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“God-Sized Dreams” **Sermon on Genesis 45:1-9**

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God-Sized Dreams. Here’s one. One evening God said to Abraham, “See those stars in the sky? If you can count them up, and I doubt you can, but if you get to the last one, that’s as many children as you and Sarah are going to have.” That’s a God-sized dream. A God-sized dream is filled with hope and salvation. It is bigger than you can imagine. You can laugh at it and dismiss it as indigestion. Or you can live by it.

We’re going to be talking about the God-sized dream of a person named Joseph. One night, he had a very vivid, God-sized dream that as he was picking wheat with his brothers, they bent down as if to worship him. Joseph didn’t know what this meant, but he shared it with his brothers anyway. Not a good idea.

“Reign over us? We don’t think so.” They picked up the little twerp, threw him into a pit to die, and then went over to Denny’s for breakfast. But, after breakfast, while they were in the parking lot chewing on toothpicks, a caravan of Ishmaelites suddenly pulled in, and they got the idea to rescue their brother from the pit and sell him off into slavery for 20 pieces of silver.

Well, you remember the story, Joseph ends up in Egypt. He does well as a servant, but then a series of unfortunate events lands him in an Egyptian prison. While there, his is able to discern the God-sized dreams of some very powerful people, including Pharaoh. And such a gift rockets him up to become Pharaoh’s right-hand man, all the while saving Egypt from a severe famine.

Across the border, however, not everyone was so lucky. And so, over the border crawled Joseph’s brothers to the land of plenty. They crawled right up to the feet of a stranger, one who had all the power, a stranger they should have recognized. Joseph recognized them. It surely must have reminded him of that God-sized dream he had back before he was in prison, back before he was a slave, back before he was bouncing around in the back of a wagon, back before he was looking up from a pit.

A God-sized dream. Now hear the rest of the story.

Genesis 45: 1-15

45 Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, “Send everyone away from me.” So no one stayed with

him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. ³ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹ Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me; do not delay. ¹⁰ You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹ I will provide for you there, since there are five more years of famine to come, so that you and your household and all that you have will not come to poverty.' ¹² And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. ¹³ You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." ¹⁴ Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them, and after that his brothers talked with him.

Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here. For God sent me before you to preserve life. You see, these are the words of the God-sized dream of salvation that Joseph had when he was a boy. The dream that caused his brothers to throw him into a pit, has now become the God-sized dream that has saved them. They will live. Their children will live, and for generations to come.

Here's my question: Did Joseph trust that God-sized dream when he was bruised and naked and broken at the bottom of a pit? If he did trust the dream, imagine the confidence that Joseph had down in the pit. His life wasn't over. God was up to something.

Here's my question: Did Joseph trust his God-sized dream while bouncing around in the back of a wagon, slavery as his future? If he did, imagine the power that slave must have had. He must have been the most powerful slave alive, filled with hope, knowing who he was and whose he was.

Here's my question: Did he trust that God-sized dream when he was falsely accused and thrown into the depths of an Egyptian prison? If he did, imagine the light that he was cutting through the darkness.

Imagine if we could live a God-sized dream instead of just trying to get through the day. Just trying to live to the weekend. Just trying to get through life.

I remember the preacher, my predecessor in my church in Durham who defined life as "One damn thing after another." His name was William Crompton Bennett III. This preacher was there for 48 years. I met him for the first time in the parlor of the church. His portrait was hanging over the fireplace, a large portrait, with candles on either side. On the brass plaque below, it said, "Our Beloved Pastor." The only thing missing was a kneeling bench. The second time I met Dr. Bennett was in his apartment, which looked like the British Museum.

He asked me if I liked the two doors in my office. I wasn't sure what he meant. He said, "I had those doors put in because you can see from your desk who was coming into the church from the parking lot, and if you didn't want to talk to them, you could run out through the escape hatch – the extra door."

There was a woman who drove Dr. Bennett a little crazy, and she was at the church almost every day. A woman who was saintly and prayerful and full of God-sized dreams, but she just wasn't his cup of tea. He'd see her coming. He'd go out the escape hatch. See her coming. Out the escape hatch. See her coming, out the escape hatch. I should say that before our last renovation, my office here had that same feature. Now I have to jump out of a window.

He asked me, "Do you like the door?" I said, "I don't think I've been here long enough to enjoy the door. He nodded and said, "Trust me, you'll enjoy the door."

There came a day when Dr. Bennett was taking his last breaths on the face of this earth. There at his bedside, holding his hand, was that woman, praying him into the heavens, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. I lift up my eyes unto the hills, from whence will my help come. My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth." There she was, praying for Dr. Bennett to escape to the heavens. And there he was trying to find that escape hatch. There they were – she was pushing, he was pulling - into that God-sized promise that "I will go to prepare a room for you."

What do you think? What is life? Is it brother against brother? Is it one pitfall after another? Is it a slave to the job, a prison from which you can't escape? Many of you can testify as to how painful life can be. Some of you have stories of having to endure bullying as a child, and it has affected you all of your life. Some of you had to deal with alcoholic fathers. Some of you were abused by people who should have loved you. Some of you have health problems that have no cure. You know life can be a series of painful events, one after another.

Now, others of you have lived lives without a hitch. But even so, when you have it good, there's this little thing in the back of your mind that there just may be a hitch somewhere for you. Some of you feel it as you're getting older, and you're trying to stay young, but you can't stay young forever. The time will come when we can't quite remember things. There's someone out there who knows the hitches and want what we have. And it makes you turn on the lights at night and check the doors twice. Last week, someone busted into my neighbor's pickup and stole the gun he was going to use to keep someone from taking what was his. There are people running around in my neighborhood in the middle of the night stealing!

And now all these people from California are moving here. They're taking up our space in traffic, making it worse. My daughter was here visiting last week from Austin, TX. Do you know they've had more than 30-days over 100 degrees in Austin, TX? How long is it going to take a Texan to realize it's too hot down there? "I'm going to come to Tennessee?" We're going to have to build a wall to keep out our anxieties!

Or we can be people of power. People who trust in God-sized dreams. Like Joseph. Believing in a God-sized dream doesn't shield us from the awful. My God, you could have asked Father Stobel that. He ran Room In The Inn, helping homeless people. And that started with a peanut butter and jelly sandwich given to one person, and it stretched into a ministry lasting his whole life. It rescued him, saved him from his own depression, this God-sized dream that God loves everyone and there is enough to feed the 5,000, the 10,000, the millions. Having experienced the brutal death of his mother, he was not going to sit in that pit of despair, not when he was loved by God, not when he was bathed by grace.

Father Strobel wasn't a God-sized person. He wasn't bigger than you or me. He just believed in a God-sized dream that a clay jar, and we're all clay jars, and the light of Christ could shine through us and be the most powerful thing in the world. That God could take a hideous death of someone he loved, murdered by someone whom he would have given a peanut butter and jelly sandwich to, and he chose to forgive him. That God could take a hideous death, someone who was murdered on a cross, and turn it into resurrection light and life.

How many people were given hope and salvation because Father Strobel chose light, chose mercy, chose hope, chose community, and chose radical love? He chose a God-sized promise. It changes the world.

Over this past year, we've been seeking to re-vision, recalibrate where we are going as a congregation. We have heard your visions of wanting our children to grow in faith. Of wanting a community that will genuinely love you and nurture you. You want to be an inclusive community that loves everyone, and by that, do we mean everyone? Do you mean everyone? Are we that inclusive? Because I know some very inclusive people who want to include everyone but can't stand Republicans. Can't stand Aunt Marjorie who comes from Minnesota every year for Thanksgiving. Can we love everyone? Because that's the God-sized vision.

If you can't love everyone, the choice is ... there is no choice. The God-sized vision is we love everyone.

Can we transform? Can we transform ourselves? Can we transform this world? Can we love others because God first loved us?

When we read our Bibles, God will tell us over and over and over again that we have God-sized dreams to live into. It's up to us to live into those dreams. To hold one another accountable. To be disciples, disciplined... so that when we are deep in the pit, we know that suffering produces character, and character produces endurance, and endurance produces hope, and hope doesn't disappoint us. Not with the love that is made manifest in Christ Jesus. The discipline of the God-sized dream.

So that when our human dreams go off track and we're rattling around in the back of a wagon, we are not a slave to those who think they can control us. For we know that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Because life... life is just one.... ..glorious thing after another.

The lost are found. The blind see. I lift up my eyes unto hills from whence will my help come. My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. That's where our help comes from – God is our refuge and strength. A very present help in times of trouble. And therefore, we will not fear. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, and this is the day the Lord has made, so let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.