

## God's Witness Before Pharaoh (6)

*The Life of Joseph*

By Rev. Garrett Eriks

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** Genesis 41:1-36  
**Preached on:** Sunday, May 18, 2014

### Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church

5101 Beechtree Street  
Hudsonville, MI 49426

**Website:** [www.hudsonvilleprc.org](http://www.hudsonvilleprc.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/hudsonvilleprc](http://www.sermonaudio.com/hudsonvilleprc)

We turn in God's word this morning to Genesis 41. Genesis 41. The text this morning will be the first 36 verses of the chapter. We're going to read just a little bit past. I'll read the first 45 verses of the chapter. Genesis 41,

1 And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed: and, behold, he stood by the river. 2 And, behold, there came up out of the river seven well favoured kine and fatfleshed; and they fed in a meadow. 3 And, behold, seven other kine came up after them out of the river, ill favoured and leanfleshed; and stood by the other kine upon the brink of the river. 4 And the ill favoured and leanfleshed kine did eat up the seven well favoured and fat kine. So Pharaoh awoke. 5 And he slept and dreamed the second time: and, behold, seven ears of corn came up upon one stalk, rank and good. 6 And, behold, seven thin ears and blasted with the east wind sprung up after them. 7 And the seven thin ears devoured the seven rank and full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and, behold, it was a dream. 8 And it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof: and Pharaoh told them his dream; but there was none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh. 9 Then spake the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying, I do remember my faults this day: 10 Pharaoh was wroth with his servants, and put me in ward in the captain of the guard's house, both me and the chief baker: 11 And we dreamed a dream in one night, I and he; we dreamed each man according to the interpretation of his dream. 12 And there was there with us a young man, an Hebrew, servant to the captain of the guard; and we told him, and he interpreted to us our dreams; to each man according to his dream he did interpret. 13 And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was; me he restored unto mine office, and him he hanged. 14 Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh. 15 And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, that thou canst understand a dream to interpret it. 16 And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, It is not in me: God shall give

Pharaoh an answer of peace. 17 And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, In my dream, behold, I stood upon the bank of the river: 18 And, behold, there came up out of the river seven kine, fatfleshed and well favoured; and they fed in a meadow: 19 And, behold, seven other kine came up after them, poor and very ill favoured and leanfleshed, such as I never saw in all the land of Egypt for badness: 20 And the lean and the ill favoured kine did eat up the first seven fat kine: 21 And when they had eaten them up, it could not be known that they had eaten them; but they were still ill favoured, as at the beginning. So I awoke. 22 And I saw in my dream, and, behold, seven ears came up in one stalk, full and good: 23 And, behold, seven ears, withered, thin, and blasted with the east wind, sprung up after them: 24 And the thin ears devoured the seven good ears: and I told this unto the magicians; but there was none that could declare it to me. 25 And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh is one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what he is about to do. 26 The seven good kine are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years: the dream is one. 27 And the seven thin and ill favoured kine that came up after them are seven years; and the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine. 28 This is the thing which I have spoken unto Pharaoh: What God is about to do he sheweth unto Pharaoh. 29 Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt: 30 And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land; 31 And the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine following; for it shall be very grievous. 32 And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass. 33 Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. 34 Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years. 35 And let them gather all the food of those good years that come, and lay up corn under the hand of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. 36 And that food shall be for store to the land against the seven years of famine, which shall be in the land of Egypt; that the land perish not through the famine. 37 And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants. 38 And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? 39 And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: 40 Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou. 41 And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. 42 And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; 43 And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt. 44 And Pharaoh said unto

Joseph, I am Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt. 45 And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnathpaaneah; and he gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On. And Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt.

Thus far we read God's word. Let's ask God's blessing of the preaching.

*Father in heaven, we pray that in the power of the Holy Spirit this word may go forth this morning. We pray that in the power of the Holy Spirit we may receive this word so that we may be encouraged to be faithful witnesses to thy truth in the midst of this wicked world, just as Joseph was a faithful witness to thee in thy truth before Pharaoh. Give us strength, Father, courage and boldness through this word to be faithful witnesses of thy truth, but also strengthen us in the knowledge of thy sovereignty through this word preached this morning. May thy name be glorified through this word. It's in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.*

In biblical history, we see that God puts his people at times in unusual places to witness to his truth. Sometimes that's in prison. Joseph was in prison. The apostles were in prison, but even in prison, the gospel went forth. Paul preached in prison. Joseph had the opportunity to bring God's word in prison. But another unique place, strange place where God put his people to declare his truth, was in the presence of some of the greatest leaders in world history. Think of Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar, right in the middle of this worldwide kingdom which was an anti-Christian kingdom, God put one of his faithful servants to bring his word, Daniel. You find that in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul speaking the word before great leaders, even coming before Caesar himself, and other leaders under Caesar along the way. The Lord Jesus Christ himself, according to God's providential rule, stood before Pontius Pilate, the ruler of that region at that time, where Jesus witnessed to the truth that he is the King of the Jews, but also that his kingdom is not of this world. But before any of these other men stood before great rulers, there was Joseph in the presence of Pharaoh. Joseph, here, a slave who had then sold by his brothers from his homeland, had come into Egypt as a slave and was then in prison, suddenly he finds himself in the presence of Pharaoh and Joseph is there in the presence of Pharaoh, not to gain his own freedom, but to speak the word of God. He speaks truth before Pharaoh and that truth that Joseph speaks to Pharaoh is the truth of God's sovereignty.

That again, is the truth that's before us in this passage of scripture. It's vital to understand the truth of God's sovereignty and understanding the life of Joseph. Even Joseph, remember, reflects back upon his life in Genesis 50:20. He says that, "Ye meant it for evil," talking to his brothers, "but God meant it for good." Not only is there the aspect of God working good through all that has happened, but there's also the sovereignty of God. Joseph understands, he believes the sovereignty of God, and it's that very truth that he proclaims in the presence of Pharaoh. What we see this morning in the passage is that Joseph understands God's sovereignty, what that truth means for his life and the hardships and struggles of that life, but as a man who understands it for his own life, he declares it to others. He declares it before Pharaoh. As we see Joseph before Pharaoh this

morning proclaiming this truth of God, we are encouraged. There is application for us. The application we want to see this morning is that as we live in the midst of this world, we also must testify of the greatness of our God and one of the ways we do that is by testifying of his sovereignty. May we be encouraged in our witness in this world.

So we keep that in mind this morning as we look at this part of Joseph's life using the theme "God's Witness Before Pharaoh." First of all, that witness was found in the dreams. We look first at the providential dreams. Secondly, the faithful prophet. God's witness before Pharaoh came, then, by Joseph and the word that he spoke to Pharaoh. And then finally, we're going to see the sovereign purpose of God in all of this.

Notice at the very beginning of the chapter we read, "And it came to pass." I can remember in the beginning stages when I was in seminary and I was learning Hebrew and we came across that Hebrew phrase, the professor that taught me reminded me that that's not just a phrase that says this is something that's about to happen, or this just happened, it's a phrase that always points to the sovereignty of God, the sovereignty of God in what is happening where you find that phrase, and you find it throughout the Old Testament many, many times, so that you could read that phrase, "And it came to pass," in this way: God ordains what came to pass. This phrase is not just saying that something happened here, it's saying that God is accomplishing something by his sovereign will. God brought something, God did something here.

What did he do? Well he brought dreams to Pharaoh. This pharaoh that God had placed in this position of rule, this particular pharaoh, God had placed him there and now God in one night gives him two dreams and these dreams are the word of God. They're speaking to Pharaoh. Right now he doesn't understand what God is saying, but God is speaking to Pharaoh, he's speaking to his palace and all the people that are in it, God is speaking through these dreams. Not only that, but as we read this and understand that God is sovereign here, we see the timing is determined by the sovereignty of God as well. This is under God's control. These dreams came to Pharaoh not a week after the dreams of the butler and baker. Not a month. Not a few months. But two years after the dreams of the butler and the baker which means that Joseph was probably in prison for close to three years. The days that Joseph was in prison must have dragged on, even though he was busy and things to do, the question for Joseph on his own mind and in his soul was, "Am I ever going to see the light of day again? Am I going to spend the rest of my life in prison?" It soon became evident to Joseph that either the butler had forgotten about him, or if the butler hadn't, Pharaoh didn't care, and so there he remains in prison. The trial, the hardship for Joseph continued. He continued to be, as it were, in that pit of the prison. He didn't despair. We saw that last week. But now after two years the soldiers come for him, but to see that these dreams are all in the timing of God. God determined exactly not only that Pharaoh would have these dreams, but the timing of those dreams for Joseph's good and for the witness of Joseph here before Pharaoh.

We see the sovereignty of God this morning, and as we see the sovereignty of God, there's application for us. Do we see God's sovereignty like we should in our own lives? We know that God is sovereign. Joseph knew that God was sovereign over his life. Every

detail was ordained by God. We know that regarding our lives as well. We are held by God. We are led by God. It's God's counsel that guides us in the whole of our lives, as we read in Psalm 73. We know that everything that God does in that he is accomplishing his sovereign will. This is the truth of God's providence, that he governs all things. But do we see it like we should? Sometimes when good things happen to us, we certainly attribute that to the providence of God, to the sovereignty of God, but what about when bad things happen? What about the timing of things? Sometimes we say, "If only. If only it would have happened then." Well, there's no "if only" with God. It happens exactly as God wants it to happen. Lately, more and more I've heard this phrase "it's a God thing." Sometimes people say that in regard to meeting someone and talking to someone, they say, "Well, that was a God thing," but sometimes what I wonder about that is when they say that do they mean, well, that was something that was sovereignly decreed by God, it was controlled by God, but if that one thing is identified as a God thing, well, what about other things? The reality is everything is a God thing. Everything is controlled by God. Do we see it in our lives, the timing of everything in our lives, the way things happen in our lives? There are no ifs with God. God is sovereign.

We need to see our lives from that perspective. We're reminded of that in this passage this morning, but now here, as God is sovereign, he speaks to Pharaoh in the dreams that Pharaoh has in one night. Pharaoh has two dreams that deeply trouble him. Pharaoh has two dreams that in one night turned his world upside down and turned the palace upside down as well because of the worry that he has. Let's just review very briefly what those dreams were through which God was speaking to Pharaoh. In the first dream, Pharaoh sees seven fat cows come out of the river. Then after that, seven skinny, scrawny cows like he had never seen. It doesn't look like they could even stand or be alive. These scrawny cows come out of the river as well and then these scrawny cows devour the fat cows, but the physique of those cows hadn't changed. They were still scrawny as ever. They hadn't become any fatter after eating, after devouring those seven fat cows. Pharaoh woke up from that dream, it was a startling dream. He finally gets himself back to sleep and he has another dream. On one stock there were seven fat ears of corn that grew, but then after that there were seven skinny ears that grew, basically having no kernels on them, all shriveled and dried up. You can just picture a corn stalk late in the fall after everything's all dried up, not looking alive, not plump and juicy anymore, but skinny and scrawny, and the seven thin ears devoured the seven fat ears. Pharaoh wakes up from that dream and now he's disturbed. He can't get back to sleep and in the morning he calls in all of his wise men. They can't figure out what the meaning of the dream is. Everything's turned upside down in Pharaoh's life by two dreams.

Now the question is why? Why did these dreams so bother Pharaoh? There are three things we see as to why these dreams would have bothered Pharaoh. The first is there were two dreams and they were very similar, the sevens in them and the thin ones eating the fat ones. So we have these two dreams that are very similar. Notice that in this history, too, the pairs, the pair of dreams. Two dreams came to Joseph, then there was the dream of the butler and the baker. Those dreams came together in the same night, and now Pharaoh has two dreams. All of that showing that these were dreams that came from God. Pharaoh sees and understands there's something different about these.

The second thing is the content of these dreams. We might not think much about that, cows, corn, a river that were all part of these dreams, but those three elements are significant from an Egyptian perspective. We have to understand it from the Egyptian perspective. These elements are striking. You've heard of a sacred cow. Well, in Egypt cows were sacred. They were. Sheep were despised. Shepherds and their work were despised. But cows, they were sacred animals in Egypt. They were revered in Egypt. They were part of the religion of Egypt. Secondly, corn, that was the main staple of the agricultural community of Egypt. Corn, this, and now this was part of the dream. And then in addition, these cows came up out of the river. The Nile River was the life of Egypt. Egypt was a dry land but along the Nile River it was lush and green. Not only that, but because of that, the Nile River was a God in Egypt. It was the symbol of fertility, the fertility God. And so the river was so important in Egyptian culture and now you have these three main elements of Egyptian culture, cows, corn, and the river, that alarms Pharaoh. What does this all mean? That's the second thing.

The third is that although these dreams are particularly Egyptian in their content, no one could understand them. Pharaoh calls in his best scholars. These aren't magicians in the sense of men who do tricks, these are men who are learned, who study. They were the religious scholars of the land of Egypt, but the best of them, and altogether, they could not figure out the meaning of these dreams. God made the wisdom of the world foolishness here.

Pharaoh and his wise men are blind to the meaning of these dreams so it's God in his sovereignty who interrupts the peace of Pharaoh's kingdom and now with two dreams, Pharaoh's life and the life of the palace are turned upside down. There's all kinds of talk, all kinds of chatter. No one can figure out what these dreams mean, but they understand they must be important and significant. Now there's something important we see here. We see what God does in the midst of this wicked world. We see that the wicked world is blind to the truth of God. There's the truth of God that has spoken to the world, it's the truth of creation that declares that God is God, that he is the Creator of all things, but just like these wise men and Pharaoh we're blind to what God was saying, so also the world in our day is blind to what it is that God says. We see that in so many ways. We see that even in regard to not just the creation of this world where the world says, no, there's no God who created all things but instead there's a Big Bang that took place billions of years ago, and that this world developed by evolution. We see it in that way, but there are other ways too. God speaks even in the creation about men and women, male and female, being together, but in the world today the emphasis is on homosexuality and they fail to see that that's wrong. Man understands that killing and murder is wrong, but yet he allows the abortions that take place in our land and throughout the world to take place. We see the blindness of man to what God says. That's what we are as well without the grace of God.

But now the butler breaks into all of this confusion. The butler's doing his work, he's serving Pharaoh in the morning, and as he hears all the confusion and hears what the confusion is about, then the butler remembers Joseph. Verse 9, "Then spake the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying, I do remember my faults this day: Pharaoh was wroth with

his servants, and put me in ward in the captain of the guard's house, both me and the chief baker: And we dreamed a dream in one night, I and he; we dreamed each man according to the interpretation of his dream. And there was there with us a young man, an Hebrew, servant to the captain of the guard; and we told him, and he interpreted to us our dreams; to each man according to his dream he did interpret. And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was; me he restored unto mine office, and him he hanged." The butler now remembers and with this, too, we see the sovereignty of God not just in some things, in all things, the timing element. Joseph was in the prison doing what he's normally doing, and then there was an interruption in his life. This is the timing of God. God is sovereign here bringing this to pass at this moment that the butler even in his forgetting, and I believe he didn't just forget, he was restored to his position. He was concerned only about himself, and when something's not important to you, you just forget about it. That's the way it was for that butler. Now he remembers. Of course, now it could actually do him some good as well to tell Pharaoh about this man.

Now Joseph was in the prison doing what he's normally doing in the early morning, and suddenly there's a commotion probably outside his cell or wherever he's working, he hears guards coming and they're coming in a hurry and they're coming for him. And they tell him, "You have to get ready quickly. Pharaoh wants to see you." Now Joseph probably doesn't know at all what this is about but he gets ready quickly. He shaves, shaves his beard. He shaves his head because that was the custom in that day. Those who weren't shaved, who had beards and long hair were those who were the homeless, the downcast in society of that day. So he shaves his head. He shaves his beard. He changes his clothes so he's presentable in Pharaoh's presence, and the guards hurriedly bring Joseph before Pharaoh into his palace.

Joseph there then speaks the word of God. He's not there to get himself out of prison, he's there to speak the truth of God. He has the opportunity here to speak that truth and that really is the focus of this part of Genesis 41. Next week we're going to look at what it means that Joseph went from a prisoner to this highly exalted man in the kingdom of Egypt, we're going to see the dangers involved with that and then the grace of God that was working, but here we want to see the powerful work of God in the life of Joseph as Joseph witnessed to God.

First of all, God was speaking in the palace through the dreams, now God speaks to Pharaoh in the palace through Joseph who is a faithful prophet of God. That characterizes Joseph through his life. He was a prophet of God. Now I understand he wasn't anointed as a prophet; you don't have the particular office of prophet yet in this time in Old Testament history. But that doesn't take away from the fact that Joseph here is a prophet of God. He spoke the word of God when he had his own dreams before his family, and he told his family about that. We noticed that. Joseph was a prophet to the butler and the baker in the prison, and now Joseph is a prophet of God here before Pharaoh. Joseph speaks God's truth in a wicked culture that does not know God. That is the work of Joseph as prophet. He speaks the truth of God in a culture that does not know God.

Joseph is speaking as he interprets the dreams that Pharaoh had. We notice that first of all, he speaks the word of God as he interprets the dreams. And the meaning of the dreams is the same, and we understand that meaning of the dreams. We know it well. We've been taught that since we were little children. The seven plump cows and the seven plump ears of corn represent seven years of prosperity that Egypt would have. The seven skinny cows and the seven skinny ears of corn represent seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, and that seven years of famine will come after the seven years of prosperity, that the idea of the seven skinny devouring the seven fat. So Joseph here interprets the dream, and he says, "Because you had this dream twice, that shows that God is going to do this."

So Joseph here speaks the word of God in interpreting the dreams, but that's not all. It's not just that Joseph here gives the interpretation of the dreams and that's it. Notice that the focus of what Joseph said, and I tried to emphasize that as I read the passage, the focus is on God, is all on God. He brings the message of who God is. Joseph here testifies of the sovereignty of God. Notice that in verse 16, first of all, Joseph just comes before Pharaoh, Pharaoh tells him what is going on and that he hears that Joseph is one who can interpret dreams, and then this is Joseph's answer, "It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." So that's where he begins, he begins with God. "God will give you the answer because as the sovereign God, he knows everything. He's the one who sent these dreams." That's what Joseph is saying here, "God, this God, the one true and living God, the God I know, this God has sent these dreams." Then you go to verse 25, "Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh is one," this is after Pharaoh tells him what the dreams were, "The dream of Pharaoh is one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what he is about to do." Then again in verse 28, "This is the thing which I have spoken unto Pharaoh: What God is about to do he sheweth unto Pharaoh." Then in verse 32, "And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass."

What's the message of Joseph to Pharaoh? "God's sovereign here." Now think how startling that must have been for Pharaoh to hear that. "It's not about your sacred cows. It's not about the Nile River. It's God who controls. He is going to give seven years of prosperity and then he is going to give seven years of drought. It's not about your fertility god. It's not about the river. Here's the one true and living God who controls all things. He's given you the dreams, now this is what he is going to do here in Egypt." That's the message of Joseph that he brings unashamedly. He brings the glorious truth of God's power and sovereignty. That's what Joseph speaks here before Pharaoh.

As we see Joseph in this work, we should see as well that the one that Joseph points to here is Jesus Christ because we see that Joseph is a prophet of God here speaking the word of God. This points us to Jesus Christ because Jesus Christ is our chief prophet. He is the one who reveals truth to us in the midst of this world. He does that, of course, through the Holy Scriptures. He does that by means of the preaching of the gospel. But Jesus Christ is the chief prophet of God. He was sent by God to reveal truth to us, and it's that truth that sets us free, that's what we read in John 8:32. He is our chief prophet who takes away the blindness of our sin so that we can see and know truth in the midst of this



world. This morning we must see that the life of Joseph again points us to Christ and what it is that Christ reveals to us and now that says to us this morning that we, as God's people, must listen. We must listen to what God says in his word.

Are we listening to what God says in his word of truth? You see, in our day that gets twisted. In our day that gets twisted this way, "Well yeah, I listen to God's word," but what we often do with God's word is we twist it in our own minds and what we twist it with is our own feelings, the way we think about things, so that we try to make God's word fit with what we're feeling, we try to make God's word fit with what we're thinking and we're thinking it wrong and a sinful way. And then we convince ourselves, well, we're thinking in the right way. We're listening to what God says. But in the meantime, we're twisting it. We're justifying our wrong thinking as well. Well, the question for us this morning is this: we have a chief prophet. He's Jesus Christ. He reveals truth to us, the truth about who God is, the truth about our sin, the truth about our salvation. Now do we listen to him? Do we hear what he has to say or do we let it go in one year and out the other? Does it leave us the moment we step out the doors of the church building? And we see this morning because Christ is our chief prophet we must listen to the truth and live by that truth of his word.

But there's another application for us as well this morning, it's this: we see in Joseph his work is propping that we are all called to be prophets in the midst of this world. We're not all preachers of the gospel in the sense that we've been ordained to that, but we are all prophets because we have the anointing of the Holy Spirit from Jesus Christ. That's what it is to be a Christian. Remember, the Heidelberg Catechism points that out. Jesus Christ is our prophet, priest and king, and because we are united to him, we are prophets, priests and kings of Christ in the midst of this world. We are prophets of Christ in this world. That means in the darkness of our world and culture, we are called to speak the light of God's truth. We're called to give an answer of the hope that lives within us. We do it as Joseph did, not abstractly but as one who saw what the sovereignty of God meant for his own life and suffering in his life as one who who believed that, was comforted by it. He spoke that same truth to Pharaoh, and that's the idea of our witness in the world, too. Not abstractly, not detached from it, but the truth I know in my heart. The truth that I love. The truth that sets me free. I want to speak of that truth to others, to my neighbors, to my coworkers, to others who don't know that truth, that they, if it is God's will, would know that beautiful truth.

But the reality is that often we don't know when we're going to be given that opportunity. Wouldn't we all like to know the future so that God would say to us, "You know, a week from today, why don't you put it in your calendar, you're going to meet So-and-so, and they're going to ask you a question, they're going to say this to you. Now get ready for it." It doesn't happen that way. It didn't happen that way in Joseph's life. God didn't whisper to Joseph a week earlier, "Hey, Joseph, Pharaoh is going to send his soldiers for you." It happens so quickly. One moment he's in the prison, before he can even think, most likely, there he is before Pharaoh. Think of yourself in that situation. "What am I going to say?" No doubt that Joseph was prepared. If this day came, he was going to be ready.

What about us? It can happen with a checkout person at the store. It can happen with a parent at a soccer game. Someone in the store asking their children about what Santa Claus is going to bring them, or what they're going to dress up for for Halloween. Someone at work is going to say something to you about Sunday or something else. We know those opportunities are going to come, are we getting ready for those opportunities, thinking about what we will say, thinking about the truth of God and how that truth applies to what they're saying and how the truth applies to our own lives? Are we ready to speak about the sovereignty of God when someone's complaining about the weather, when they talk about Mother Nature, and to do that in a good way, in a right, in a humble way? But that's what we're reminded of this morning, we are prophets in the midst of this world to speak the truth of God, and we don't have forewarning when these opportunities come. We're called to be ready to speak the truth of God.

Now this morning, as we look at Joseph's witness before Pharaoh, there are four things that we learn from Joseph's witness that encourage us in our witness in this wicked world. Four things. The first is this: Joseph, as he speaks to Pharaoh, is respectful and shows love and concern for Pharaoh. Although Joseph is bold in his witness of God and points out God directly and clearly, Joseph is not offensive. He shows respect for Pharaoh. He doesn't refuse to have his head shaved and his beard shaved and his clothes changed. No, he'll go with the customs of the palace and of that day, as long as it doesn't compromise his own Christian faith. And these things don't. He shows proper respect for Pharaoh in this way. He doesn't play hardball with the soldiers and say, "No, I won't change. If he wants to talk to me, he's going to talk to me the way that I am right now." Now that shows that Joseph is showing respect to Pharaoh. He recognized the position in which God himself had placed Pharaoh.

Joseph does not mock Pharaoh. He doesn't treat him disrespectfully because of his own idolatry. He doesn't make fun of their sacred cows or the the river which symbolizes their God of fertility. And in addition, notice this, Joseph listens to Pharaoh. When he ought to be quiet, he is quiet. He listens patiently to everything that Pharaoh says, even though remember, right away when Pharaoh told Joseph why he's there and Joseph responds and says, "It's not in me. God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace," verse 17 says, "And Pharaoh said unto Joseph." It went right over his head. Joseph talks about God. Pharaoh doesn't want to hear about God. He just wants to know what the dreams mean. Maybe he had that confused look on his face for a moment, "Oh, whatever," and and he keeps right on going, it goes over his head. But still Joseph is respectful. He listens to Pharaoh. He doesn't interrupt him at all. That shows his love and concern for Pharaoh and that's how we must be in our witness as well. We must be bold without being offensive. We speak the truthfully boldly. "This is who God is. These are the great things that he does." But we're not going to speak it in such a way that we treat disrespectfully or mock those who don't understand that truth. We're to speak the truth in love, Ephesians 4 says. Not just speak the truth, you speak the truth in love. We're concerned for that person that we're witnessing to. That's important for us to do in our witness, that we listen to what people have to say, we listen to their fears, we listen to what's on their hearts. We don't turn them away or turn them off by our offensive response.

That's the first thing, Joseph is respectful and shows love and concern for Pharaoh. Secondly, Joseph humbly speaks about the truth of God. Verse 16, "It is not in me." Literally, "Not I." That's what Joseph says to Pharaoh. When Pharaoh comes to him and says, "I want you to interpret the dreams." "Not I." He's humble there. "Instead it's God, God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." Joseph refused to give himself any credit for interpreting dreams. It's all the work of God. And then he declares the truth of God's sovereignty. "It's about God and the greatness of God and the great things that he has done." That must be true in our witness, too, before the world. It's not about me. It can be that way, for example, when we hear someone take God's name in vain, may we put it that way, "I don't like it if you do that. Please don't do that. That offends me." Sometimes our witness can be about ourselves, "But it's not about me, it's about God. I wish you'd know about this God." When someone takes God's name in vain, that's an opportunity to teach truth about God humbly, respectfully. "It's not about me. It's about God and his glory and his majesty. This is the one true and living God." We must do that with humility. Even 1 Peter 3:15, that beautiful truth or that beautiful verse that speaks of our giving an answer of the hope that lives within us, at the very end of the verse says, with meekness and fear, humility and fear. And that's the way we teach about God with meekness and humility when we know the truth of God and what it means for our own lives, and we understand that we're saved by grace and we deserve nothing that we have.

So we see here, Joseph humbly speaks the truth about God. Third, we learn from Joseph to witness not with fear but boldly. Joseph was not afraid. Here he is, he's before Pharaoh, the man, the man that can get him out of prison. He could have made something up. He could have refrained from talking about God. "Sure, Pharaoh, I can tell you the meaning of your dream." He could have given himself the credit but he doesn't do. He's not afraid to say what needs to be said. In this culture, remember, where there were the sacred cows, cows themselves and the river and the corn, Joseph is not afraid to speak against that sinfulness of that land and culture. He holds nothing back in declaring the truth about God. We have to learn that in our witness, too, because fear so easily can dominate. "How are they going to respond. What are they going to say? I know how he's going to respond. I know this guy. I know the way he responds to things. If I start talking about God, it's going to make him all angry," and so on. We determine ahead of time how we think it's going to go, and we talk ourselves out of witnessing to the truth of God. Let's not be afraid, but let's be bold in our witness declaring the truth of God and trusting that God will accomplish his purpose.

And fourth, Joseph boldly suggests a way forward for Pharaoh based on what he has told him about God. That's pretty bold of Joseph to do that. He proposes a way forward. He says, "Here's a plan, Pharaoh, as you go forward and you deal with these seven years of prosperity and then seven years of famine. Here's the plan. Pharaoh, you should appoint a famine preparedness agency and you should have a good leader who's over that who can run that agency." That's the first part of the plan. "Secondly, you should appoint men to collect food during the seven prosperous years, and when you collect that food, you should collect 20%, institute a 20% tax on all food during the seven prosperous years. And then build grain elevators so that that food can be stored and set aside for the seven years of famine that are to come." That was a bold plan to set those taxes on the people

and say to them, "In the seven years of prosperity, you have to control your spending." Think about how that would go in our own land. Things are humming along in the economy and prosperous and the government's going to say, "You know what? We're going to start socking away money." It would be impossible right now for our government, but if that would ever happen, think about that. That wouldn't go over very well among the people. "We're going to tax you heavily to set money aside for the future."

It's a bold plan but here's what we learn from that: Joseph, on the one hand, declares the sovereignty of God, but on the other hand he's saying to Pharaoh even though God is sovereign, he is in control, that doesn't take away our calling to act wisely, and we learn something about God's sovereignty here too. It's not fatalism. It's not saying, "Well, whatever may be, may be. God's in control. He's working all things. I'm just going with the flow." No, we have callings. We have responsibilities to act appropriately. And so Joseph is teaching truth here in this plan as well, that there are responsibilities that we have before God. So Joseph gives this bold plan and we ought to speak out in the midst of this world too. It's not just God's sovereign, he's in control of everything, doesn't matter what I do then. No, there's a calling we have in the midst of this world. We must live wisely and obediently to God.

That's the witness of Joseph, the powerful witness of Joseph as prophet here before Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. What we see in all of this that God has a bigger purpose. There's a sovereign purpose in all of this. God, of course, is in control, but it's leading up to something. It's leading up to something. The big picture is that through this witness God blesses Joseph and gives him an exalted position. That exalted position is going to bring him in contact with his brothers and that's going to bring his family down to Egypt, and that's going to lead to God delivering them out of Egypt and bringing them to the Promised Land. And all of this, remember, is for that goal of the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Now next week we're going to look at that exalted position of Joseph, the dangers that are part of that, the wonderful grace of God we see in the life of Joseph, but there's something we learn from this, too, there's a sovereign purpose of God in our lives. God is sovereign. He's sovereign over every detail of your life, your place and your family, the work that you have right now, the afflictions you experience in this life. The sovereignty of God does not mean that our lives are going to end up like Joseph's, that we'll have this great and exalted position. There are those who teach that and explain the life of Joseph from that perspective, a health and wealth gospel. That's not what this is. The point is that God in his sovereignty over our lives and God, as he's sovereign over the opportunities we have to witness, God is always accomplishing his purpose. He's glorifying himself, and that's what we want more than anything else. We have to keep that before our minds. Here's the big picture: in whatever it is you're going through right now and now you're learning to see the sovereignty of God in relationship to that, the purpose of God is exultation not in this life, but it is the exultation of everlasting life with him And God uses our witness as well. Sometimes it's the hardened, many times it may be the hardened, but other times it may be that others are brought to see and know the Lord

Jesus Christ, others are brought to see and know the greatness of their sin and they repent of their sin. God is using us to accomplish his sovereign purpose. So always in looking at the sovereignty of God, we see he has a purpose that he is accomplishing everything that he does. May God be glorified in praise as he accomplishes his sovereign purpose in our lives. Amen.

Let us pray.

*Father in heaven, we are thankful for this word, for the reminder of the truth of thy sovereignty, and our calling to witness to that truth in the midst of this world that refuses to believe it. We pray, Lord, that thou wilt give us boldness and courage to proclaim thy truth, that we would do so unashamedly, but also that we would do that in love, that we do so humbly, and that we keep the focus on the glory of thy name, and not ourselves. So Father, use this word to encourage us, forgive graciously our sins, even sins we've committed in this time of worship. All this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Introduction

- I. In the history, over and over again God has placed His faithful servants before kings and rulers of the world to testify of His power and sovereignty.
- II. The truth about God that we learn in this passage is the truth of God's sovereignty.

**The Life of Joseph  
(6) God's Witness Before Pharaoh**

**I. The Providential Dreams**

- A. God is accomplishing all things in this story to accomplish His sovereign will.

- B. God speaks by these dreams to Pharaoh to trouble him. We see this in three ways.

**II. The Faithful Prophet**

- A. Joseph is a faithful prophet of God who speaks God's truth to his family, the butler and baker, and now to Pharaoh.

- B. There are four things we learn from Joseph's witness:

**III. The Sovereign Purpose**

- A. The big picture is that through this witness, God blesses Joseph.
- B. God will bless our witness in the world also.