

“Rub-A-Dub Dub, Three Men in a...”
Genesis 40:1-23
May 7th, 2017

His name was Walter Elias, a city boy by birth, the son of a building contractor. Before Walter was five, his parents moved from Chicago to a farm in rural Missouri. Some two years later, when he was 7, Walter was exploring in an apple orchard just beyond a grove of graceful willow trees on the farm.

He had an encounter with an owl, which he happened upon while it was sleeping. In the moments that followed, the owl lost its life, and Walter burst out of the orchard. He returned to bury the owl; each shovelful of dirt moistened by his tears of deep regret. For months after, the owl visited Walter’s dreams.

Though Walter could not bring that owl back to life, through its death a whole *world* of animals came into being. For it was then that a 7-year old boy first sought to possess the animals of the forest while allowing them to run free – by drawing them.

Now, that boy, too, is gone. But his drawings and several movies and major vacation destinations live on around the world, based on the incomparable, undying art of Walter Elias...Disney. Walt Disney.

Each of us has, at one time or another, held a dream of some future goal or outcome. Many girls dream of their wedding day and what that might entail. Others of us may have a dream home, or vehicle. Some aspire to a dream occupation or status. *Me?* Well, I had a very healthy imagination when I was a youngster – I dreamed of one day being a professional football and baseball player – simultaneously - the original Bo Jackson!

Yet, there is another facet of dreams beyond Disney World or even some hoped for life outcome. I speak of the dreams that come to us in sleep that seem to communicate something to or about us. We’ll be looking at the dreams that came to two of Pharaoh’s officers in the text of Scripture before us today.

I often don’t remember my dreams. This week I even asked God to give me a remembrance of them for this message. But instead, He’s allowed me to hear others speak of their dreams the last few days.

Genesis 40:1-23:

“It came to pass after these things *that* the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt. ² And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief butler and the chief baker. ³ So he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison, the place where Joseph *was* confined. ⁴ And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them; so they were in custody for a while.

⁵ Then the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, who *were* confined in the prison, had a dream, both of them, each man’s dream in one night *and* each man’s dream with its *own* interpretation. ⁶ And Joseph came in to them in the morning and looked at them, and saw that they *were* sad. ⁷ So he asked Pharaoh’s officers who *were* with him in the custody of his lord’s house, saying, “Why do you look *so* sad today?”

⁸ And they said to him, “We each have had a dream, and *there is* no interpreter of it.”

So Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell *them* to me, please.”

⁹ Then the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, “Behold, in my dream a vine *was* before me, ¹⁰ and in the vine *were* three branches; it *was* as though it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and its clusters brought forth ripe grapes. ¹¹ Then Pharaoh’s cup *was* in my hand; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh’s cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand.”

¹² And Joseph said to him, “This *is* the interpretation of it: The three branches *are* three days. ¹³ Now within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your place, and you will put Pharaoh’s cup in his hand according to the former manner, when you were his butler. ¹⁴ But remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house. ¹⁵ For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and also I have done nothing here that they should put me into the dungeon.”

¹⁶ When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said to Joseph, “I also *was* in my dream, and there *were* three white baskets on my head. ¹⁷ In the uppermost basket *were* all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, and the birds ate them out of the basket on my head.”

¹⁸ So Joseph answered and said, “This *is* the interpretation of it: The three baskets *are* three days.

¹⁹ Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head from you and hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh from you.”

²⁰ Now it came to pass on the third day, *which was* Pharaoh’s birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants. ²¹ Then he restored the chief butler to his butlership again, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand. ²² But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them. ²³ Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.”

3’s are wild in this passage. The dreams portrayed in this chapter are the middle of three “dream” couplings in these latter chapters of Genesis. The first two dreams God gave to Joseph while he was still at home (**Genesis 37:5-11**). The third coupling of dreams comes in chapter 41 to Pharaoh.

In this 40th chapter, we have three men in the king’s prison – a butler, a baker, and a candlestick maker ... er... Joseph. (Now you know why I’ve chosen the title I have – “Rub-a-Dub-Dub, Three Men in a...” dungeon – pit- jail – none rhyme with dub!)

Further, there are three branches in the butler’s dream, three baskets in the baker’s dream, and three days mentioned.

In like manner, I pose three questions from this text to answer:

Q. 1 – Why is Joseph in Prison?

Q. 2 – What is God’s Purpose for and Spiritual Benefit of Dreams?

Q. 3 – How does Joseph anticipate (point forward to) Jesus?

It’s been a couple weeks since we last studied Chapter 39, but looking there briefly will remind us **why Joseph was in prison**. Chapter 39 revealed that Joseph’s boss, Potiphar, put him (Joseph) in charge of the matters of his (Potiphar’s) household. His responsibilities required him to be often in the house and around Potiphar’s wife. She tried hard to get Joseph to be with her in a way only appropriate if they were married to one another.

But Joseph stood his ground. Things came to a head when she grabbed his garment one day, and he wriggled out of it, and fled the premises. Potiphar received a flawed report of what happened from his wife (she said Joseph tried to force himself on her), and he placed Joseph in the king’s prison. But, the chapter also revealed that the Lord was with Joseph and prospered him (**Genesis 39:2, 3, 4, 5, 21 & 23**).

That brings us to our second point, and the heart of the chapter – **the dreams of the butler and the baker**. Let’s address a first question in this point – *What purpose does God have in and through dreams?* The best way to answer such questions is to place ourselves under what God’s Word says, and not, primarily, to our experiences. Our feelings shouldn’t determine our doctrine; our doctrine should determine our feelings!

In the final few moments of the television show, *Newhart*, which ran from 1982-1990, Dick Loudon (Bob Newhart) is hit on the head by a wayward golf ball. When he wakes up, we learn that the entire series has been a dream of Newhart’s character, Dr. Bob Hartley, from his previous sitcom, *The Bob Newhart Show*.

I’d venture to guess many here are fans of the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*. The novel on which the film is based presents the world of Oz as a distant land in a real plane; the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, the Cowardly Lion... everybody is there. The film we love portrays Oz and his kingdom as part of Dorothy’s dream, and these same characters are people from her real life.

But, what of God’s intention for dreams in terms of His revelation? Put simply, dreams were a way God communicated with people before His written Word was fully completed. Our dreams can have a major impact on us because they can be very vivid, powerful, and unforgettable. But, it’s worth noting that dreams do not have much significance in the Bible.

“The Bible is a big book covering many thousands of years in history. But there are only three places in the Bible where dreams figure prominently. In the Old Testament, dreams are restricted to (the books of) Genesis and Daniel. In the New Testament, (we learn) people sometimes had visions, as John did on the island of Patmos. But strictly speaking, there are only six dreams (in the New Testament), and all these occur in Matthew’s gospel account.

That begs another question, then – *of what benefit, spiritually, are dreams for us? Did these (dreams in Scripture) reveal the future?* Yes. But largely at a time when the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament had not been given. This was clearly the case with Genesis; and with Daniel the dreams were part of the revelation that God was then giving. We are wise to conclude that today dreams are not revelations from God, though they may be accurate reflections of our own subconscious states. For a true and trustworthy revelation we are to turn to Scripture alone, *Sola Scriptura.*” (Boice, 951)

Hebrews 1:1-2 helps us to understand the place of God’s Word in communicating His will for us. There we read:

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² has in these last days spoken to us by *His Son*, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;”

Before Jesus came to earth in human attire that first Christmas, God spoke through incredible miracles like the plagues on Egypt and the dividing of the Red Sea. He also gave His people a divine word when He gave The Ten Commandments through Moses. God also called prophets to speak His word to His people. But, with the first coming of Jesus Christ to earth, His revelation is complete. We have all that God desired for us to have in this book!

Our third question is determining **how Joseph anticipates** (points forward) **to Jesus**.

* In the first three verses of this chapter, Joseph was numbered with transgressors in the king's prison – the butler and the baker. Likewise, Jesus was numbered with the transgressors (**Isaiah 53:12**) and it was so in **Mark 15:28**.

* In **Genesis 40:16, 17, & 19**, Joseph is the means of blessing to one of his prison mates, but he was the pronouncer of judgment on the other; correspondingly Jesus was a blessing to one of the thieves He was crucified between (**Luke 23:43**).

* Joseph evidenced his knowledge of the future and gave credit to God alone (verse 8); as Jesus did the same on earth (**John 12:49-50**).

* Joseph desired to be remembered by the butler (verse 14); as Jesus said of the Lord's Supper, "This do in remembrance of Me." (**Luke 22:19**)

And, that brings me to a couple of applications from this text.

1 – The fruit of the branches of the vine in the butler's dream, and the baked breads in the baker's dream make up the elements of the Lord's Supper (communion) – the wine and the bread. Astonishingly, we come to this on one of the 12 Sundays in which we celebrate communion as part of our Sunday worship.

2 – Don't miss **Joseph's courage** in sharing the tough news God had for the baker. As witnesses to Jesus Christ, each of us, fellow Christian, are to be courageous in proclaiming God's life-changing gospel message to an unbelieving world. Unfortunately, sometimes those in the local church are reluctant to do so because their *pastors* are reluctant to preach the whole counsel of God's Word. The late James Montgomery Boice's thoughts here are helpful:

"How many there are who are willing to preach the butler's sermon, but are unwilling to preach the baker's sermon! They are afraid to stand before a congregation and say that they are members of Adam's fallen race, under the curse of God's broken law, and that if they had what was coming to them, they would all end up in the hell that God has prepared to punish sinners. They are afraid to say that God has appointed but one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, and that if they are not united to Him by saving faith, they will perish miserably. They preach that God loves sinners, but they will not preach that God hates sin. They preach about heaven, but they will not warn about hell." (Boice, 953)

Friends, pray for your pastors and Bible teachers to boldly and fearlessly proclaim God's Word. And, then, do it yourself – speaking the truth in love – as you bring Jesus into conversations in your home, with your neighbors and extended family members, and engage in the market place, schools, or other places people congregate. Fight the tendency to withdraw from a fallen world that seems to continue spinning wildly out of sensible control!

3 – Despite his request of the butler to remember Joseph after he was released from prison, the butler forgot Joseph. It would be two full years (**Genesis 41:1**) until God comes to Pharaoh in a dream, and Joseph is once again needed to interpret.

Two years! That’s a long time to wait because you’ve been treated unjustly. You may be in a similar state – and maybe even more than two years have passed. You are not in a literal prison, but you are in a prison of circumstance. You are trapped by life. For some of you, this may mean working the same dull job day after day; or enduring the same abuse and mistreatment by bosses, spouses, or others; for others, it means the same problems day after day – it can be a marriage that appears to be broken beyond repair...I could go on.

Yet, God’s timetable is often longer than our own. It takes 100 years for an oak tree to reach its peak! Consider some of the Bible’s greats - Abram waited 14 years for the son God promised to give him (Isaac); Moses was in the desert for 40 years; and David was anointed by Samuel as a boy, and then endured long years of delay in the fields of Judea, and then his flight from Saul and hiding in caves in Adullam.

Such delays can make a person bitter. It may have been so for Joseph, but it did not embitter him. On the contrary, his circumstances steadied Joseph and deepened his character. Disappointment, monotony, and even betrayal do not have to make you rebellious. “Instead of the iron entering into your soul, the iron can enter your backbone and you can be made compassionate and trusting at the same time.

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In the movie, *Papillon*, the main character, Henri Charriere, played by Steve McQueen, was a criminal who was imprisoned for life for crimes against the French state. The movie portrayed the dreams he had while in prison.

In one dream, he stood before a tribunal for a crime. He pleaded with the judge that he was not guilty of the crime for which he was being tried. The judge replied that he was not being tried for that crime, but for a crime that is the most heinous crime of the human race.

Papillon asked what crime it was. The judge answered, “The crime of a wasted life.”

Papillon wept, “Guilty, guilty!” The judge pronounced the sentence of death.

Yours is a wasted life if you live for anyone – or anything – aside from Jesus!