c. However, it wouldn't be a quick or easy journey—there were a host of ups and downs over the span of 13 years (review)
 - d. None of these things were by chance; they were all part of God sovereignly working out Joseph's destiny as part of His plan
2. Last week, in the first half of chapter 41 we saw how God used Joseph to interpret two dreams He had given to Pharaoh:
 - a. The dreams included seven fat and sleek cows which were eaten by seven lean and ugly cows, and seven full and good ears of corn that were swallowed up by seven withered and thin ears of corn
 - b. The Lord revealed through Joseph that the dreams were a description of what God was about to do in Egypt:
 - 1) The seven fat and sleek cows and seven full and good ears of corn represented seven years of agricultural abundance in Egypt
 - 2) However, the seven lean and ugly cows and seven withered and thin ears of corn represented seven years of severe famine in all the land
 - 3) So, God's plan for Egypt was seven years of plenty followed by seven years of severe famine

3. This brings us to our passage today where Joseph proposed a plan to Pharaoh on how to survive the seven years of famine (READ Genesis 41:33-36):
 - a. Joseph understood the significance of what God had just revealed and the consequences if nothing was done to prepare
 - b. He proposed to Pharaoh that he find a “**discerning and wise man**” who could oversee and manage a massive agricultural project
 - c. The plan included setting up overseers throughout the land whose job it was to collect a fifth of the produce for each of the seven abundant years, store it in cities throughout Egypt, and guard it
 - d. These reserves would then be used to provide food and sustain Egypt during the seven years of famine
 - e. What we learn later is that they were also used to save Joseph’s entire family (Jacob and his eleven brothers)
4. The significance of these verses is that they set the stage for what comes next which is the fulfillment of what God revealed to Joseph in his dreams:
 - a. Everything Joseph experienced up to this point was indeed part of God’s plan
 - b. One minute he’s hearing God’s marvelous plans in a dream and the next he’s nearly murdered, tossed into a pit and sold to slave traders
 - c. One minute he’s living large in Potiphar’s house, managing all his assets and affairs, and the next he’s tossed into prison
 - d. One minute he’s interpreting dreams for the Pharaoh’s two highest ranking officials and has visions of being released from prison, the next he’s all but forgotten and still stuck in a pit for another two years
 - e. I wonder if he ever asked the Lord, “How is all this part of your plan???”
 - f. It may not have seemed like it at the time, but each incident led him closer and closer to this moment standing before the most powerful man in the world
5. Takeaway: the situations and circumstances we face in life may not always seem like it, but they are part of God’s plan and He uses them to accomplish His purpose:
 - a. God is sovereign which means that He will always accomplish His purpose and plans, not only for us as individuals, but His plans for all of Creation
 - 1) Proverbs 16:9 says, “**The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps**”
 - 2) Likewise, Proverbs 16:33 says, “**The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD**”
 - b. We can debate the seeming contradictions between God’s Sovereign Will and Man’s Free Will until we’re blue in the face, but the reality is that our situations and circumstance are never out of God’s control and He will always use them to accomplish what He’s planned
 - c. We should find great comfort in this, and it’s why Paul was able to write in Romans 8:28, “**And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose**”

- d. What this tells us is that the situations and circumstances we face in our lives—the good along with the bad—will not only be used by God for good, but are part of His purpose and plan

B. The Lord used Joseph’s wisdom and understanding to accomplish His purpose (READ Genesis 41:37-45)

1. When Pharaoh and his officials heard Joseph’s proposal, they immediately recognized Joseph’s wisdom and understanding, as well as the source behind it:
 - a) Back in v. 37 we see that Joseph’s proposal “**seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his servants**”
 - b) But look at what else it says:
 - 1) V. 38: Pharaoh saw within Joseph “**a divine spirit**” or as most other English translations render it, “**Can we find a man like this in whom is the Spirit of God?**”
 - 2) He goes even further in v. 39 saying, “**Since God has made you know all of this, there is no one so understanding and wise as you are.**”
 - 3) Later in v. 45 he gave Joseph a new Egyptian name, Zaphenath-paneah, which also appears to be a recognition of God’s presence with Joseph—the exact meaning of the name is uncertain, but most suggest it means something like “**the God has said, he will live**” or “**God speaks, he lives**”
 - c) The Egyptians were polytheistic and worshipped many gods, and the Pharaoh’s themselves were even considered gods, but Pharaoh’s reference here was to God directly:
 - 1) The context and language support this
 - 2) Joseph repeatedly referred to God in his interaction with Pharaoh:
 - a) 41:16: Joseph told Pharaoh that he couldn’t interpret dreams by himself, but rather “**God will answer concerning the welfare of Pharaoh**”
 - b) 41: 25: he said that “**God has declared to Pharaoh what He is about to do**”
 - c) 41:28: and again, “**God has shown to Pharaoh what He is about to do.**”
 - d) 41:32: Finally, in regard to why God had given the Pharaoh two dreams he said it was God’s way of confirming the matter
 - e) So at least four different times Joseph pointed to the Lord as the source and interpretation of the dreams
 - 3) So, when Pharaoh declared that Joseph had the Spirit of God, and that God had made him know all of this, and that because of this there was no one as wise or understanding as Joseph in all of Egypt, he was recognizing God’s work and presence in Joseph’s life
2. As a result, Pharaoh made Joseph the second highest official in all of Egypt which was the beginning of God fulfilling what He revealed in Joseph’s dreams:
 - a. The dreams revealed Joseph would someday rule and reign over his family

- b. But God's intent wasn't that he would merely rule over his family:
 - 1) In vs. 40-41 we learn that Pharaoh not only put Joseph in charge of his own household, but all of Egypt; only the Pharaoh himself would be greater than Joseph in Egypt
 - 2) In v. 42 we learn that He dressed Joseph in royal garments and gave him his signet ring, proof that he could enact laws and royal decrees under the authority of Pharaoh
 - 3) In v. 43 we learn that he had Joseph ride in his second chariot with royal servants calling out, "**Bow the knee!**" before him: this was a public display of Joseph's authority out among the people of Egypt
 - 4) In v. 44 we learn that Joseph's authority was universal; even though the Pharaoh was king, nothing would be done throughout all of Egypt without Joseph's permission
 - 5) He even gave Joseph a new name (we'll get to this in a minute) and a wife (45)
- 3. Takeaway: Because we have God's Spirit, we should be the wisest, most knowledgeable, understanding AND trustworthy of all people:
 - a. This should certainly be true of spiritual things, but what about other things in this life?
 - b. The Bible is filled with God's people having other forms of wisdom:
 - 1) In Exodus 31:2-3 it says that God gave a craftsman named Bezalel wisdom in all kinds of craftsmanship, and in 1 Kings 7:13-14 it says he filled a man named Hiram with wisdom and understanding and skill for doing any work in bronze
 - 2) In Deuteronomy 34 it says that God filled Joshua with the spirit of wisdom to lead Israel in the military conquest of Canaan
 - 3) In 1st Kings it says God gave Solomon wisdom to execute justice, lead Israel as a king, and understand biology, zoology, nature and other sciences (1 Kings 3-4)
 - 4) Proverbs 31 refers to the wisdom a wife and mother uses to support her husband and family
 - c. God gives His people wisdom and understanding beyond just spiritual truths and this was certainly true of Joseph whose wisdom and understanding extended to managing Potiphar's household, overseeing prisoners, and ultimately executing a plan to save Egypt
 - d. Have you ever wondered why most (not all) of the greatest scientific discoveries and advancements in history have come from the west, and this includes all three main branches: natural, social and formal sciences? It's because historically Christianity has had the greatest influence and growth in the West (though that is changing)

C. The Lord used Joseph's faithfulness to accomplish His purpose (READ Genesis 41:46-57)
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- 1. Just as Joseph had succeeded in Potiphar's house and in prison, he succeeded in his new responsibilities over all of Egypt:

- a. It would be a mistake to attribute Joseph's success simply to his own personal because we've seen on multiple occasions that God was with him and was the source of his success
 - b. Joseph was quite aware of this as seen in the names he gives to his children:
 - 1) He named his firstborn Manasseh which meant, **"God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household"**; this was Joseph's way of saying that God had rescued him from all the troubles caused him by his family—his time as a slave and prisoner—were now behind him
 - 2) He named his second born Ephraim which meant, **"God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction"**; this was Joseph's way of saying that God had made him successful
2. So, once again we see Joseph faithfully execute his responsibilities and God causes him to succeed:
- a. In this case, he used the information, wisdom and understanding God had given him to faithfully carry out God's plan
 - b. During the seven years of abundance, he gathered up grain and stored it in warehouses in the cities throughout Egypt—in fact, there was so much that he stopped measuring it because it could no longer be measured
 - c. Then, after seven years when the famine hit, Joseph continued to faithfully execute his responsibilities by opening up the warehouses and overseeing the distribution of grain
3. Takeaway: God uses our faithfulness to accomplish His plans:
- a. I think it would be accurate to say that God's plans are not dependent on our individual faithfulness, but He desires our faithfulness and wants to use us to accomplish His plans
 - b. In fact, I think it would also be accurate to say that when we're not faithful He will either discipline us to bring about our obedience and faithfulness so He can use us, or He will use someone who is faithful to accomplish His plans
 - c. Two passages come to mind when I think about this:
 - 1) 1 Corinthians 4:1-2: **"Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy."**
 - 2) The other one comes from Matthew 25 and Jesus' parable of the talents when the master said to the two faithful servants, **"Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master."**