

The Fragrant Fruit of God's Spirit

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[0 : 01] Good, let's turn to our reading, shall we? And Willie is picking up in Genesis, so do turn in your Bible. If you don't have a Bible with you, we have plenty of visitor Bibles at the side here, also at the back. Do turn with me to Genesis chapter 41, page 34, if you have a visitor Bible. We were last in Genesis just before Christmas, and you might remember in chapter 39, Joseph, who is in Egypt, resisted great temptation, staying faithful to the Lord, and yet he is wrongly thrown into prison, where he remains for some time. But through all of his suffering and humiliation, Joseph remained faithful to the Lord, and the Lord was merciful to him. Chapter 40, he correctly interprets the dreams of two of Pharaoh's servants who are also in prison. One of them, the chief cupbearer, is then restored back into Pharaoh's service, just as Joseph said he would be, and yet this cupbearer forgets about Joseph for some time. Joseph is left in prison, and we see here what happens next in chapter 41. So let's pick it up, verse 1 of chapter 41.

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 on 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 bank of the Nile. And the ugly, thin cows ate up the seven attractive plump cows. 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, but there was none who could interpret them to Pharaoh. Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, I remember my offenses today, when Pharaoh was angry with his servants and put me and his chief baker in the 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.

[3 : 01] And as he interpreted to us, so it came about, I was restored to my office and the baker was hanged. Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph and they quickly brought him out of the pit. And when he was 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've 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. Then 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've never seen in all the land of Egypt. And the thin, ugly cows ate up the first seven plump cows. But when they'd 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 years and the seven good ears are seven years. The dreams are one.

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, there will be arising seven years of famine and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt. The famine will consume the land and the 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 and let them gather all the food of those good years that are coming and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities and let them keep it.

[6 : 08] That food shall be reserved 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 my house and all my people shall order themselves as you command only as regards to throwing that I'll be greater than you. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, see, I have set you over all the land of Egypt. Then Pharaoh took a 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 the second chariot and they called up 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. And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zephanathophar and gave him in marriage to Asenath, the daughter of Potiphar, priest of Om. So Joseph went out over the land of Egypt.

Joseph was 30 years old when he entered the 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 of 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, priest of Om, bore them to him.

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.

[8 : 39] 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 the 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.

May God bless his word to us. We'll do it with you, if you would, to Genesis chapter 41, as Paul read to us a little earlier.

[9 : 53] Now back before Christmas, we saw in chapters 39 and 40 of Genesis the mystery of God's presence with Joseph. As he was proved through affliction as a faithful servant of God, his soul came into iron, that is, into the iron-smelting furnace of Egypt's slavery.

That's how Psalm 105 puts it, where the word of the Lord proved him true. And amid that great mystery of his experience, God's great mercy was at work in him, forging him into his people's great savior.

Not being punished by God, as it looked, but being prepared for service. Not forsaken, but being forged into a true servant of God.

So that what man meant for evil, for sure, God purposed for good, for the saving of many lives. And Joseph's life so closely, we saw, resembles and foreshadows the great savior, who also learned obedience through suffering, that he might become the source of salvation for many brothers, as

Hebrews puts it.

And that pattern of the Christ himself, reflected back into Joseph's life, Joseph's experience, as that also shines forward into the lives of all who are truly united to the Christ by the spirit of Jesus, through faith in Jesus.

[11 : 29] And that's why, you see, these ancient stories are so encouraging for us, especially when we find ourselves in dark days, in difficult days, when God's mercy seems to be so clouded by mystery, by pain, as it was for Joseph here, in verse one of our chapter, where he's still forgotten, he's still languishing in prison, despite everything he's done for the king's butler.

The apostle Paul says that all these things are written for us, that through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope. You see, when we can see, when we can recognize the pattern, the pattern of the genuine faith of Christ in us, then I think we're better able to hold on to the promises of Christ to us.

As Hebrews 12 puts it, though for the moment all discipline seems painful, later it yields the peaceable fruit, the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Therefore, he says, lift up your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees. And you see, here is a chapter to lift up drooping hands, to strengthen weak knees, to encourage us, to give us hope, as we see here at last, the great reward for all Joseph's faithfulness in his affliction.

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

[13 : 12] Because this is a chapter that speaks, I think, above all, of the fragrant fruit of God's Spirit through Joseph's life, flowing like rivers of living waters to bless others, but also in Joseph's own life.

There's a spring of water welling up to eternal life. So let's look at the story as it unfolds and try and see the great encouragement and hope that God has for us in it.

First, look at the first scene, verses 1 to 14, which describes a sudden reversal, a sudden reversal for Joseph, the prisoner of God. The Lord acts here instantly, effortlessly, to restore and to exalt Joseph, rather, and yet he has waited a very long time to do it, hasn't he?

And so, you see, these verses remind us both of the sovereignty of God and bringing deliverance, but also, they remind us of the responsible sin of man in the needless delay that Joseph experienced.

Verse 1 reminds us of that delay, another two whole years of misery in prison for Joseph after he had reason for hope, didn't he?

[14 : 24] After the butler's release and the butler's testimony. But it seems the butler was so taken up with himself that he cared little for Joseph's plight.

He took from Joseph, he used Joseph, but he just forgot. Forgot that he owed anything to Joseph. And that's so common in life, isn't it?

And sometimes, sadly, it's common in Christian service, too. One writer says this, God's servants are often subjected 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 this is grievous in the sight of the Lord who says, touch not the Lord's anointed, neither do his prophets any harm. It's a sobering thought, isn't it?

How thoughtless and careless we can often be. And of course, it was all in God's hands. John Calvin says, it was the windy course of God's providence by which Joseph was led until he rose in notice with the king.

[15 : 36] But the needless distress that was inflicted on Joseph by the butler's ingratitude isn't therefore excused, does it? Any more than Judas' betrayal of Jesus is blameless, although it had to happen.

Remember, Jesus himself said, temptations and other evil must come, but woe to the one by whom they come. But we're not told, are we, how the Lord may have dealt with the butler's sins, but after noting the delay, we are shown just how swiftly and decisively God brings deliverance when his chosen time comes and how pointedly he shows that it's his heavenly power that is controlling all these earthly powers.

It's Pharaoh's great dilemma from God that leads to Joseph's great deliverance by God. And God sends Pharaoh this nasty nightmare. And you see in verses 2 and 3 and so on, all the vividness of

it.

There's this repetition of the call for us to look. Behold, verse 2, seven fat cows. In verse 3, behold, hideous, ugly, thin cows. Come along and cannibalize them. Well, no wonder Pharaoh wakes up. Then I guess he has his cup of Horlicks and his sleeping tablet and he finally gets off to sleep again. But no, verse 5, look, all over again. Same dream, but this time it's the years of corn.

[16:58] And again, he's sleepless. He knows, doesn't he, that it's full of foreboding. He's very troubled. It's very like the story so much later with Nebuchadnezzar and his dreams. And none of his wise men, none of his magicians could help.

And then all of a sudden in verse 9, the butler remembers Joseph and tells his story. And then, bang, immediately, look at verse 14.

Joseph's whisked out of prison, the pit, it's called, of his misery. He's shaved, he's clothed, and there he is standing before the king, before fear. It's staggering, isn't it? One minute is the misery of the pit, and the next minute he's facing the majesty of Pharaoh.

As someone puts it, impossibilities were swept aside in a moment. Dreams planted in a despot's mind, the magicians of Egypt confounded, and all in fulfillment of God's eternal purpose of grace. We should rejoice, he says, that we have a God to whom nothing is impossible. When he works, none can hinder. It's a staggeringly swift and sudden reversal, isn't it?

[18:10] And that should encourage us when we face times of darkness and struggle, when it seems like it's going to be never ending in our Christian walk, in our life of witness to Jesus.

We're always going to be up against it. No, God can reverse things. There's a wonderful poem by Arthur Hugh Clough, sometimes actually sung as a hymn, and it speaks about how even in the darkest hours, when what we can see is only tiny, tiny glimmers of light, if anything at all.

But already actually, behind us, unseen, the land is being lit up by light. Say not, the struggle not availeth, the labor and the words are vain, the enemy faints not nor faileth, as things have been, they remain.

For while the tired waves, violently breaking, seem here, no painful inch to gain, far back, through creeks and inlets making, comes silent, flooding in the main.

And not by eastern windows only, when daylight comes, comes in the light. In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly, but westward, look, the land is bright.

[19:26] And all of a sudden, you see, daylight comes here. And the interminable delay turns to instant deliverance for Joseph.

But notice here, when that happens, notice how all the focus in this passage takes us immediately, not from Joseph, but to Joseph's God. Because the heart of the chapter, from verse 15 to 36, is all about a sovereign revelation.

through Joseph, now the prophet of God. It's all about God speaking fearfully and yet mercifully to this pagan king.

And he speaks a word of solemn warning and a word of saving wisdom. And that's what the gospel always presents, doesn't it, to human beings, whether great kings or ordinary people.

A word of warning and a word of salvation. Notice in verse 16, first of all, Joseph's fearless testimony. Pharaoh explains his problem.

[20:33] He asked Joseph to interpret. And Joseph's opening words to the king of the empire of the earth are, no, king, you've got it all wrong. It's not in me to do this. Only God can do this.

Would you have dared to be so bold to the king in a moment of opportunity like that? Your big chance at last that you've been waiting for? It would have been a very great temptation, wouldn't it, to only grease the king with all sorts of positive words.

But Joseph's a true prophet and he's unafraid to speak truth to power. He's unafraid to speak a necessary negative. No, you're wrong. It's not my words.

It's only God's words that you need to hear. In fact, Pharaoh, that is what you need to learn above everything else, to listen to God, the true God. You see, this whole passage is screaming out to us that it's an exposure of all the feeble inadequacy of Egyptian religion.

Look at verse 15 and verse 24. Do you see how these words bracket around the account of the dream and they repeat this refrain we've already had in verse 8 where Pharaoh says, I've had a dream but there's no one to interpret it.

[21:44] there's no one who could explain it to me. Not even the mightiest of Egypt's wisdom and magic can help. Not one little bit. Think of it.

Here is Egypt with its magnificent pyramids, with its temples, with its science and engineering, with all its buildings, with its power, with its wealth, with its religion, with its ceremonies.

But all utterly impotent to meet the troubled spirit of the king. And that's just the impotence, isn't it, of all earthly religion that's devoid of a living revelation from the living God.

Doesn't matter how impressive it may seem. Doesn't matter how wonderful it may sound. Nothing, nothing can compensate for that lack. But here we have a man, a mere slave, an imprisoned slave at that.

And he has got a word of power that can help. But like every true prophet, everyone who truly speaks for God, he knows it's not about him, but it's all about God.

[22 : 56] It's all about what God says. And he doesn't flinch in this opportunity to witness, to point everyone to the living God. That's what Jesus himself says, isn't it, in Luke chapter 21, that it's when his people are hauled before courts, hauled before rulers.

That will be your opportunity for witness, he says. And that's Joseph here. Don't look to me, look to the living God. Not to your false gods, is what he's saying.

And that must be our word of witness, mustn't it? All we have of worth to pass on to the world of our day is the word of the living God. And that is the word always that challenges the false ideologies of man.

So here in verse 17 to 24, we're retold the dream, and it's very clear, isn't it, that Pharaoh knows enough to know that it's very threatening. It's troubled him, it's disturbed his complacency, disturbed the sense of power, the sense of control that he thought he had over his own life, over his own domain, his empire.

And that's often so, isn't it, when people are first confronted with the word of God, the gospel of God, the word of the scriptures. They might not understand very much at first, but it strikes fear, it strikes a discomfort into their lives.

[24 : 22] A fear that no mere human solution can help this disturbance that's come upon them. And the dream, as John Calvin says, leaves a sting in Pharaoh's heart.

It's a good way of putting it. But God is very gracious to him, and so in verses 25 to 32, he gives this explanation through Joseph. And it's a clear word, it's a sovereign word of warning about what God is going to do.

Notice verse 25 and verse 28. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. There'll be seven years of boom, and then seven years of such mighty bust that all the good times will be much, much more than undone.

Well, we don't know if Pharaoh thought he had abolished boom and bust as Gordon Brown, the former chancellor, once so fatefully proclaimed just before the almighty global financial crisis. But we do know that Pharaoh did think of himself as a God, and everybody else did. But even he could not prevent this because the true God is going to do it.

[25 : 28] Notice how there's just one brief sentence about the boom, the plenty, in verse 29. But in verse 30, there's five fateful clauses that lay out the extent and the severity of the bust, the famine that will follow.

Seven years of famine. The plenty will be forgotten. The famine will consume the land. The plenty will be unknown in the land. The famine will be very severe. It's a very clear word of warning, and it's a certain word, verse 32.

It is a thing fixed by God as the doubling of the dream signifies. God will shortly bring it about, says Joseph. He's in no doubt, just as he was in no doubt about the certainty of those double dreams of the two prisoners, remember.

And surely, we must also think, mustn't we, that he was also in no doubt all those years before about the double dreams that God had given to him, revealing his future. He believed God, and God surely credited it to him as righteousness.

God's revelation is clear, it's certain, and notice verse 33, it's commanding. You see, a true prophet, a true preacher, will always urge response to God's word, and will instruct and counsel what that response is to be, just as Peter did the apostle on the day of Pentecost.

[26 : 51] What must we do? You must repent in response, he said. And here, Joseph's passing on of God's solemn warning is followed, isn't it, by these words of saving wisdom.

Isn't that 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 a single government, at least in the western world, in these last few decades, does it?

To do such a thing. And the disastrous aftermath of our debt-fueled bonanza will be with us for decades to come.

Despite the belief of some politicians that thin cows will become fat cows if we just keep on borrowing and spending. It's so obvious, isn't it? Why do we get into such a mess? Well, you see, because whether we're Pharaoh or whether we're modern governments or indeed modern electorates, we don't really want to believe, do we, in a sovereign God?

[28 : 09] We don't want to believe that He is in control of all things. We don't want to believe that there is a morality at the heart of the universe. We want to think that we human beings are omnipotent, whether we're governments or economists or whoever we are.

We want to think that we can control the world. We can control its trade and its currencies and its prosperity and its culture and its harvest and food supplies, even its climate.

What an utter delusion. But that's what we think and we say things like, oh, it's all different now or things can only get better or we'll build back better.

They're rather ridiculous slogans, sinister slogans actually. See, when Pharaoh thinks he is God and when we think we're God, then we stop listening to sense, don't we?

And we turn truth into lies. And that is the very essence of what the Bible calls sin, turning truth into lies. But you see, God is merciful and he speaks words of merciful warning to mankind and words of saving wisdom.

[29 : 27] Save yourselves is the message by heeding his command. And notice that it's God's sovereignty that confers responsibility on human beings to act wisely or to bear the consequences.

Whether it's in matters of national survival as here or whether it's in matters of eternity. It's heeding God's wisdom alone that will save a nation from calamity and it is heeding God's wisdom alone that will save men and women from eternal calamity.

And unlike, it seems, most world rulers today, Pharaoh did humble himself to heed God's word through Joseph.

He recognized this was a divine word of power. And so 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 dreams, it is vindicated as God's servant. It's publicly vindicated here. And we see this staggering reversal once again.

[30 : 39] Joseph goes from being prisoner to president in a flash. From a sad victim to being the supreme vizier of all Egypt. And it's because, look at verse 38, God has displayed to everyone that his spirit is in this man.

And he's seen as a man who can mediate between God and man. He's a priestly figure in that sense. Scholars argue a bit about the exact role that Joseph's given.

Most likely it is that of the grand vizier of Egypt. And the archaeology gives evidence of all these robes and rings and chains and so on that are mentioned here. But clearly, whatever it is, he is the de facto ruler of all Egypt.

Well, remember what Daniel says to Nebuchadnezzar. God is sovereign. He gives kingdoms to whom he pleases. But notice above all how these verses emphasize the fulfillment of the revelation, the dreams that God gave Joseph all those years before.

Do you remember about the sheaves buying down, about the sun and the moon and the stars buying down to Joseph? Look here at verse 41. God has set him over all the land of Egypt, the empire.

[31 : 51] Verse 43, literally everyone is bowing the knee to Joseph. And it's repeated again and again. Verse 45, verse 46, in case we miss it, he's over all the land of Egypt, the great empire of the world in that day.

Don't really know what the new name means there in verse 45. Bruce Walkie says it most likely means God speaks and lives. And if so, 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 it's spoken by this man Joseph. It's very striking, this story, don't you think?

Here's Joseph, he's despised, he's rejected by his own family, by his own brothers. And yet he's recognized and he's honored by these pagans as a true man of God.

One who speaks to God and one through whom God speaks to man. And once again, it's such a constant pattern of the gospel story, isn't it? Think of the Lord Jesus, rejected by his own, and yet the whole world came after him.

[33 : 04] Think of the apostles who were scorned by their own religious establishment, cast out of the synagogues, but the Gentile were rejoiced in their gospel. And so it will always be, you see, because life-changing power and nation-saving power comes not, not from the impressive religion of the world, nor from the personal charisma of any man, but it comes from hearing the words of the true and living God.

And they are often spoken by very frail and feeble vessels. But that word is recognized for what it truly is. Not the word of men, but the word of the living God who is at work to bring salvation to those who will receive it gladly.

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

And these verses are pointedly showing us, aren't they, how God blesses and saves the whole known world through the gracious and wise rule of his anointed ruler, whom he's raised up at the place of being despised and rejected.

But now he's high and lifted up. He who was, to use Isaiah's words, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, cut off from the land of the living in the pit. But now, out of the anguish of his soul, he sees and is satisfied and by his knowledge many are saved.

[34 : 49] He rules wisely, verses 47 to 49, in the days of plenty. He stores up food in abundance. Notice verse 49, like the sand of the sea, the language is redolent, isn't it, of God's blessing and promise through Abraham.

And verses 53 to 57, he rules wisely in the days of famine. When all Egypt is in distress, the command is, go to Joseph, verse 55. What he says to you, do.

Strikingly similar, isn't it, to the words of Mary at that wedding in Cana of Galilee when the wine ran out. Remember? And she spoke of her son, what he says, do.

And verse 57 here says, all the earth came to Joseph and he gave them food to save them from death. The whole known world, all the families of the earth finding blessing, how?

Through the seed of Abraham, just as God had promised to the patriarch all those years ago. See, Joseph isn't just the prototype of the prophets who speak God's words to kings and the priests who speak to God on behalf of men.

[36 : 03] He foreshadows, he adumbrates God's promised king himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom was wisdom and discernment and on whom we're told the spirit rested in abundance.

I've alluded to those words of Isaiah the prophet about the servant king that he spoke of who would bring light to the Gentiles' darkness, whom the spirit of the Lord would rest upon in fullness, the spirit of wisdom and understanding.

As Isaiah says, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles, in him will the Gentiles hope. And you see, here in Joseph, we're getting a glimpse, a foretaste in former times of that glorious fulfillment that's still to come in all its glory.

But even here, way, way, way back at the beginning, the first book of the Bible, Genesis, we're hearing a whisper of the promise of that ruler to come.

And even here, the seed of promise is literally blessing the world in salvation from famine, from starvation. But all of this, you see, is just part of the great unfolding story of salvation, the saving of all God's people from something far worse, from the consequence of the curse of sin and death, through the Lord Jesus himself, the great Savior.

[37 : 28] And all of this is just part of that great plan. And God will use this to ultimately lead Joseph's whole family down into Egypt, where they will increase and multiply greatly, and then they'll go out from there back to Canaan, and they'll keep the Holy Seed alive all through the generations until at last that true king, David, came to reign in Jerusalem.

And then at last, great David's greatest son, the one who will arise to rule all nations, and now has been raised in the resurrection of Jesus from the pit to rule all nations.

See, we are not Joseph, as Bob Fio would tell us, but Joseph's story is our story, because he was part of that great story of the great king who rules over all, and so are we.

The spirit of the same God who was made known in all his radiant glory in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was in Joseph, he abides in all who love the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isn't that so? And we are promised, we will share in his glorious reign. Paul says, for all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God, fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him, just as Joseph did, in order that we also might be glorified with him.

[38 : 54] Paul says to Timothy, this we can trust, that if we have died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him. To use Joseph's word, the thing is fixed by God.

He will shortly bring it about. And friends, see that means that just as Joseph trusted and held on to God's promise about his future all through those days of darkness and in the end proved God true, so also we can trust God's promise to us in the gospel, no matter how dark the days are that we are living through or may have to live through.

We will also prove his promise true. We'll see the same pattern of death, and of resurrection. It will be played out in our own personal lives.

It will be played out in our church life again and again and again. But we will see it fulfilled ultimately and forever when the Lord Jesus comes in glory to reign. Because we are all part of this same story of Joseph's wonderful God.

But I want to finish just to come back to Joseph the man. Because although this is all about that great story, that great story of God's salvation, of his covenant promise unfolding all through history, it is about that, but it is also, it is also the story of God dealing with one man, one real flesh and blood man, one human being, just like you and me.

[40 : 32] We must never forget, must we, that although God does care infinitely for his great covenant, our God is a God who also cares very wonderfully for each one of his little children.

I think, if you look at verses 50 to 52, that little section that, you see it comes in between and divides the accounts of Joseph's rule in the time of plenty from his rule in the time of famine.

I think that points to something. Because they speak to us there of a sufficient reward for Joseph himself, the child of God. Let me quote to you something that struck me very much from my father's notes on this passage.

He says, 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.

[41 : 42] You see, these verses here, 50 to 52, seem to be just unimportant details about the names of Joseph's son, but in fact, they are so very revealing of his inner heart and his soul and what God had forged him into and the kind of man that he had become through all his trials.

Look, 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 sons forgetful and fruitful because he was saying that is what God has enabled me to be.

Do you see? Forgetful. With the right kind of forgetfulness. He doesn't mean that he'd really forgotten his family or his home of covenant faith. His very confession of God makes that very clear, but forgetful he means of all the affliction.

forgetful of all that would and so easily could have made him bitter, made him hardened as a person if he'd allowed those things to fester with him.

[42 : 55] But God, you see, had released him from that wonderfully. It's not enough, is it, if you go through hardship and trial and difficulty in life just to come out of it and make good.

There are many people in life who endure great hardship, all kinds of personal hurts and loss and disputes and injustice and all kinds of things and they do overcome. And the future becomes bright and prosperous.

Some of them get real success in life, in the career and family and even in Christian ministry, whatever it might be. But still, they can carry a chip on their shoulder right to the grave.

Isn't that so? Bitterness and resentment in their heart. the person who's therefore determined to prove a point, to prove themselves to others, to prove themselves to themselves, to prove

themselves to God.

And that attitude of bitterness can so easily just eat you up, can't it? If it's inside you. And it can also sadly poison others in just the same way.

[44 : 04] Very easy, isn't it, to become bitter. Even as Christians. That's why the Bible warns us so much against it, isn't it? Remember Hebrews 12.

Don't let a root of bitterness spring up and cause trouble and defile others. It's a very real warning. And if ever a man could have allowed bitterness to poison his life and then have the power to wreak revenge through your new position, it was Joseph.

But no, God granted him forgetfulness. Liberty from chasing the esteem of man.

Instead, gave him remembrance of all the goodness that he'd had at God's hand. Forgetfulness.

And fruitfulness. God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.

Well, of course, says those notes, affliction and fruitfulness are always united in the economy of God. It's the law of spiritual harvest that except a corn of wheat falls into the ground and die, it abideth alone.

[45 : 18] But if it die, it brings forth much fruit. inside of the presses of pain come with the soul's best wine.

Sometimes, don't we, we feel that we're perplexed, we're near despair, the struggles, with afflictions, with sorrows, whatever it may be. We feel as though these things may be leaving marks on our lives that we just will never get over.

Sometimes, perhaps, we feel that because of things that have happened to us or because of things that we've been involved with, we'll never, never again really be able to be useful to God and to others.

But friends, that is not so. It's not so. What God did for Joseph, He can, He does. He will do for you and me.

He can grant us forgetfulness, freedom from all the bitterness of the past and fruitfulness even, even in the land of our affliction.

[46 : 28] And I think that is perhaps the greatest evidence of God's grace at work in this whole chapter, the fragrant fruit of His Spirit in Joseph, in the life of this beloved child.

And wouldn't that be sufficient reward for us, for you and me in our lives and whatever difficult days we may find ourselves in or living through or perhaps are right at this moment.

See, the Bible promises so wonderfully true and certain. We shall reign in glory with Christ one day. But until then, meantime, Paul says, Godliness with contentment is a great gain, isn't it?

To be forgetful of all that would embitter us and fruitful even in the midst of affliction. So, my brothers and sisters, may it be our prayer that God would grant us to be forgetful of all that would embitter us and make us fruitful for him always, no matter what our afflictions so that the fragrant fruit of his, his Holy Spirit would be among us and as evident to all around us as it was to all around Joseph, as it was to all in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, let's make that our prayer. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we ask indeed that the mind of Christ, our great Savior, may live in us day after day after day and that his love and his power might control us and make us forgetful and fruitful for the glory of your kingdom both here, during our lives, and forever in glory.

[48 : 34] Amen.