

“THE REVEALER OF MYSTERIES”

I. Introduction

- A. Have you ever had a dream that was so strange that you woke up wondering what in the world it could possibly mean?
 - 1. The fact that such things go on in our minds while we sleep is something for us to ponder.
 - 2. It reminds us that it is not just the external world that lies beyond our comprehension.
 - 3. Even our internal world, our own hearts and minds, contain mysteries that are too deep for us to fathom.

- B. The dreams described in Genesis 40 were of a unique nature.
 - 1. Like Joseph’s dreams in chapter 37, the dreams of the cupbearer and baker were prophetic.
 - 2. They disclosed what was about to take place in the lives of these two men.
 - 3. This is not something that is true of all dreams.
 - 4. Dreams are not usually predictive prophecy.
 - 5. But in this instance, Joseph was given the ability to explain what God was revealing through the symbolism found in these dreams.

- C. The main idea of this chapter is that God is the revealer of mysteries, and in this sermon we will consider how the text develops this idea in three ways.

1. First, it gives us a vivid picture of the plight of those who live in the ignorance of sin.
2. Second, it shows us how God gives light in our sin-darkened world.
3. And third, it reminds us that we need to be patient as we deal with the fact that there are still many things that remain unknown to us.

II. The Plight of the Ignorant

- A. The two prisoners that Joseph deals with in this passage were important officials in Pharaoh's court.
 1. Royal cupbearers and bakers were persons of high-rank in the ancient world.
 2. The cupbearer would have been much more than merely a wine-taster.
 3. Until he fell out of favor, he would have been one of Pharaoh's most-trusted advisors.
 4. We do not know what it was that caused Pharaoh to be so upset with these two men.
 5. Verse 1 simply tells us that they committed some kind of offense.
 6. Notice how this stands in contrast to what had happened to Joseph.
 7. These men had apparently done something wrong.
 8. There was a reason why they were thrown in prison.
 9. But Joseph had not done anything wrong.

10. He had been falsely accused.
 11. Yet there he was, right alongside the cupbearer and the baker.
- B. On one night during their imprisonment, these two men had dreams that they believed provided important insight into their future destinies.
1. Such notions were widely held by the Egyptians, as well as by other peoples in the ancient Near East.
 2. They believed that dreams could contain predictions about the future.
 3. While this was a matter of pagan superstition on their part, in this instance God actually was giving prophetic insight through these dreams.
 4. The thing that disturbed the cupbearer and the baker was that they did not have access to the special dream-interpreters who were believed to have the ability to tell people what their dreams meant.
 5. Normally, they would have tracked down one of the many seers in Pharaoh's palace and asked for an interpretation of their dreams.
 6. But now that they were in prison they could not do that, and this made them anxious about their fate.
- C. I want to call your attention to how this points to the difference between images and words as media of communication.
1. A message that is communicated visually is inherently ambiguous and subjective.
 2. The meaning of an image-based message is not self-evident.

3. This is why the cupbearer and baker wanted an interpreter to tell them the meaning of the symbolism in their dreams.
 4. If you want to convey a clear and objective message, you need to use words.
 5. This is something that we should be especially aware of given that the dominant medium of communication in our society is no longer the word but the image.
 6. There is a connection between the rise of the image and the rise of relativism in our society.
 7. As one writer has observed, "A culture that is rooted more in images than in words will find it increasingly difficult to sustain any broad commitment to any truth, since truth is an abstraction requiring language." [Ken Myers, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes*, 164.]
 8. We should also note that, because images engage us at an emotional level, they can easily be used to manipulate our thoughts and our attitudes.
 9. If we are going to hold fast to the truth in our image-based culture, we need to remain committed to the primacy of the word.
- D. When Joseph attended to these two important prisoners on the morning after their dream, he could see that they were troubled.
1. It is noteworthy that this was a matter of such concern to Joseph.
 2. He easily could have said that he had enough troubles of his own.
 3. He could have ignored the prisoners and wallowed in self-pity over his own miserable circumstances.

4. But he took notice when he saw that these men were so disturbed, and he sought to alleviate their distress.
5. This reminds us that we too should be watching for opportunities to engage people about the things that trouble them.
6. Such situations may present openings to share the light of God's truth with people.
7. This is what we see Joseph doing in our text.
8. He seizes this opportunity to show these men that their celebrated dream-interpreters were actually charlatans, and that the Lord is the true revealer of mysteries.

III. The Gift of Light

- A. As we have noted, the dreams given to these two men were vehicles through which God gave special revelation.
 1. But the cupbearer and the baker were not able to understand the meaning of this revelation without an interpreter.
 2. God provided them with an interpreter by sending Joseph to them.
 3. God gave the gift of light to these ignorant men.
 4. Of course, the details of how this took place were unique to that particular period of redemptive history.
 5. But God continues to give light to the ignorant today.
 6. The ultimate way in which he does so is through his Holy Spirit, who enlightens the minds of believers in the knowledge of Christ.
 7. God also gives light through human agents.

8. He does so by sending ministers of the gospel to convey the meaning of what he has revealed in the holy Scriptures.
 9. The office of minister is so important that the apostle Paul says in Ephesians 4 that it is the means by which the body of Christ is built up and protected from being carried about by every wind of doctrine. (vv. 11-14)
 10. The health of the church is directly related to the vibrancy of its preaching.
- B. This is why it is so important for God's people to be cultivating a culture of learning and encouraging capable young men to aspire to the ministerial office.
1. As one theologian has noted, the maintenance of vitality in preaching depends upon "a steady supply of young men who [know] how to speak in public, how to use words, and how to read and understand a written text. If there [is] to be a ministry of the Word, then the culture of words, the arts of literature, and the preservation and distribution of books [has] to be cultivated." [Old, cited in Letham, 628]
 2. It is a matter of concern for the church that reading and thinking skills are declining in our society, that seminary enrollment is going down, and that a significant number of men are leaving the ministry.
 3. Certainly, God is the one who calls men to the office of minister and equips them to serve in this office.
 4. But our Lord also instructs his people to pray that he will provide workers to labor in his fields of harvest.
 5. And whenever we pray for something, we are expected not merely to pray, but also to do what is within our ability to see it realized.

6. We should be doing what we can to encourage and equip young men to pursue the ministerial office.
- C. When Joseph interpreted the dreams of his two fellow prisoners, he could only pronounce what he received from the Lord.
1. He could not tell these men what they wanted to hear.
 2. He could only speak the words that he had been given.
 3. This meant good news for the cupbearer, but it meant bad news for the baker.
 4. This reminds us that faithful messengers of God speak the truth, even when it is unpleasant or unpopular.
 5. This is something that should characterize the preaching of every minister of the gospel.
 6. We should pray for the Lord to raise up ministers who will faithfully expound God's Word, even when its message is not what people want to hear.
 7. We should also make sure that in our own lives we do not do or say anything that goes against what God has revealed in his Word.
 8. This is especially important as we live in a culture that pressures us to affirm things that the Scriptures declare to be evil and false.
- D. The dreams of the cupbearer and the baker were not interpreted by the esteemed wise men of Egypt, but by the God of the Hebrews through his servant Joseph.
1. This illustrates where Christians stand in relation to the unbelieving world.

2. While unbelievers are living in ignorance, we have access to the truth that God has revealed in his Word.
3. The world comes up with a wide array of notions that supposedly enable people to gain control over their destinies.
4. We need to realize that these things are just passing fads.
5. What is accepted as common sense one day is seen as utterly ridiculous the next.
6. There are very few people today who would take seriously the ancient Near Eastern world's attempts to gain insight through the study of animal livers.
7. But the people of Joseph's day put a great deal of stock in such things.
8. The world keeps on running after such nonsense, but we are in possession the truth.
9. This is why our Lord told us that we are the light of the world. (Mt. 5:14)

IV. The Need for Patience

- A. Joseph was confident that what he said would take place because he believed that the Lord was the source of his information.
 1. This is why he asked the cupbearer to be sure to remember him when he was restored to his position.
 2. Joseph had no doubt that the cupbearer would be restored.
 3. And sure enough, both dreams were fulfilled exactly as Joseph had said they would be.

Exposition of Genesis #49

4. The cupbearer was restored, and the baker was executed.
 5. This would have been a great encouragement to Joseph's faith.
 6. It reassured him that his own earlier dreams about being raised to a position of prominence above his brothers and even his parents would be fulfilled.
- B. Joseph was hoping that the cupbearer would use his return to the king's favor to solicit Joseph's release from prison.
1. But the cupbearer promptly forgot about the man who had accurately predicted his restoration.
 2. Joseph had to wait two more years before a situation arose that jogged the cupbearer's memory.
 3. God continued to be with Joseph, but Joseph had to wait a long time before he was released from prison.
 4. This is an experience with which every believer can identify.
 5. We wonder why God is taking so long to hear our cries for help.
 6. We pray with the psalmist, "How long, O Lord ? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" (Ps. 13:1)
 7. I would imagine that Joseph prayed such prayers at points during his imprisonment.
 8. He was hoping that the cupbearer would be his ticket out of prison but that hope was dashed.
 9. Joseph had to be patient.
 10. He had to let go of his own ideas about how his problems would be solved and trust the Lord in the face of the unknown future that lay

ahead of him.

- C. Joseph had no idea why he was made to wait.
 - 1. But the Lord had a reason for delaying his release.
 - 2. Through God's providential ordering of events, a situation arose that resulted in Pharaoh himself becoming indebted to Joseph.
 - 3. This would cause Pharaoh to put Joseph in a prominent position in Egypt.
 - 4. And it was in this way that Joseph's dreams reached their fulfillment.

V. Conclusion

- A. Joseph did not know the answers to everything, but he knew what really mattered.
 - 1. He knew the secret wisdom of the living God, and this made him a source of light in the darkness.
 - 2. So it is with everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ.
 - 3. In the gospel, we have received things that are not taught by human wisdom, but by the Spirit of God.
 - 4. The Scriptures even say that we have the mind of Christ.
- B. Of course, there will still be times when, like Joseph in prison, you look at your life or at the world around you and you just have no idea what God is doing.
 - 1. But what you always do have is the truth of God.

2. This puts you in an entirely different position than those around you who are still lost in the ignorance of sin.
3. The world continues to be full of many unknowns.
4. But you need not fear any of them, because there is nothing that is unknown to your God.