

# Genesis 41:14

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] This passage that we looked at in chapter 41 of Genesis, we could, of course, very easily take here an illustration of a parallel, as it were, of the life of the soul called out of unbelief and darkness into light.

Just as we could say here in verse 14, they sent and brought Joseph hastily out of the dungeon. A dungeon is where we are until we know the Lord. We are in prison. We are blind and in the darkness, in trespasses and sins.

Joseph wasn't actually guilty of the things that had got him cast into the dungeon. We are guilty. We have original sin even before we commit our actual sins.

But in one sense, we're not unlike him because we don't have a choice about being in that dungeon in the first place. We don't have a choice about the fact we are born in ignorance and transgression and sin.

But it is Pharaoh who sends for him, who calls him out of this dungeon. It is the king of kings who calls us to come forth out of the dungeon. And what is set before us is what is set before Egypt and before Joseph is times of abundance and blessing and, yes, times of hardship after that.

[ 1 : 1 5 ] And we can say as well that, yes, when one first comes to Christ, there are mountaintop experiences. Perhaps there are times of real fullness of blessing.

And we're so well enriched with the presence of the Lord. And we're so full of his joy. And it's like bumper years, even if it doesn't last maybe for years on end.

But those initial stages of conversion and the power of God are like these bumper years. And then, of course, inevitably, times of famine follow. And we wonder if maybe we were deluded in all those high and wonderful thoughts that we had and how good we felt.

And were we just fooling ourselves as the years of famine seemed to eat away the years of goodness. But the Lord prepares us for these things. Not so that we can just slob about in abundance and easy, easy plenty and so on.

But rather so we can be kept alive. He doesn't give us enough to wallow in abundance. But he gives us enough to get us through the years of famine. So we can easily paint illustrations and say, oh, yes, look at all these parallels that there are.

[ 2 : 2 5 ] And all of that would be valid. All of that would be true. But what I really want us to focus on tonight is this verse 14. Many years ago, I remember the APC minister and storm leader, George McCaskill, saying that this was a verse which he had heard.

It's been one of the most unusual verses that he had ever heard of in being used in the process of somebody's conversion. Now, it wasn't this verse that converted them.

It was this verse that started, kick-started the process. Whereby he started inquiring more and more about, you know, the things of the Lord, the truth of his word and so on.

Because there was a gentleman who was a complete unbeliever. And yet he had a great interest in ancient Egypt and about the things that they did and the culture and what they did and so on.

And he happened to be, whether he was reading it himself or whether he happened to be attending church just, you know, with somebody else or whatever. But this passage came up in this verse.

[ 3 : 28 ] It says, the Pharaoh sent, the Colonel Joseph brought him hastily out of the dungeon and he shaved himself and changed his way and then came in onto Pharaoh. He said, yeah, that's right, actually. Because the Egyptians, they did shave themselves.

They shaved their face. They shaved off their heads and everything. So when they came in before Pharaoh, they were clean. They were smooth-headed. This is what the Egyptians did. They thought, the Bible can't actually be all nonsense if it's got this little historical detail accurate.

Because he knew from his studies that much was true. It was culturally accurate. It was historically accurate. And from that little trigger verse, he began delving deeper and deeper into other aspects of the Bible and other historical truths.

And as he discovered more and more, he thought, you know, we're going to have to take this Bible seriously. And eventually, in the fullness of time and the Lord's providence, he came to faith and was converted.

You couldn't say this verse converted him, but you could say this verse kick-started the process. And it was one of the most unusual verses ever used in somebody's Christian conversion in that way.

[ 4 : 39 ] But I'd like us to recognize not merely how God can use any verse in any way, but the process here. Baro said, call Joseph. They brought him hastily out of the dungeon.

He shaved himself. He's not going to do something. He's not going to do something. He's not going to do something. He's not going to do something. There is that which Joseph himself does in preparation for standing before the king.

And you might say he doesn't have a lot of choice in it. You might say, well, if he could do it himself, why couldn't he do it himself in the dungeon? Clearly, he doesn't have opportunity to do it himself. But having been brought out of the dungeon, he is now not only given opportunity, but there's the expectation.

He's only going to have better do something before he stands before Pharaoh. He's been in dungeon for the last umpteen years. He's going to need a wash. He's going to need a shave. He's going to need to look presentable before Pharaoh, even though there's a hurry.

Even though they brought him with haste. Pharaoh isn't really going to want this grungy prisoner from the last ten years stinking up his court in his presence when he wants to question him.

[ 5 : 42 ] So despite the haste, he has to do something by way of preparation, by way of making himself presentable and ready for Pharaoh.

Now, I know there's a minefield of potential theological difficulties here. We can do nothing to effect our own salvation.

It is all of God's grace. It is all of his work. You know, he's only coming out of this dungeon because Pharaoh sends for it. Joseph doesn't say, ah, I think I've been here long enough now.

I'll go and say to Pharaoh. Come on, call me out of here. It's about time I came out of this. It's about time I was free. It's not down to him. It's down to God. It's down to God who calls us out of the dungeon. It's down to Pharaoh that calls Joseph out of the dungeon.

The king is the one who makes the decision. But there is that which he himself must do before he will stand before the king. And there is in each of our lives not that which can make God more amenable to granting us our salvation.

[ 6 : 46 ] No matter how much he washes and shaves and presents himself before Pharaoh, all clean and shiny and new, he is still a slave. He is still an ex-convict who can be sent back to the dungeon at the flick of Pharaoh's fingers.

He is not in any stronger position than he was before. And what he says now before the king and how he interprets this dream will determine not only his future, but the future of the whole of Egypt.

Everything hinges on what happens in the next little while. This could be a turning point in his life or in the life of Egypt itself.

But remember how Jesus says, you know, that when we are standing before kings or governors or we're giving us a moment that's highly charged with difficulty or challenge, it will be given to us in that same hour.

But we will need to speak. But there is that which Joseph can do. He can wash himself. He can shave himself.

[ 7 : 45 ] He can put on clean clothes and come in on to Pharaoh. He doesn't know what Pharaoh is going to say. He's almost certainly never stood before Pharaoh in his entire life before.

But here he is in the presence of one of the mightiest monarchs in the ancient world. And when we are called by the Lord to come to them, we will never have stood consciously before the Lord before.

We will never have been aware, perhaps, of his all-seeing eye and his piercing gaze. We may tremble in his presence, and that's only right and good.

But how does this relate to what we can do? What is it that we can do if we are called by the Lord and summoned, and we sense them drawing us out of our dungeon and being brought into his presence?

What is it that we can do? We can't make ourselves more amenable to salvation. We can't change our hearts. We can't do anything. Surely it is all of God.

[ 8 : 47 ] Yes, it is all of God. And yet the Bible teaches us that there is that which man not only can do but must do if he is to approach to the Lord.

He cannot change his own heart. He cannot effect his own salvation. But there is that which we are required to do. In the case of Joseph, physically, before he comes, before this king, he washes, he shaves, he changes his clothes.

Now, nobody gave him a razor when he was in a dungeon. Nobody gave him clean clothes when he was in a dungeon. Nobody enabled him to be washed and presentable. He is given the tools. He's given the new clothes.

He's given the razor. And he's told to get on with it. He's given the tools. Now, he's got the opportunity. There is still haste. But it is important that he does this.

So he probably won't get an opportunity to stand before Pharaoh at all. But the Bible teaches us consistently that there is that which we ourselves must do.

[ 9 : 54 ] It will not necessarily make us saved as opposed to unsaved. But God expects some kind of response from us in what we are called upon to do.

Sometimes it is a sheer act of the will. We'll talk a wee bit more, perhaps, about the divine will and the will that the Lord exercised when it comes to our paparazzi service on Saturday.

But we are mindful this evening that we approach, albeit, at what we might call a mini-communion season, a localized communion season. But it is the Lord's table, nonetheless.

We will constitute a session beforehand. People will still be invited as the Lord moves them to come forward to profess their faith in Christ as their Savior.

But if we're going to do that, we have to be prepared. Now, one of the things we have to do, as Peter says, chapter 5, 1 Peter, verse 6, humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.

[ 11 : 07 ] Now, when it says humble yourselves, that means it is something which we ourselves are capable of doing and indeed are required to do.

Now, in the previous verse, Peter is talking about mutual submission one to another. And he says, Now, if we are humbling ourselves, it is something clearly which we have the power and the means to do, and the expectation, the instruction that we should do it, but also, you see in the context, how it takes an act of disciplined will, even for the believer to be able to do it.

Humble yourselves. I mean, this isn't coming naturally. Ye younger, submit yourselves to the elder. Well, no generation ever likes to do that, do they? We all think, Oh, the young ones nowadays, they don't show any respect for their elders.

When we were young, we always respected our elders. Maybe we did outwardly, but when we were young, we all thought we knew better than these crusty old fogies of the previous generation who didn't know a thing.

And thank goodness we had appeared on the scene, the next generation, to rescue the world from the hopelessness that the previous generation had made. But every generation thinks that.

[ 12 : 46 ] That they are the up-and-coming new wonders, and what do the old people know? So it is each generation has to learn afresh. Maybe, yes, they get older.

Oh, maybe they weren't so daft after all, and it's a bit more complicated than we thought. But humbling ourselves one to another, that takes discipline. It takes will. Likewise, when Paul writes to the Ephesians, before he writes these oft-criticized words in this day and age, wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, before he writes that, the very previous verse, verse 21 of the Ephesians 5 says, submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it. This is something which does, it's not just the case of, oh, well, if I feel lovey-dovey, then I'll love my wife.

Oh, if I feel like so many are being humble today, well, then I'll do it. No, this takes an act of the will. It was no more popular teaching in the first century than it would have been in the 21st century.

It takes an act of discipline to humble ourselves, to submit one to another. And if the wife doesn't really like submitting to her husband, the husband won't exactly be thrilled at the idea that he must be prepared to extend his life, if need be, for the benefit of and protection of his wife, just as Christ did for the church.

[ 14 : 17 ] That is the kind of costly headship, costly leadership, costly love that Christ calls for in his people. It's not, oh, I feel so fluffy and lovey-dovey, and hey, oh, love is so nice, love is so easy.

Love is not easy. Love costs. Love hurts. And yet love is the greatest thing that the Lord has ever done. God is love.

And those who are called to be like him must be like him in that respect as well. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.

Humble yourselves. It is that which you are able to do is that which you are called upon to do. Joseph might have wanted to stagger up the fear and say, look, this is what your dungeon did me.

Oh, look at the state I'm in. Oh, look how I haven't shaved for 10 years. Oh, look how I haven't had a wash in ages. Yep, if I'm stinking, it's your problem. You put me in that dungeon. Well, technically, Pharaoh didn't want it for a day, but it's the same principle.

[ 15 : 23 ] No, he washes, he shaves himself. He changes his raven. He comes before Pharaoh. Yes, there has to be haste, but hey, it's got to be done. And he is able and required to do it himself.

There is that which we are called upon to do ourselves. And it does not detract in any sense from the almighty and ultimate work of God.

You will often have heard me make reference to the parable of the sower and how the good soil, by contrast with that which is choked with weeds and thistles and so on, or stony ground, doesn't get good by magic, doesn't get good by itself.

It's not like, oh, well, the soil on this particular hillside over here, this is very acidic. You know, if you go into the next valley, it's more alkaline. It's richer or darker, different kind of clay or different kind of earth or whatever.

No, we're talking about one field in which the sower goes along throwing out his seed and so on. It's all the same kind of earth. It's all the same kind of rock formations underneath.

[ 16 : 33 ] There's not lots of different zigzagging kinds of alkaline soil or acidic soil. This one's deep and rich, but that one's very shallow and sandy and that's clay and that's something else. No, it's all going to be one type of soil.

It's all going to be one type of land within the space of our field that this guy can throw his seed across. So what makes the difference? Because in the good soil, it's not always having to be a nice deep patch here.

No, they dug out the soils. They maybe built them into a dike around the edge. They wrecked out the weeds. They made sure it's been well dug, well fertilized.

They made sure plenty of manure, plenty of time to settle in, plenty of good seed, plenty of water. This soil is good because this soil has been cleared. This soil has been fertilized.

This soil has been worked. It has been prepared. That is why it is good soil. And we can't say, oh, that's why the seed grows in it because Jesus himself says in the very same chapter, take Mark chapter four and the parable of the sowers and most of the gospel accounts.

[ 17 : 42 ] But if we take Mark's example, move a little further on in Mark chapter four and we read this at verse 26. So is the kingdom of God. As if a man should cast seed into the ground and should sleep and rise night and day and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.

He knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of her self. It's not the earth doing it, of course. It's God. First the blade, then the ear after that, the full corn in the ear.

But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he put it in the signal because the harvest has come. Mark 4, 26 to 29. And what is it that Paul writes, of course, to the Corinthians?

1 Corinthians chapter three. Who there is Paul? Who's a Paulist? The minister, servants, whom he believed, even as the Lord gave to every man. I have planted a Paulist water, but God gave the increase.

You scatter the seed in this patch of ground that's been worked and prepared and made good. God gives the increase. And if it's not God, then how could it be that as Jesus tells the parable, you know, it brings forth a motherly, some 30, some 60, some 100 fold.

[ 19 : 01 ] Why isn't it all 30? Or why isn't it all 60? Why isn't it all 100? Why are some bits more fruitful than others in this same patch of good soil? Except that God determines what seed will sprout and germinate and bring forth a harvest, even in the good soil, even in the prepared soil.

Some will bring 30, some will bring 60, some will bring 100. Because it's God that decides. It's God that determines the harvest. When somebody sows, it brings forth, he knoweth not how.

He doesn't know how the process is that the little seed germinates under the soil, and then it puts down its roots, then it shoots up, and then it's all green, and then it turns yellow, and then brings forth far more seed than initially was planted in the first place.

Man can't explain that. And it's not the earth magically doing it by itself. It is God who giveth the increase. It is God who decides in any family or any marriage who is going to be conceived and born, what the personality of that child is going to be, when they will be born, what date their birth they will follow, how many years they will live, what color their eyes will be, what their personality will be.

God giveth the increase. God is the one that makes the harvest. But man is still expected to do something by way of making ready for God's work.

[ 20 : 33 ] He can't make himself more favorable to God. God's not going to say, oh, well, you've done a really good job on that patch of land, so I'll tell you what, I'm going to give you a bumper harness.

No. God doesn't reward us for our works. Not like that transaction. But if we are made ready, if we are prepared, then the likelihood is greater we will benefit the more from what God himself alone can do.

Joseph stands before Pharaoh. He is still a slave. He is still a convict. He is still capable of being sent back to that dungeon any second if he puts a put wrong.

Nothing has changed except he is a bit cleaner and less smelly and he is clean shaven there. That's the only difference. Nothing has changed in substance. Even when he becomes Zaphnaf Paniah and when he is riding in Pharaoh's second chariot and when he has got Azunath, the daughter of the priest of Onn, as his wife and when he is exalted to second in the land, he can still be put back down again.

Pharaoh puts him up and Pharaoh can put him down. If he fails in the task he is given, he can be chucked back down again. He can't get too big for his boots. He has been given all these resources so that he can do a job that is going to save lives.

[ 21 : 53 ] So, we are brought forth out of our dungeon of darkness and unbelief and the Lord puts into our hands resources, spiritual riches, an ability, a means, perhaps during the bumper times but also maybe in the famine times to be able to witness or to minister or to pass on help or knowledge of the Lord or encouragement or food of spiritual nature to others.

We have been given those resources so that we will use them. That's what the Lord intends us to do with them. It's not just so that we can fill the storehouse, we can sit cross-legged and stuff ourselves with all the grain and never mind everybody else.

No, there is famine. There is a famine in the land like the prophet Amos said, a famine of hearing the word of God, a famine of the knowledge of the Lord. We have food.

The Lord has given us these means. But there is that which we ourselves must also do by way of preparing ourselves. Joseph sent and called Joseph and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon and he shaved himself and changed his raiment and came around the Pharaoh.

There is that which we are not only expecting but that which we are required to do. by way of preparing of ourselves to meet with the Lord.

[ 23 : 27 ] Even if we are to take it, you know, like in the prophet Amos where you've got this sense of juggernaut, prepare to meet thy God. What is the sense here in Amos 4 here at verse 12?

When the Lord is talking about he has overthrown Sodom and Gomorrah. He was a firebrand plucked out of the burning. Now if a firebrand is plucked out of the burning, it is being saved.

It is being spared. And that's what the Lord is doing in days of destruction. He spares individual souls. He saves those whom he has set apart for salvation.

Therefore, thus will I do unto thee. Amos 4 verse 12 and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel. For all he that formeth the mountains and created the wind and declaredeth other man what is his thought that night of the morning darkness and treadeth from the high places of the earth.

The Lord, the God of hosts, is his name. Now, even if you think, ooh, doom and gloom. No, what is the actual message there? God is coming whether we like it or not.

[ 24 : 31 ] God is coming whether we are ready or not. You know, we all play in the kite and sea from a little cage and we count up to a hundred and then we say, coming ready or not. And if somebody has taken the opportunity to use the kind of blood to hide themselves, well, that's fine, but if they've still got feet sticking out and their head sticking over the top of the head, you can see, you spot, you like what you've got.

Ready or not, the person's coming. Ready or not, the Lord is coming. And this is why it says, prepare, make ready to the spiritual equipment of washing, shaving, changing your clothes.

Be ready to stand before the king. Prepare to meet thy God. God wouldn't say to Amos and to the Israelites, you know, prepare to meet your God unless preparation was actually going to make some difference.

Unless preparation is something that they can actually do themselves. He is not going to say to them, oh, prepare to meet your God. Actually, no, we can't.

We can't do a thing about it, Lord, because it's only you, it's only your grace, it's only your man. So we're just going to sit on our hands here and wait for the lightning to fall from heaven and wait for you to appear in glory. And we're going to say, sorry, this is my week to do.

[ 25 : 44 ] God is not going to say, make preparation because I'm coming, if they themselves were somehow incapable of doing a thing. If the Lord says, prepare to meet thy God, it's because they are capable of making preparation and they are being instructed to make preparation.

If Joseph is going in to stand before Pharaoh, he's not going to stand in his prison garments and stinking and all looking a mess. He has to wash and shave and change his clothes and he has to do something himself.

He has to make ready himself. Prepare to meet the king. We'll see in chapter 10, we read likewise at verse 12, sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.

There's that sowing and reaping theme again, breaking up the fallow ground, preparing the soil so instead of just being rough, it becomes good soil, rich soil, well broken up, well prepared.

Why? Because it is time to seek the Lord. God is not going to say, come on, come seek me, if he physically can be found. There's no hope and no means and no point in making any preparation.

[ 27 : 07 ] It is all of God's grace. It is only him. It is only Pharaoh that can bring Joseph out the dungeon. It is only Pharaoh that can give him the tools, the resources, the power to do what he needs to do.

But he himself must make ready to meet with the king. Now, obviously this coming weekend, as you know, we have a little localized mini communion there.

The Lord is not more present at his table than he is in his house the other weeks. So when his people gather by twos and threes, it's not that it's somehow God is more there than he is in the pews of the cupid or anywhere else.

But there is a heightened sense of our awareness of what the Lord has done for us. There is perhaps a heightened readiness to listen for how the Lord would speak to us at such times.

There is no getting away from the plan. Whether it's in physical terms or physical preparation or spiritual things, there is a heightened sense of expectation at any times of communion.

[ 28 : 20 ] When I first started in the ministry years ago, maybe this is still the case, you know, if there was any fabric needing done or church grass needed cutting or they wanted to get a bit of painting done, it was always, got to get it done by the communions.

We got to have everything ready by the communions. Want to get the carpet done before the communions. This was the big cutoff, this was the time for which everything was prepared. This was the heightened sense of expectation and awareness.

Now I'm aware. This is not a big formal communion season. This is not visiting minister in the full five days. This is just a mini communion, let's say.

This is just a local communion. This is just us. It's only every second of heaven. Is God less present when it's just us? Is God less ready to meet with his people?

Is there less spiritual power in the almighty? Less ability to cause the seed to bear fruit in the soil? No.

[ 29 : 27 ] He is still the same God. If Pharaoh was still in the throne of Egypt, how much more is the almighty still in the throne of heaven? What can we do?

We may already be his servants in the court of the king, but we may just be being brought out of the dungeon, just seeing the light perhaps for the first time and squinting at it.

And it's not that comfortable perhaps. And maybe as we step out into the fresh air, we become aware, wow, James, I'm beginning to think of it, isn't it? You always did, but you never noticed it before in the dungeon, but now in the fresh air of God's truth and light as we become more and more aware of the new life to which he calls us.

We need a wash, we need a shave, we need new clothes, we need to be prepared to meet with our God.

And as the Lord's table approaches, it's not we'll put on our Sunday vest and we'll polish up our shoe, yeah, we should do that as well, but leave that aside. What I mean is, we ought to be prepared to take that wee bit more time with the Lord to seek him that wee bit more seriously and solemnly to make our preparations for meeting with him because just as although it is only God that gives the harvest 30, 60, 100, 4, the ground that is well prepared has more right to expect that God's seed will be blessed there and that which is still running wild with thorns and weeds and that which is rocky and shallow and that thrown to the birds of the air.

[ 31 : 17 ] It's not that, oh, well, I've done this, so God must do that. No, God doesn't must do anything. There's been plenty of times, I can tell you, as a preacher, when it's been well prayed over and all the hard work's got into it and it just comes out wooden and dead.

And there's other times when you're practically just winging it. And when, you know, that preparation might, for many legitimate reasons, have been, humanly speaking, minimal, and yet God causes it to soar.

It is only the Lord who brings life out of darkness. It is only the Lord who brings the captive from the dungeon. It is only the Lord who brings the Josephs of this world out of obscurity and hopelessness to stand before the king and to give them the opportunity to serve, to save life, to do some good with the opportunity that I'm given.

Yeah, loads of privileges go with it, just as loads of privileges go with Joseph's new position. He still has to do what is required of him.

He still has a duty to fulfill. He is still expected to do what the king requires. Lies are brisk. Time is running out.

[ 32 : 43 ] And for us, as the king calls us forth out of the dungeon to sit at his table once more, yes, we should make some preparation.

Not just on the service on the Saturday, but by then, spiritually speaking, we should be washed and shaved in green clothes and ready to meet with the king.

That's not just something outward, that's something in the heart, that's something in the spirit, which takes a good time to do. Takes time to do our ablutions, takes time to get ourselves clean, takes time to do our grooming outwardly and we never still think, oh, maybe this isn't the best use of time.

We know it's necessary, we have to do that. So take time inwardly in the few days that we have before our official preparations, before we sit at the Lord's table.

They brought him hastily out of the dungeon. He shaved himself and changed his remnant and came in unto Pharaoh. There is that which we can do.

[ 33 : 54 ] There is that which we are required to do, which we ought to do, if we are to have that right sense of expectation, that we have been brought before the king for a reason.

Something is about to happen, and it can only be something good, or God would simply have left us where we were before, there are preparations we can make, there are things that we can do.

Just as Joseph had things to do himself, let us make sure we do not neglect that which we can do, and that which we ought to do, in order to be ready for the king and what he calls.

Let us pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.