

Patience in Righteousness

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[0 : 00] Okay, I really shouldn't be boasting, but I will. And that is, as I look back over the last few years, I have to say that my culinary skills have really improved.

Just this week, I made Thai fried rice for the very first time. There's a picture of that on the thing. Now, if you want to know whether it tastes as good as it looks, then you have to ask my two girls because they tasted it.

Okay, now I mention this because I actually credit watching MasterChef for this improvement. I might even, I don't know, should I bring this dish on Saturday? I don't know.

You see, like other cooking shows, MasterChef actually shows you how dishes are made. It's not like, you know, going to a restaurant where they just put it on the table and the final dish is served or the dish is served as a final product.

Instead, you know, you get the recipes online and then you can watch the program, see how it's done, you know, from war to go, you know, what the ingredients are, what the approach is, what the method is, how you've got to, you know, just get it right, put the thermometer in and all that kind of stuff.

[1 : 08] Well, tonight, I'm going to try and do something similar with our sermon. So instead of just the usual sermon, I'm also going to try and explain how we, as pastors, work out how to interpret and apply the passage.

And the reason is because unlike the New Testament, reading the Old Testament can often be tricky. The truth isn't presented as a series of do's and don'ts. Rather, a lot of Old Testament is narrative, history in story form.

And even things like the Ten Commandments are actually set within a historical context. So working out how to apply and preach it can be confusing.

But hopefully tonight, we'll look at some principles on how to do it. Now, the aim is not to train all of you as preachers, even though some of you are learning to do that, but really it's to help you when you read the Bible yourselves or when you do Bible studies together.

Because the reality is, it's often easy to miss the point and therefore to apply the passage in the wrong way. So that's why we're going to have some questions at the end as well relating to this particular aspect of it.

[2 : 23] So as Helen has said, if you've got anything, just jot them down and then we'll have a mic go around and people can ask and hopefully I can answer. So what we're going to do is try and fly through the narrative or the story relatively quickly and then spend a bit more time on application.

All right, so with that explanation out of the way, let's begin, shall we? Last week, we saw that Joseph was in prison and the reason was he was in prison because he didn't give in to Potiphar's wife and her sexual advances.

But now here in verse 1, Joseph is joined by two men. One is Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and the other is his chief baker.

Now these were key roles in Pharaoh's court because they had the job of protecting Pharaoh. They had the job of protecting him from being poisoned by either food or wine.

Anyway, we find that they both offended the king. I don't know, maybe he had diarrhea or something and they couldn't work out whether it was the wine or the food and saw both in the prison.

[3 : 33] Maybe, just a guess. But in any case, both of them found themselves in prison and under Joseph's custody. Now in verse 5, we discover that each had a dream and on the same night, but no one could interpret them.

So come the morning, Joseph sees their dejection and asks, why so sad? To which they let on that they've had a dream but they couldn't decipher the meaning of it. Well, Joseph tells them in verse 8, if you look at it, do not interpretations belong to God.

Tell me your dreams. And so what we have from verse 9 to 22 are the retelling and the interpretation of both dreams. I won't read it again as Victor has already done it, but essentially the cupbearer's dream is favourable for him.

The three vine bunches represent three days and they bud, blossom and then cluster, ripen and the cluster ripens into grapes, which are then squeezed into Pharaoh's cup and put into his hands.

All of this means, Joseph says, that he will be restored to his position. Or the words that Joseph says, Pharaoh will lift his head up.

[4 : 48] Now, knowing this, Joseph then inserts a little plea for kindness in verse 14. He says, When all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness.

Mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews and even here I've done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon.

Now, the baker notices the similarities that his dream has with the cupbearers and so he's hopeful of a similar interpretation as well.

And because he's a baker, his dream has baked goods. Yummo. I wanted to put a visual up for you, but I couldn't decide whether it was going to be French bakery or the Chinese bread top variety.

So you get both. Okay, sorry to make you hungry, but anyway, back to the dream. And sadly for the baker, it's the birds and not Pharaoh that get into the basket to eat from his head.

[5 : 50] And so in verse 18, Joseph tells the baker that Pharaoh will lift his head too in three days. Same words, except it will be lifted clean off his body and he'll be impaled on a pole for the birds to eat.

I decided not to have a picture of that one, just to spare you. But true enough, both predictions come true. So in verse 20, the third day was Pharaoh's birthday and he had a feast for the officials and he lifted up both the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker.

He restored the chief cupbearer to his position so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh's hand, but he impaled the chief baker just as Joseph has said to them in his interpretation.

And then sadly in verse 23, in amongst the midst of all that excitement, the cupbearer did not remember Joseph nor his plea. So that's the story and point one.

But there are a few details to notice in this story, which I'm going to point out now, all of which I think help you to interpret the passage and work out what the point of it is. And normally, often, how you can do this is to pick those things where you see patterns or repetition in the story or spotting details that are either surprising or unexpected.

[7 : 17] So I have three over there in point two. So the first is that we get the sense of the long-suffering nature of Joseph's suffering. So in verse 1, we read that it was sometime later that the cupbearer and baker are in prison with Joseph, sometime later from when he first got into prison.

And then later in verse 4, we read again that it's only after they've been in custody for some time that the dreams come to them. And then when we read in verses 14 and 15, Joseph reveals when this whole ordeal started for him.

He says it's from the time he was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews. That was when he was put in a cistern. If you remember chapter 37 by his brothers, the word there is a Hebrew word for pit, all the way to where he finds himself now in a dungeon, which is actually the same Hebrew word that was used for pit in chapter 37.

So he's really saying from pit to pit, this is one long episode in the pits, as it were. And when we look at chapter 41 next week, we can actually calculate that this whole period was 11 long years.

So he was 17 in chapter 37 when he was carried off, and he's 13 next chapter when he's promoted by Pharaoh. And in verse 1 of the next chapter, we are told that it was two full years between the end of chapter 40 and the start of chapter 41.

[8 : 47] So this is long-suffering suffering. By contrast, you'll notice how quickly the justice actually comes in this story. Three days, isn't it, between the dream and the fulfillment.

And so the sense is that as the drama is unfolding quickly from one chapter to the next, it's actually punctuated by long waiting periods between the chapter.

Joseph spent years when actually not much happens, when God doesn't seem to be doing anything. Well, that's the first detail to notice.

The second is that we notice that with these dreams, there is now an inkling of things to come. Now, we had two opening dreams in chapter 37, if you remember.

They were about Joseph, of which no interpretation was needed. And they still remain unfulfilled. Now, we've got two dreams with two different outcomes.

[9 : 47] But here, Joseph's no longer the subject, but the interpreter. And in a sense, these dreams actually aren't that important in and of themselves. And the reason being is that they're merely talking about the fate of two people.

And so, they're really only precursors to the next set of dreams, those of Pharaoh's. But now, we're being prepared to make sense of those dreams.

Because in verse 8, both men says that they can't, no one is able to interpret the dreams. And this is exactly what Pharaoh will say in the next chapter. As well, Joseph's response is, do not interpretations belong to God.

And that, again, is similar to what he will say to Pharaoh next week. And so, we're made to see that these dreams are all from God, who's the only one capable of interpreting them and bringing them to fulfillment.

Not just these two, but all the dreams that will be in this whole narrative. But the thing is that even though God alone is sovereign, he actually appoints one man, Joseph, to interpret on his behalf.

[11 : 01] Joseph becomes God's agent in bringing his plan to pass. And it's precisely this ability of his that he uses here that brings him to the attention of Pharaoh next week through the word of the cupbearer.

And then finally, the third detail to notice is the reminders of remembering. So, in verse 14, when all goes well, Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him.

And that is contrasted by what we hear in verse 23, that actually he failed to remember. There's actually an emphasis there through repetition. He failed to remember, he did not remember, and he forgot Joseph.

Now, if you know Genesis well, then you'll recall the significance of remembering in Genesis. You'll be reminded of how God himself remembers at key points in Genesis.

So, we've got the verses up on the screen. At the height of the flood, after the earth had been flooded 150 days, chapter 8 and verse 1, God remembers Noah and rescues him, his family and the animals, and restarts creation, as it were, again.

[12 : 19] Then, as Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed, chapter 19 and verse 29, God remembered Abraham and rescues Lot from the city. And then, in chapter 30, in verse 23, it says, God remembered Rachel after she'd been barren for many years.

And guess who that child was? It was Joseph, wasn't it? And then, later on, it's not in Genesis, but we may turn to Exodus.

What we see near the start of Exodus is that God again hears the groans of Israel, chapter 2, and remembers his covenant to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And so, when we come to this passage and we read that the cupbearer didn't remember, it makes us ask, what about God? Will he remember?

And if he does, when will he do it? Well, we're all primed to find out, aren't we? And we'll do that over the next few chapters. Well, point two, having picked up all these details, what then are we to do with them in terms of working out the application for this passage?

[13 : 38] Where do we go with all these details? Well, in real estate, they always say it's about location, location, location, right? Well, in Bible interpretation, it's all about context, context, context.

Or Don Carson once said, a text taken out of context is a pretext for a proof text. In other words, it's a pretty good line. In other words, good interpretation is all about context.

And over the last few weeks, hopefully you've heard me refer to that context each week. So, let's look at point three, where the first thing we see is that the first context to take in mind is the big idea of Joseph's narrative.

that is all the way from 37 to chapter 50 of Genesis. And that big idea is in Genesis chapter 50 and verse 20, as I've said in the first week, that God is sovereign and He's able to accomplish His plan of salvation, even when humans seek to do harm.

And so, as we read each passage every week, that's the first context we need to keep in mind. God is working to bring His plan to pass, no matter the circumstance, no matter the machinations of humans.

[14 : 53] salvation in the context of the Joseph narrative is the famine. But apart from saving people physically in Egypt and Canaan, integral to God's plan is also the preservation or the saving of Jacob's family.

Because that's the big idea, the next context, of the entire book of Genesis. Remember how I said the key question running through was who is the seed or the offspring?

Well, if you go all the way back to Genesis chapter 3, that's where we first encountered the word seed offspring. Genesis chapter 3 and verse 15 because as a result of sin, God has put enmity between the seed of the woman, Eve, and the serpent, which signifies evil.

But then when we get to Genesis chapter 12, we discover that God has chosen Abraham and it's through him and his seed, an offspring, that salvation will come into the world.

So one verse that says this is in Genesis chapter 12 and verse 7 where it says it's to his offspring that God will give the land and bless him. And this thread then runs right through Genesis so that when we come to the Joseph narrative, we understand that God is working through Joseph not simply to save people from famine, but to preserve Jacob's family as well through whom Abraham's seed will come.

[16 : 26] And so whenever we speak of God's plan in the narrative, it's this grand plan of salvation that needs to always be in the back of our minds. We need to remember that this grand plan culminates with the coming of God's son, Jesus, as Abraham's seed so that by his death, forgiveness of sins is given to all who put their trust in him.

And that part of this plan as well involves the sending of Christ's disciples, that's us, to be witnesses for him until he returns in glory and judgment. And so when we think about God's plan for us as we look at this text and the narrative, whether it's as individuals or as a church, we mustn't think that God's plan is a personal plan for us which consists of our dreams and our goals and our aims.

That would be to misunderstand God's plan for you as though God is going to come along and put a seal of approval on your plan. Rather, when we think about God's plan, then it's about each of us as Christians submitting our lives to God's big plan bringing salvation to the world through Christ.

That is the plan that we need to be thinking about when we try and apply the passage. And so it is true these two lenses, as it were, these two big ideas, God's sovereignty on one hand and God's sovereign plan that we then look now at the specifics of each passage to see how it gives us the final points to apply practically these two big ideas in our lives.

So we come to the second principle, that of seeing in Joseph things to apply for us. And here, the second principle we need to take account of is how we relate to the main character or in other cases, main characters of the narrative.

[18 : 33] And commonly, the mistake that's often made is that people often gravitate immediately to putting themselves in the shoes of the characters. So in this instance, they would read about Joseph and they'll think, ah, whatever happens to Joseph, that's what will happen to me.

So if they see that God did this or that for Joseph, then they'll say, oh, if I do the same as Joseph does, then God will do it for me. But when we do that, what we've done is we've actually skipped a crucial step in the interpretation.

Because often, what we need to ask first is whether the characters are types of Christ. I used that term last week and what that means is, is this person, as presented in the Bible, a precursor or a shadow of what Christ will do?

And so with Joseph, who is a type of Christ, then what we should be doing, first of all, is putting Jesus in his shoes rather than putting ourselves in Joseph's shoes.

And we then are almost like people relating to Joseph in the story in the same way that we relate to Jesus himself. So let me give you an example.

[19 : 53] In chapter 37, when Joseph was forced into slavery, we're not like Joseph because Joseph is the Jesus figure. rather, we're more like the brothers. And in Jesus' own life, during his time, the equivalent of the brothers were actually the elders and the chief priests who opposed and went against Jesus.

Likewise, in chapter 37, we have to ask ourselves whether we're like the brothers in terms of how we're relating to Joseph or Jesus. Likewise, as we see Joseph saving the world in the next few weeks, then we're more like the Egyptians and the Israelites that Joseph saves rather than being Joseph himself thinking that God has called us to save others.

Does that make sort of sense? So we need to be careful and it's not always the case that there will be an equivalent, but we need to be asking that question first.

Is the main character, the hero, a type of Christ rather than saying, well, we are the hero just like the hero in the passage. Now, as I said, sometimes we can't really apply or put that into practice.

So, for example, in this week's passage, for example, I don't think we should be identifying ourselves as either the cupbearer or the baker. Okay, so it doesn't always work, but it's worth asking that question.

[21 : 23] And the reason that the Bible has types of Christ, just to do a bit of diversion, is that there are many, and there are many in the Old Testament, is that types of Christ are also fulfillment of God's promises to us when Jesus finally comes.

A lot of times we see promises as only things that are given explicitly in words of prophecy. But often, fulfillment also comes in terms of types, whether they're events, symbols, or characters that are shadows or precursors of some aspect of Jesus.

So, many of you, for example, would know that the Lamb at the Passover is a type of Christ because ultimately, Jesus becomes the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Similarly, King David is also a type of Christ because Jesus will come along and be the more and the most powerful king over all of Israel.

So, likewise here, Joseph is a type of Christ and we'll see this in his entire life in Egypt because there are a lot of echoes of what he does that Jesus himself would do when he comes to earth.

And next week, Daniel will cover some of them. And so, whatever amazing thing that God is going to be doing through Joseph in Genesis, what it does is actually remind us that God does this in an even more amazing and wonderful way through his son, Jesus.

[22 : 54] That's how we're meant to connect the passage to us or to Jesus. So, to be saved from eternal judgment by Jesus is way better than to be saved just from famine by Joseph.

For God to use Joseph to reveal his plans, well, Jesus does it in an even more spectacular way because he not only reveals God's plan, he reveals God himself because he's the son of God.

And so on and so forth. We could keep going on with examples. And now, when we see, it's only when we have all these big pieces in place, the two big ideas of the context as well as the type of Christ, then we can start to then work out how this particular passage is to be applied to us.

All this big picture stuff, if you want a technical term, is called biblical theology. And so, only when we have considered all of that that we can then say that Joseph might in some way be an example and encouragement for us as well.

Because a lot of times we go straight to Joseph being the example. But that's really just the final point. And when we look at Joseph as the example, we need to apply it in the context of all these other big picture stuff.

[24 : 21] So, for instance, we're not called to be like Joseph in interpreting dreams. Nor does it teach that God only speaks to us through dreams.

Rather, today, the lesson is about patience. But even the lesson about patience has to be carefully applied. Because I don't think it means to say that if only I'm patient, then God will always get me out of a horrible situation.

That's not the application from this passage. Rather, it teaches us that if we are patient, we can be patient because we know Christ will return, then God will put everything right.

that's the promise when Christ returns. He will do that because that's part of his big plan of salvation, not your individual plan for you as to what you will do in your life.

And so, we're called to live like Joseph as Christ's disciples, to be patient and righteous as we wait on God and on the return of his son.

[25 : 28] Now, of course, if there's also a New Testament passage that explicitly supports this application, then all the better. And we do have that tonight in that second reading, don't we? Where we were urged to remember that with the Lord, a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day.

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise as some understand slowness. Instead, he's patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. And so, in view of that, the fearful coming of the Lord, we are to then live holy and godly lives as we look forward to the day of God and speed his coming.

And so, like Joseph, even if others forget us, we can know that God remembers and he will always bring his promises regarding his big plan to pass.

One of the interesting things about Joseph is that he's actually never told why he needs to wait so long, does he? Is it because God wants to prepare him as a leader?

Is it to prepare his brothers so that they will change their ways? We can only sort of imply and guess, but we can't know for sure, can we?

[26 : 49] And that's the same with us. Why do we have to wait so long for God to do good in our lives, as we are sometimes? And why is it sometimes that justice isn't even fully done at the end?

Now the reading in Peter says that sometimes God wants to give us time to repent, because when the judgment of God comes, it will be a fearful thing. But at other times, we don't really know, do we?

It's not always about repentance. Just on Wednesday night, there was an older couple from nine o'clock who told me that their house had been broken into just a couple weeks ago. 35 years they've been in that home, and it's the first time it's happened to them.

They've only gone for an hour, I think they went to Kurong or something, right in the middle of the day, but when they came back, everything was ransacked, and yet the intruders took nothing. They were shaken, a little angry, but then they concluded to me at the end that even though they may not understand, they thought that what God was trying to teach them was to trust in him more.

What a great attitude of faith. They didn't understand, but they knew that whatever it was, God was teaching them to trust him more. Can we have that same trust when we're waiting on God?

[28 : 17] That everything God does in our lives is actually for our good. Even if we don't understand exactly why sometimes. Well, the truth is, God does.

That's the comforting thing that despite our trials and tribulation, God hasn't forgotten us at all. He knows what's happening to us, what we're going through, and even why, even though he may not say so.

And so we can trust him. We can trust in Jesus. Or as Peter puts it, we can lead holy and godly lives, patiently looking forward to and speeding the day of God.

So let me encourage you, if you're waiting at the moment, to put your trust in God. He may not tell you why, but you can be assured that he's working things out according to his big plan, and that plan includes blessing for you, even though you may have to wait and be patient.

Let's pray. Father, we ask for the patience of Joseph, who knew that you are sovereign, and that even if others may forget us, and may do us harm even, yet help us to remember that you remember us in our weakness, and come to our rescue.

[29 : 41] Thank you that you have already saved us in Christ Jesus. Help us to lead patient but righteous lives, as we look forward to the new heavens and the new earth, where righteousness and only righteousness dwells.

We pray this in the name of the King of Righteousness, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.