

The Story of Joseph

Serving Time

Part 25 – September 9, 2012



At the beginning of chapter 39, Joseph is rightly moved into Potiphar's house, and "The Lord gave him success in everything he did" (39:3b) At the end of the chapter, he's wrongly tossed into Pharaoh's prison, and "the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did". (39:23b)



The world defines success by circumstances; God defines success by our depth of intimacy with *Him*, and our ministry to *others*. Joseph is more successful at the *end* of 39 than the beginning! Today, we'll see precisely what makes Joseph *so* unique, *so* special, and ultimately *so successful!*

But, shhh, he's still sleeping in his cell, and dreaming those dreams of greatness: the sheaves of wheat, and the sun and moon and stars, all bowing down before him, and serving him. (Gen 37:7, 9)

Then he wakes and adjusts his shackles. 11 years have passed since he was sold; he's 28 now, and enslaved and imprisoned in the huge, cistern-shaped dungeon under Potiphar's house. He sure doesn't *feel* successful; in *his* family and in *all Egypt*, greatness is defined by the number of *people* who serve you.

Some time later, [the dungeon door, high on the landing, opens, three men shuffle in, silhouetted by dazzling daylight, and cause a stir among the VIP inmates] the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended ['sinned against'] their master, the king of Egypt. – *Genesis 40:1 NIV*



These were positions of great honor and great trust. Pharaoh was regarded as divine, so to offend him was to sin against god (with a little 'g'). This is a 4000-year-old model of a bakery and brewery that was overseen by an Egyptian Chancellor, about 60 years before Joseph was born. The cupbearer oversaw the royal vineyards and wine cellar and served at Pharaoh's side. He'd pour wine into his own palm to taste for poison.

Egyptian, Middle Kingdom Model from the Tomb of Chancellor Meketre, BC 1981-1975



That's why he was also called the wine taster.

The chief baker oversaw the 30+ varieties of bread that were served to the king.

The Pharaoh would've had a chief butcher, a chief cook, and a chief pastry chef as well, each with their own trained staff.



Pharaoh [god with a little 'g'] was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, and put them in custody in [or rather, 'under'] the house of the captain of the guard, [that's Potiphar (39:1)] in the same prison where Joseph was confined. [These verses just ooze God's sovereignty, and remind us how He can work within and through any human institution or structure or government without being limited by 'em in the least] The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended ['waited on'] them. – Genesis 40:2-4a NIV

Last week we looked at how far Joseph has been “pushed down this well”. Not only has Potiphar wrongly imprisoned his onetime chief of staff, now he's got him *servicing* criminal servants! So what's *all this* say about Potiphar? He still trusts Joseph! What's it say about *Joseph*?! He still trusts *God*. Well, what's it say about *God*? He wants us to trust *Him* ... and attend *others*.

After they had been in custody for some time, [This term can mean minutes or months; judging from the story, it's probably a few days] each of the two men — the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in prison — had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. [I'm saving their dreams, their crime, and their personalities for next week, but we'll flash-forward to the cupbearer's dream, for a quick summary] – Genesis 40:4b-5 NIV



Tomb of Kha, 1428-1351 BC

Know what this is? A bowl of grapes, from an Egyptian tomb, undisturbed for 3,400 years!

[The wine taster says] “In my dream I saw a vine in front of me, and on the vine were three branches. As soon as it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes. Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup and put the cup in his hand.” – Genesis 40:9b-11 NIV



Mortuary Temple, Mentuhotep II, c. 2010 BC

Ever see that 100-year-old fruit cake on TV? Well, this 4000-year-old loaf of Egyptian flat bread was about 100 when Joseph was confined.

[The bread baker says] “I too had a dream: On my head were three baskets of bread. In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head.” – Genesis 40:16b-17 NIV

The cupbearer and baker assume the (little 'g') gods are speaking, but can't get to a royal interpreter. And they have no clue that God (with the big "G") is orchestrating *everything*. But we do, 'cause we can read ahead! I'll let you in on it, real quick. The cupbearer's dream symbolized new life, forgiveness, and restoration of his former relationship with the king.

To the cupbearer, Joseph says, “Pharaoh will lift *up* your head and restore you”. The baker's dream symbolized judgment, death, and a broken body. Joseph says, “Pharaoh will lift *off* your head and hang [impale] you on a tree”. (Gen 40:13, 19)

The three branches and three baskets are three days. Pharaoh's birthday is three days away, and he'll unwittingly fulfill both prophetic interpretations during the celebration.

[Back to the morning of their mysterious dreams] When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. So he asked Pharaoh's officials who were in custody with him in his master's house, "Why are your faces so sad today?" – *Genesis 40:6-7 NIV*

And *this is precisely* what makes Joseph so unique, so special, and ultimately so successful! Even though he's been poured out and broken, he's *more concerned* about those in the *same predicament!* It's not that we *ignore* our pain, but that we comfort *others* in spite of it. Don't waste time demanding *relief* when God is only offering *comfort*. Do you know the difference? A marathon is 26 miles. Relief would be a recliner, a foot massage, and a milkshake at mile 24. But *comfort* is a paper cup of Gatorade and the encouragement to press on!

[That's why Paul says] Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. – *2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NIV*



Each tragedy increased Joseph's capacity to serve. As a son, he served himself; as a slave he served a household; as an inmate he's serving a prison filled with Egypt's VIPs; and as a ruler, he'll serve a nation, and beyond, during the famine. In his dreams, everything was bowing, but *nothing* was serving! God was pointing to a time when all of Egypt, the known world, and his own family, would come before him, so *he* could serve 'em! God is teaching him the great truth of what true greatness is!



[Jesus had to teach this to His own disciples; He said] "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." – *Matthew 20:26-28 NIV*

Ever wonder when or how *Jesus* learned these things? Luke says He "increased in wisdom" (Luke 2:40), but God *is* wisdom; He can't *increase* unless He 'makes room', which is just what Paul says He did.

... [Jesus] made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. – *Philippians 2:6-8 NIV*

Somehow, the great truth was revealed to Jesus by His own Holy Spirit, and through His Word, and religious feasts and fasts, and ceremonies and regulations, and most importantly ... Passover.



Once a year, Israel celebrates the night of the 10th plague, when the Angel of Death came to Egypt, and passed over the homes marked by the blood of an unblemished lamb. (Exodus 12:1-50) Unleavened bread, prepared for the following day's exodus, is a major symbol of Passover. And the Lord instructed Moses to include wine, which was associated with Jewish festivals, from the very beginning.

"This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance." – *Exodus 12:14 NIV*



By Jesus' day, the red wine had come to represent the blood of the unblemished lamb, and redemption, and the joy of salvation. Luke records the only account of Jesus' boyhood: Passover in Jerusalem (when a 12-year-old would've watched an innocent lamb being led to the slaughter for the sins of His people).

[Luke bookends the account with near identical statements]

And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. – Luke 2:52 NIV

The great truth the boy Jesus grew to comprehend is that the innocent lamb is *him*, the broken bread *his body*, the wine *his blood*, poured out for the redemption of sin.



In His last words at the Last Supper, He reveals the great truth *of the great truth*: God is the servant of *all* and served by *none!*

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." – Luke 22:19-20 NIV

God is the *Master Servant!* Even the term, "serving God" is a misnomer. All it can really mean is that we're "*pleasing God*" by serving *others* in *His* name.

Just as Israel was officially ushered *out of* Egypt through an innocent lamb and the bread and wine, so to they were ushered *into* Egypt through an innocent man and the bread and wine officials. Three days later, the body of the bread baker was broken, the wine taster was forgiven and restored, and 'god' made death and life part of his party (that's 'god' with a little 'g' and a big 'G').

And just as Jesus, *our* Passover Lamb, learned the great truth of true greatness through the bread and the wine, so to, Joseph is learning it through the chief baker and the cupbearer. But, shhh, he's sleeping again, in his cell, and dreaming ... someone who looks like a perfect lamb without spot or blemish is speaking to Joseph *and* the cupbearer and the baker ...

"You've always had the power of true greatness within you." "I have?!" "Then why didn't you tell him before?" "Because, he wouldn't have believed me; he had to learn it for himself." "What have you learned, Joseph?" "Well, I think that *true greatness can't be served; true greatness is to serve!*" "But that's so easy; I should've distilled it for him, like wine!" "It should've risen upon my hearth, like bread!" "No. He had to find it out for himself. Everyone does. But, not all do."

And now, once again, the sheaves of wheat, and the sun and moon and stars, are all bowing down before him ... but *this time* it is Joseph who is doing *all* the serving.

Let's let him sleep, he's got a *big day* tomorrow. He doesn't know it, but he's only *half* finished foreshadowing the Messiah. So, this is where we'll quietly close God's story for today.