

50. The Fragrant Fruit of God's Spirit (2007)

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[0 : 00] Turn with me now to the Bibles and to our reading for this morning, and we're back into the book of Genesis at chapter 41, which you'll find on page 34 if you have one of our visitors' church Bibles.

Genesis chapter 41, and we're going to read together the whole chapter. We left Joseph last time languishing not only in slavery in Egypt, but then in prison.

And despite his hopes being raised by the restoration of the cupbearer whose dream he had given the interpretation of, the last verse of chapter 40 must have come like a devastating blow once again to this man.

And yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him. And after two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, and behold, there came up out of the Nile seven cows, attractive and plump, and they fed in the reed grass.

And behold, seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them and stood by the other cows on the banks of the Nile. And the ugly, thin cows ate up the seven attractive, plump cows.

[1 : 18] And Pharaoh awoke. And he fell asleep and dreamed a second time. And behold, seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk.

And behold, after them sprouted seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind. And the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump, full ears. And Pharaoh awoke. And behold, it was a dream.

So in the morning, his spirit was troubled. And he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, and there was none who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

The archaeologists tell us, by the way, that Egypt was renowned for its interpretation of dream. It made a whole science of it. There were great books written all about how to interpret dreams. So how surprising then that there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh. Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, I remember my offenses today.

[2 : 23] When Pharaoh was angry with his servants and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, we dreamed on the same night, he and I, each having a dream with its own interpretation.

A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each man according to his dream.

And as he interpreted to us, so it came about. I was restored to my office. The baker was hanged.

And Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they quickly brought him out of the pit.

And when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it.

I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream, you can interpret it. Joseph answered Pharaoh, it is not in me. God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.

[3 : 24] And Pharaoh said to Joseph, behold, in my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile. Seven cows, plump and attractive, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass. Seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and thin, such as I have never seen in all the land of Egypt.

And the thin, ugly cows ate up the first seven plump cows. But when they had eaten them, no one would have known that they had eaten them, for they were still as ugly as at the beginning.

Then I awoke. I also saw in my dream seven ears growing on one stalk, full and good. Seven ears withered thin and blighted by the east wind sprouted up after them.

And the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. And I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me. Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, the dreams of Pharaoh are one. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. The seven good cows are seven ears, and the seven good ears are seven years. The dreams are one.

[4 : 29] The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years. And the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind are also seven years of famine. It is as I told Pharaoh.

God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. But after them will arise seven years of famine.

And all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt. The famine will consume the land. And plenty will be unknown in the land by reason of the famine that will follow.

For it will be very severe. And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God. And God will shortly bring it about.

Now therefore let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land, and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plentiful years.

[5 : 31] And let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine.

This proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God? Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are.

You shall be over all my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.

Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand, and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck. And he made him ride in his second chariot, and they called out before him, Bow the knee!

Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, I am Pharaoh, and without your consent, no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.

[6 : 55] And Pharaoh called Joseph's name, Zephanath-Paneah. And he gave him in marriage, Arseneath, the daughter of Potiphar, a priest of On. So Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt.

Joseph was 33 years old when he entered his service of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and went through all the land of Egypt.

During the seven plentiful years, the earth produced abundantly. And he gathered up all the food those seven years which occurred in the land of Egypt, and put the food in the cities.

He put in every city the food from the fields around it. And Joseph stored up grain in great abundance, like the sand of the sea, until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured.

Before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph. Asenath, the daughter of Potiphar, a priest of On, bore them to him. Joseph called the name of his firstborn Manasseh.

[7 : 57] For he said, God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house. The name of the second he called Ephraim. For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.

The seven years of plenty that occurred in the land of Egypt came to an end. And the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. There was famine in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread.

When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, go to Joseph. What he says to you, do. So when the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians.

For the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain. Because the famine was severe over all the earth.

Amen. And may God bless to us this, his word. I'll do turn, if you would, to the passage we read together there in Genesis chapter 41.

[9 : 12] Last time we were with Joseph a few weeks ago, we saw the mystery of God's presence in Joseph's life.

As he was proven by God through long affliction and proved to be a faithful servant. You remember Psalm 105 verse 18 summed it up.

His soul came into iron. That is, the iron smelting furnace of Egypt. And that is how the word of the Lord proved him true.

And in that mystery, God's great mercy was at work. Forging Joseph to be a great savior for his people. He wasn't forsaken by God as it had seemed.

But he was being forged by God. He wasn't being punished by God. But he was being prepared by God to be a servant of the Lord. And so what men certainly meant for evil, God meant for good.

[10:19] For the saving of many lives. And we saw how closely Joseph's own experience foreshadowed the pattern of the great savior, the Lord Jesus himself.

He was the one who learned obedience through suffering. That he might become the source of salvation for many brothers, says the book of Hebrews.

And the New Testament gospel teaches us very plainly that this same pattern will always be evident. Always be evident. In the lives of those who are likewise true servants of the Lord Jesus.

And that's true in every age. The pattern of Jesus is reflected back into Joseph's real life and experience. But so also it shines forward into the lives of all who are truly united to this Christ.

The true Christ of scripture. United to him by the spirit of Jesus and through faith in Jesus. And that of course is why these ancient stories are such a wonderful encouragement and strength to us today.

[11:24] Especially when we as believers find ourselves in dark and difficult days. Especially when we also are conscious of the mystery of God's ways.

And when we might find it very hard indeed to find the merciful good. And where it can possibly be in our circumstances. When we're like Joseph in verse 1 of our chapter 41.

One, still forgotten. Still languishing in prison. Despite everything that he's done for the butler of the king and everybody else. All these things, says the Apostle Paul, are written for us.

That through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope. And when we can see and when we can recognize the pattern. the pattern of the genuine faith of Christ in us.

Well, that's, friends, when we are better able to grasp hold of the promises of Christ to us also. That is, Hebrews 12 teaches us, although for the moment no discipline seems painful, yet later it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

[12:37] Therefore, he says, lift up your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees. Well, our chapter today is surely a wonderful reminder of God's faithfulness to the promises that he makes to his servants.

It is indeed a chapter to lift drooping hands and to strengthen weak knees. It's a chapter that encourages us and gives us hope. And my goodness, we need encouragement and we need hope, don't we?

It encourages us not to give up. And we see at last the great reward that Joseph receives for his faithfulness and affliction.

But as we'll discover, in fact, the greatest reward is not so much in all that Pharaoh gives to Joseph, but it's actually in what God has made Joseph through his sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

Because this is a chapter that speaks above all about the fragrant fruit of God's Spirit through Joseph's life, flowing like rivers of living water to bless others, and also in Joseph's life like a spring welling up to eternal life.

[13:50] So let's look at how the story unfolds then and see the great encouragement and hope that God has for us in it. First of all, look at the first scene in verses 1 to 14, which describes a sudden reversal.

A sudden reversal for Joseph, the prisoner of God. The Lord acts instantly and effortlessly to restore and to exalt Joseph. Although, of course, he has waited a very long time for that.

And so these verses remind us both of the sovereignty of God in bringing deliverance, but also of the responsible sin of man in causing that delay.

Verse 1 begins reminding us of that delay, another two whole years of misery in prison for Joseph. After, surely, he had such hope of the butler's testimony on his behalf.

But the king's butler seems so taken up with himself, it seems that he cared very little for Joseph's plight, and he just forgot him. He took from Joseph, he used Joseph, but he just forgot that he owed anything at all to Joseph.

[15 : 06] That's so common in life, isn't it? Alas, it's so common also in Christian service. One writer makes this trenchant remark, God's servants, he says, are often subject to needless indignities and embarrassments and distresses by the crass unthankfulness and culpable carelessness of those who owe them most and who have least cause of any to be neglectful of them.

And he goes on to say, this is grievous in the sight of the Lord, who says, touch not the Lord's anointed, neither do his prophets any harm. That's a sobering warning, isn't it?

It was, of course, all in God's hands. As John Calvin says, it was the winding course of God's providence by which Joseph was led until he rose to notice with the king. It was all in God's hands, but the needless distress inflicted on Joseph by the butler's ingratitude is not thereby excused, is it? Any more than Judas' betrayal of Jesus was blameless, although it had to happen. And we need to heed Jesus' words about that sort of thing, don't we, when he says temptations and other evil must come in this world, but woe to him by whom they come.

A needless delay. We're not told how the Lord may have dealt with the butler's sins, but after noting the delay, we are told just how swiftly and how decisively God brings deliverance when his chosen time comes, and how pointedly he shows his heavenly power controlling every earthly power beneath.

[16 : 46] It's Pharaoh's great dilemma from God that brings about Joseph's great deliverance by God. So God sends Pharaoh a nasty nightmare. And all its vividness, you'll see, it comes over in the repeated call for us to look, behold, verse 2, seven fat cows.

And behold, look, verse 3, hideous, ugly cows that come up and cannibalize them. No wonder Pharaoh woke up with a start. So he has his hot Ovaltine and his melatonin tablet and finally gets back to sleep again.

And then look, verse 5, behold, all over again. Same thing, but this time with ears of corn. And again, he's sleepless. He knows it's full of foreboding.

He's deeply troubled by his dream, just like Nebuchadnezzar was all those years later. But none of the wise men and magicians in Egypt can help. And all of a sudden, the butler remembers Joseph, tells his story, and immediately, verse 14 says, Joseph is whisked out of prison, out of the pit of his misery, and he's shaved and he's clothed, and before he knows what's happening, he's standing before fear.

It's staggering, isn't it? One minute he's in the misery of the pit, and the very next, he is in the presence of the majesty of Pharaoh. Impossibilities were swept aside in a moment.

[18 : 10] Dreams were planted in a despot's mind. The magicians of Egypt were confounded, and all in the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose of grace. And we should rejoice, says this writer, that we have a God to whom nothing is impossible.

When he works, none can hinder. And it is, isn't it? A staggeringly swift and sudden reversal. And shouldn't that encourage us?

When at times in the darkness, it may be that our struggle personally seems never-ending, in our Christian walk, in our own life of witness to Jesus.

Shouldn't it encourage us that we have such a God who can change things in an instant, just like that? That hymn of Arthur Hugh Cloth that we sang, speaks so clearly of that, doesn't it?

That in the darkest hours, we often see only the faintest glimmers of light. And yet if we would just turn around, the land behind us is bright with the rising sun, not by eastern windows only, when daylight comes, comes in the light.

[19 : 20] In front, the sun climbs low. How slowly? But westward look. The land is bright. And all of a sudden here, daylight comes. And the interminable delay in Joseph's life becomes an instant deliverance.

But notice how the focus in the story turns us immediately in this, not to Joseph, but to Joseph's God. Because the heart of the chapter, in verses 15 to 36, is all about a sovereign revelation.

A sovereign revelation through Joseph, the prophet of God. It's all about God speaking fearfully, yes, but also mercifully, to this pagan king.

He speaks a word of solemn warning, but it's also a word of saving wisdom. And that's what the gospel always, always presents to human beings, whether they're great or they're small.

A word of sovereign warning, which is a word of saving wisdom, if it's heeded. Notice, first of all, Joseph's fearless testimony in verse 16.

[20 : 33] Pharaoh explains the problem, and he expects Joseph to interpret, and Joseph's opening words are, no, king, you're all wrong. It's not in me to do this. Only my God can do this.

Would you have dared to say that to Pharaoh in that moment of great opportunity? What a temptation to present only a very positive word to Pharaoh, your great moment of opportunity for freedom.

But you see, Joseph, as we've already seen, is a true prophet, and he's unafraid to speak truth to power. He's unafraid, isn't he, of the necessary negatives. It's not my words.

It's God's words that you need to hear, O king. And that's what you need to learn above all. And you see how the whole passage screams out to us that this is an exposure by Joseph of the feeble inadequacy of Egyptian religion.

Look at verse 15 and verse 24 that are like brackets around the account of this dream. They repeat the refrain of verse 8. I have a dream and there's no one to interpret it.

[21 : 47] Not even the mightiest of Egypt's wisdom and magic can help. Not one bit. Egypt, with its magnificent temples, with its pyramids, with its science, with its beauty, with its power and wealth, with its religion, all its ceremonies, useless, useless, utterly impotent to give any help to the troubled spirit of the king.

And that is, isn't it, the impotence of all human religion that is devoid of the living revelation of the living God. No matter how impressive it might seem or it might sound, nothing, but nothing, can compensate for that lack of a living word from heaven.

But here is a man, a mere slave, and indeed a convicted slave at that. Here is a man who has the power of that word to bring help to the king.

But like every true prophet who speaks for God, he knows it's not about him, but it's all about God and God's word and what God says. And he doesn't flinch, does he, for this opportunity to witness. Do you remember so many years later, Jesus told his followers in Luke chapter 21 that when you, when we, are held up before courts and before religious rulers, it will be your opportunity, he says, to witness.

[23 : 12] And that's Joseph here, isn't it? Look, O king, to the Lord for the answer. He alone and his word can tell you. That must always be our word, mustn't it?

All that we have of worth in this world is to pass on the living word of the living God. And verses 17 to 24 retell the dream.

And it's clear, isn't it, that Pharaoh knows enough to know that it's very threatening. He's deeply troubled. God has disturbed his complacency, his sense of power and control over his own life and indeed over his whole kingdom and realm.

That's often the way, isn't it, when people are confronted first with the word of the living God. They may not understand very much of the gospel, but they're undermined by it. They're unnerved. They're troubled.

It strikes fear and discomfort into their lives. A fear that no human solution or situation can help. fear that no human solution and this dream, as John Calvin says, leaves a sting in Pharaoh's heart.

[24 : 20] And yet God is gracious. And so in verses 25 to 32, he gives an explanation through Joseph. And it's a clear word.

It's a word of sovereign warning about what God is going to do. verse 25 and verse 28. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. There'll be seven years of boom followed by seven years of such mighty bust that all the good times will be more than undone.

We're not told if Pharaoh thought he had abolished boom and bust like Mr. Brown thought he had. But no doubt he did think himself as God-like. But Joseph said, you cannot prevent, you cannot prevent this Pharaoh, not even you.

Notice it's just one brief sentence on the boom, the plenty, verse 29, but five fateful clauses laying out the extent of the severity of the famine that's to follow.

It's a very clear word of warning. And it's a certain word, verse 32. It's a thing fixed by God as the doubling of the dream signifies.

[25 : 34] God will shortly bring it about, says Joseph. Joseph is in no doubt, just as he was in no doubt about the certainty of the double dreams of the two prisoners.

And surely, surely then, we must also think that he was also in no doubt about the certainty of the double dreams that he himself had received from God back at home all those years ago.

Yes, Joseph believed God. And God counted it to him for righteousness. God's revelation is clear and it is certain and, verse 33, it's commanding.

Now, therefore, says Joseph to the king, you must respond. And you see, the true prophet and preacher of God always urges that response to God's word, always instructs and cancels what that response must be, what must be done.

Remember Peter on the day of Pentecost, what must we do? You must repent and change your life, says Peter the apostle and Joseph the prophet here.

[26 : 43] And here, Joseph passes on God's solemn warning and follows it immediately with these words of saving wisdom. Listen to how John Calvin puts it.

Whereas prosperity so intoxicates men that the greater part make no provision for themselves against the future, but absorb the present abundance by intemperance, Joseph advises the king to take care that the country may have its produce laid up in store.

It's not exactly rocket science, is it? Yet it doesn't seem to have occurred to one single government in the whole of the Western world in the last two decades to have the idea of doing what Joseph suggested for Egypt.

And we're still living, aren't we, in the disastrous aftermath of the debt-fuel boom. And it's going to be with us for a long time to come, I'm afraid, despite the fact that some politicians still seem to think that thin cows will become fat cows again if we just keep on spending and borrowing.

But if it's so obvious what Joseph says here, why do nations and people get in such a mess?

Whether Pharaoh or modern governments or modern electorates?

[28 : 05] Well, the answer is, of course, that none of us want to believe in a sovereign God who really is in control of all things. We want to think that we human beings are omnipotent, that we, with our governments and our economists and our scientists, that we can control the world, that we can control its trade and its economics and its currencies and its prosperity, its harvests and food supplies, even its climate.

That's why we say stupid things, isn't it? Like, everything is different now or things can only get better or all sorts of other inane political slogans. When Pharaoh thinks he's a god and when we think we are gods, well, we stop listening to sense, don't we?

And we turn truth into lies. That's the very essence, isn't it, of what the Bible calls sin. But God speaks words of merciful warning to man in his self-delusion and sin.

And he speaks words of saving wisdom. Save yourselves, he says, by heeding this command. And that's what Joseph is saying to Pharaoh.

Notice, by the way, that it is God's sovereignty that confers responsibility on human beings to act wisely or to bear the consequences, whether in matters of national survival as here or in matters of eternal survival.

[29 : 35] It is heeding God's word alone that will save a nation from calamity. And it's heeding God's wisdom alone that will save men and women from eternal calamity.

Well, Pharaoh, astonishingly, perhaps, did humble himself to hear Joseph's words. He recognized divine words of power and as a result, verses 37 to 46 speak of a supreme recognition for Joseph, the man of God.

God's word is vindicated. His previous revelation in Joseph's own dreams is vindicated as God's servant, Joseph, here, is vindicated publicly.

And we see a staggering reversal. Joseph goes from being a prisoner to president in the blink of an eye, from being a victim to being the grand vizier of the whole of Egypt.

And it's because, verse 38, do you see? It's because God has displayed to all that his spirit is in this man and that he is seen as a man who mediates between God and man.

[30 : 47] He's like a priest of God. God. The scholars argue, as they always do, over the particular role that Joseph has given. It's likely what's known as the grand vizier.

And the archaeology gives us plenty of knowledge all about the robes and the rings and the chains and so on that are mentioned in these verses. But whatever it is, clearly he is the effective ruler of all Egypt, the great power of the day.

Well, as Daniel reminds Nebuchadnezzar, God is sovereign and he gives the kingdoms to whom he pleases. But notice above all that these verses emphasize for us the fulfillment of God's word to Joseph, of the dreams that God gave Joseph all these years before.

Do you remember about the sheaves of corn and the sun and the moon and the stars bowing down to Joseph? Well, look at verse 41. Here he is, set over all the land of Egypt.

And here he is, verse 43, everyone bowing the knee to him. And again in verse 45 and verse 46, just in case you miss it, he's over all the land of Egypt.

[32 : 01] He goes out over all the land of Egypt, the greatest empire in the world in that day. I don't really know what this new name means in verse 45, life, but Bruce Waltke says it most likely means God speaks and lives.

And that certainly reflects the reality in Pharaoh's mind, doesn't it? Because he readily submits to the clear power of the word of the living God as spoken through this man.

Very striking, isn't it, that Joseph is despised and rejected by his own family, his own brethren, and yet he's recognized and honored by these pagans as a true man of God, one who speaks to God and through whom God speaks his words of power.

Isn't that striking? And yet once again it's such a constant pattern in the gospel story. The Lord Jesus was rejected by his own and yet the whole world came after him.

The apostles of Jesus were scorned by the religious establishment, they were cast out of their own synagogues and yet the Gentiles rejoiced to hear this gospel from those who were regarded by the religious establishment as the scum of the earth.

[33 : 26] And that's always how it's going to be, friends, because life-changing power and nation-changing power comes not from the impressive religion of the world, nor even from the impressive charisma of men, but from hearing the words of the true God, as often they are spoken by frail and feeble vessels, but who are recognized to be those who speak the words of the living God, not the words of men, but the words of God himself at work to bring his salvation to those who will indeed receive it gladly, as the Egyptians did.

And it's the reception of Joseph's words that leads not only to his own supreme recognition, but to God's purpose in it all. Because the rest of the chapter, from verse 47 to the end, describe, don't they, a saving reign, a saving reign through Joseph, the chosen ruler of God.

These verses are pointedly showing us how God blesses and saves the whole world in that day through the wise and gracious rule of his chosen and anointed ruler, a ruler that he has raised up from being despised and rejected of men and has now made to be lifted high and exalted.

Of one who was once a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, cast off from the land of the living, and yet now, as it were out of the anguish of his soul, he sees and is satisfied and by his knowledge, many are saved.

That rings bells, doesn't it? We're told Joseph rules wisely in the days of plenty, verses 47 to 49, storing up food in abundance like the sands of the sea.

[35 : 26] Language is so redolent, isn't it, of the blessing of God to Abraham, your offspring will be like the sand of the sea or the stars in the sky. And likewise, he rules wisely in the days of famine, verses 53 to 57.

And when all Egypt is in distress, do you see what the command is? Go to Joseph, verse 55. What he says to you do.

Isn't that strikingly similar to those words that we were looking at just the other Sunday evening in John chapter two from Mary about her son at the wedding in Canaan of Galilee all those centuries later.

Go to him, whatever he says to you, do. And indeed, verse 57, all the earth did indeed come to Joseph, and he gave them food to save them from death.

The whole world, all the families of the earth finding blessing through the seed of Abraham, just as God had promised.

[36 : 32] You see, Joseph is not just a prototype of God's prophets who speak God's words to kings, not just of the priests who speak to God on behalf of men and nations, but surely also he foreshadows and adumbrates God's promised king, the Lord Jesus himself, in whom is all wisdom and discernment, upon whom the spirit rests in abundance and completely.

I've already alluded to the words of Isaiah the prophet about the servant king whom he spoke of, who would be the light to the Gentiles, upon whom the Lord would make his spirit rest, the spirit of wisdom and understanding and power.

Even he who rules the Gentiles, says Isaiah, to him and in him will the Gentiles hope. And here's just another glimpse, you see, in former times of that great fulfillment that was still to come in all its

glory.

But even here, way back in the earliest days of Genesis, these ancient pages of our Bibles, they rustle, they whisper with the promise of the king who is to come.

Even here we get glimpses of the seed of promise blessing the whole world the saving mercy. Here, it is salvation from famine and from starvation.

[37 : 59] But all of this, you see, is just part of the great unfolding story of God's salvation, of the story of God's saving of all of his people from the consequences of something far more than just famine, the consequences of sin and of death through the curse.

all this is part of God's great plan. And God will use this to bring Jacob's own family, as we'll see, down into Egypt where they will grow and multiply and be fruitful and then bring them back into the land of Canaan to keep the Holy Seed alive down the generations.

Until the time at last would come for great David, the king, to rule in Jerusalem. And then at last, in the fullness of time, the great David's greater son, to arise and to rule the nations.

And now, of course, has been raised in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, raised from the pit of death to be exalted and to rule all nations and peoples.

So, do you see, yes, we are not Joseph. But Joseph's story is our story. Because Joseph was part of that same great story, the story of the great king who rules over all.

[39 : 23] And so are we. And the spirit of the same God, who's now made known in all his radiant glory in the Lord Jesus Christ, the spirit who was in Joseph, abides in us also who love the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. That means we also will share in that glorious reign. For all, says Paul, who are led by the spirit of God are sons of God, fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him, as Joseph did, in order that we also might be glorified with him.

This saying we can trust, says the apostle Paul, if we died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him.

To use Joseph's own words, the thing is fixed by God. He will shortly bring it about. Friends, what that means for us is that just as Joseph trusted and held on to God's promise for his future, all through those days of darkness and confusion and mystery and in the end proved God true, so also we can trust God's promises to us in his gospel.

No matter how dark and mysterious the days may be that we have to walk through, we also will prove his promises true.

[41 : 00] We will see the same pattern, the pattern of death and of resurrection played out in our own lives and in our church life and we'll see it again and again and again until ultimately there is a great rising to glory and we shall see it fulfilled ultimately and forever when the Lord Jesus Christ comes to reign because we are part of this same story of Joseph's wonderful God.

Just as I finish, I want to go back, back to Joseph the man because although this is all about the great story of God and his salvation, the great story of his covenant promise and plan unfolding, it is also, also at the same time, a story of God's dealing with this man, Joseph, a real man of flesh and blood, a real human being just like you and me.

And we must never forget that although God does care infinitely for his great covenant plan, he also cares very, very wonderfully for every one of his little children.

And I think verses 50 to 52 which divide that great account of Joseph's rule between his rule in the time of plenty and the time of famine, I think these little verses point us to this and speak to us something very, very important indeed.

They speak to us of a sufficient reward, a sufficient reward for Joseph, the child of God. Let me quote something that struck me this week from my own father's notes in his book on Genesis when I read them.

[42 : 54] He says this, We might speak of the recognition Pharaoh gave Joseph as God's reward to him, but it would be truer to say that the greater reward lay in what God had made him.

God's men are forged in the furnace of affliction, and only such is it safe to elevate to positions of responsibility and authority. You see these apparently unimportant little verses with these little details about Joseph's son's names.

In fact, in fact, they're so very revealing of Joseph's inner heart and soul, and so very revealing about what God had forged into him and the kind of man that he'd become through all his trials.

Do you see? Two sons were born to Joseph, verse 50. And verse 51, Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh, for he said, God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house.

In the name of the second he called Ephraim, for God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction. He named his two sons forgetful and fruitful, forgetful, because that is what God had enabled him to be.

[44 : 18] Forgetful with the right kind of forgetfulness. Not that he'd really forgotten his family and his father's house and his covenant faith. Of course not. His confession of God makes that so clear.

But he is forgetful of all the affliction, of all that could and would have made him bitter and hardened as a person. Had he allowed himself to fester in all of these things.

You see, God had released him from all of that. And he'd done it most wonderfully. See, it's not enough, is it, just to make it good in life at the end of the day.

Some people endure great hardship and personal hurts and loss and disputes or injustice or whatever it is. They overcome and they're brought out bright and prosperous in the end.

They have success in life or in their career or their family or even in Christian ministry, whatever era it is. But nevertheless, they can carry a chip on their shoulder all the way to the grave.

[45 : 28] Isn't that so? Bitterness and resentment, determination to prove a point, ambition to prove yourself to others or to yourself or even to God.

And you see, that attitude of bitterness, it can just eat you up, eat you up inside and poison others as well into the bargain.

And it's so, so easy to become bitter as Christians because of what life flings at us. That's why the Bible warns us so clearly, doesn't it, not to allow that to happen in the church.

Don't let a root of bitterness spring up and cause trouble defiling others with the poison. Read it in Hebrews 12. If ever a man could have allowed bitterness to poison his life and to be in a position of power to damage others constantly through that bitterness, if ever there was such a man, it was Joseph.

But no, God granted him forgetfulness, liberty from chasing after the esteem of man and remembrance instead of all the goodness, rather, that he had had from God's hand.

[46 : 48] Forgetfulness and fruitfulness. God has made me and will make me fruitful in the land of my affliction. Why, of course, says those Bible notes, affliction and fruitfulness are always united in the economy of God.

It's the law of the spiritual harvest that except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and died, abideth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. Out of the presses of pain cometh the soul's best wine.

We sometimes feel, don't we, when we're perplexed and perhaps near despair at the struggles and the afflictions that seem to surround us in our life, we sometimes feel that these things must surely leave marks upon our lives that we will never, ever get over.

We will never leave them behind. Perhaps at times we wonder if because of things that have happened to us in life, or perhaps because things that have never happened to us, that we'll never really be able to be useful again.

Maybe we feel that about our Christian life and service. I'll never be able to be useful again. But friends, that is not so. Not so.

[48 : 17] Because what God did for Joseph, he can do and he will do also for you, if you will let him. God can grant you forgetfulness, freedom from all the bitterness of the past, and fruitfulness even in the land of your affliction.

That, I think, is perhaps the greatest evidence of God's grace at work in this whole chapter. Not in the great exaltation of Joseph to be ruler of Egypt, but in the fragrant fruit of the Spirit of God in Joseph, God's dearly beloved child, as evidenced in these things.

And wouldn't that be sufficient reward for us, for you and for me, indeed for our whole fellowship in these difficult days? One day we have a hope.

We too shall reign in glory with Christ. But meantime, as Paul tells us, godliness with contentment is great gain. So, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, may God grant us to forget all that would embitter us.

God bless you and may he also make us fruitful for him in and even through all our present afflictions. May the fragrant fruit of his Holy Spirit thus be among us and evident to all, as it was with

Joseph.

[49 : 57] Let's pray. Joseph called the name of his firstborn Manasseh, for he said, God has made me forget all my hardship.

The name of the second he called Ephraim, for God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction. Gracious God, our Heavenly Father, how we pray through the ministry of the Spirit of your Holy and Beloved Son, the one who was despised and rejected, the one who has been raised and exalted to the highest place, how we pray that the fragrance of his Holy Spirit may bring the mind of Christ our Savior to our minds and hearts this day and every day.

We ask it in his name. Amen.