

DISCOVERING GOD'S WILL (14)
THE SPECIFIC WILL OF GOD
SEEKING HIS UNREVEALED WILL-Part Two
Sermon 9/16/18

For the past several months we have seen several overarching principles in Scripture which reveal God's will for us. Last week we began to inquire how we can know the will of God in situations where we need more than a general principle; times when we are seeking answers to decisions we must make such as which house to buy, which job to take, or which person to marry? These are the times when we need to know God's specific will and direction for our individual lives.

God says if we lack the wisdom to know His will we are to ask for it but to ask in faith without doubting. But while we wait expectantly for His answer we must not pre-judge the method God will use to reveal His will to us. God is a creative God and reveals His will to us in many different ways. I shared last week how God revealed His will to me through looking at Scriptures when my mother was in the hospital with a brain aneurism. I asked God for complete health and recovery for my mother and God answered my prayer using His written word. This week I want to talk about another way God reveals His will and that is through dreams.

God sometimes uses dreams to reveal His will in advance – that is to say He will reveal something to you in a dream that has not yet occurred. He does this to prepare you to receive something that will change the course of your life. You may not know at the time what the dream means or what God is attempting to convey. But once the events unfold you will understand that God knew in advance that it would happen. He was preparing you to trust Him by revealing something about your future before it came to pass.

In Genesis we read of this happening to Joseph, the great grandson of Abraham and the oldest son of Jacob and his wife Rachel. Joseph was given a dream in which God foretold what would happen not only to him but to his entire family. In two separate dreams God revealed to this 17 year old boy some key information concerning his future; a future that would impact not only his own life and the life of his family but their future descendants as well.

GENESIS 37:5-3

'Now Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic. His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms.

"Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. He said to them, 'Please listen to this dream which I have had; for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf.'

"Then his brothers said to him, 'Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?' So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, 'Lo, I have had still another dream, and

behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.'

"He related it to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, 'What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?' His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind."

While living at home with his family there was no context for Jacob or his family to interpret the meaning of his dreams. Joseph was the youngest of his brothers and yet his dreams indicated that he would rule over them all. This was offensive to them and made no sense in the context of when and where the dreams occurred. But these dreams would make sense when they came to pass.

As you may recall, after Joseph was sold into slavery he was employed by Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guards. Because of his wisdom and trustworthy character, Potiphar put Joseph in charge of his entire household. But Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph of impropriety and Potiphar had no choice but to place Joseph in prison.

While in prison Joseph interpreted two dreams, one for Pharaoh's former Baker and one for Pharaoh's former cup bearer. The cup bearer returned to Pharaoh's service but the baker was executed, fulfilling Joseph's interpretation of their dreams. Two years later Pharaoh had a dream and, thanks to the restored cup bearer, Joseph was summoned out of prison to explain the meaning of the dream to Pharaoh. This dream foretold of a great famine that was coming to Egypt. Pharaoh was so impressed with Joseph's interpretation and his advice as to how to prepare for the famine that Pharaoh raised Joseph up to be the second highest ruler in Egypt second only to Pharaoh himself. In preparation for the famine Joseph began to store the harvested grain of Egypt in large granaries over a period of seven years.

The famine that inevitably came to Egypt soon began to affect the rest of the world, including the land where Joseph's family lived. So Joseph's father sent his son's to the land of Egypt to buy grain. Joseph was in charge of the distribution of grain so when Joseph's brothers presented themselves before him they bowed down in deference to his high position. Remember, time, distance, and position kept Joseph's brothers from recognizing him. Joseph was wearing the full dress of an Egyptian authoritarian figure and looked nothing like the Hebrew youth they had sold into slavery. So Joseph's brothers did not recognize him. But Joseph recognized his brothers and took notice that they were bowing down before him. It was at this point the Scriptures say that, "*Joseph remembered the dreams which he had about them*" (Genesis 42:9).

No longer a 17 year-old kid, Joseph had matured into a full grown man of high position and stature in Egypt. Approximately 22 years had passed between the time Joseph had his dreams and the time when his brothers presented themselves before him in Egypt. Through his dreams God was preparing Joseph in advance for some life changing events, but he had to wait over two decades before he realized what it was that God had prepared him for.

A radical change in Joseph's life had come and God had revealed to him in advance that it was going to happen. Because of this, when the fulfillment of Joseph's dream came to pass it was a

comfort to him. It explained so much. Joseph was able to see that the bad things that had happened to him had truly been used by God to prepare him to be in a position to help his family in a time of desperate need. The fulfillment of his dreams is why, after he revealed his true identity to his brothers, Joseph was able to say to them:

GENESIS 45:5-8

“Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting...”

“God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God.”

Though Joseph offered forgiveness Joseph’s brothers still retained their guilty conscience. After their father died they were afraid that Joseph would take his revenge upon them. But once again, comforted by the dreams which God had given him and their subsequent fulfillment, Joseph said to them,

GENESIS 50:19-21

“Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about the present result, to preserve many people alive. So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.” So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.”

God sometimes provides a preview of His will for our lives before the actual events take place, before we even know to ask, “What is happening?” These types of previews usually occur through dreams or visions just as it did to Joseph. They happened to Abraham and Daniel in the Old Testament as well as Joseph and Paul in the New. I have had dreams in my life which foretold of something in the future that would affect my life at least twice; once during my college days in 1968 before I became a Christian and again about 14 years ago. Both times God was revealing His future will for me in dreams. Today I want to share one of those times where God prepared me for a future event through a series of dreams.

MY DREAMS

In 2004 I had three dreams over a period of several nights. At the time I did not know what they meant but as the related events came to pass it became obvious what the Lord was telling me. I worked for Bank of America at the time. My morning routine was to park in the Bank parking lot next to BART and then cross the street between buildings to get to my office. The bank allowed me to take my assigned laptop out of the office so I could work from home on occasion. I had a small carrying case with wheels and a handle in which I put the laptop along with all my other work paraphernalia so I didn’t have to carry them.

I give you all this detail so that you will understand the dreams that I am about to tell you. In the first dream I was walking from the Bank parking lot to my office. I had the handle of my carrying case in hand as I stopped at the cross walk between buildings. When the light turned green I started to cross the street. As I did the handle of my case broke and I lost control of my case. That

was where the first dream ended.

In the second dream I was parked at the gas station near my work. When I pulled out my Bank of America ATM card to pay for the gas I noticed it was crumbled on top, like parts of it were flaking off. As I went to insert it into the pump some additional pieces flaked off. This concerned me as it was my only means of paying for the gas; but my card was accepted and I was able to purchase gas. I had this same dream a second time; which implied, according to Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream, that whatever these dreams were referring to God had fixed them in time and they would soon come to pass.

Several months later the bank announced that it needed to reduce its workforce. By this time I had spent 25 years as an employee of Bank of America. I was well respected and had been promoted many times during my career so I was not concerned about the layoffs.

On the Wednesday of the final week in October, 2004 I was working from home and received a call from my immediate supervisor. She informed me that I was one of the hundreds of workers that were being laid off. One of the reasons I was chosen was that, even though I was only 55 years old, I was eligible for retirement and therefore wouldn't suffer as much from the loss of my job as others without retirement benefits.

Have you ever had moments in your life when you felt all heaven was waiting with baited breath for your next thought or your next action? I have to say that when the phone call came telling me I was being laid off I felt like the angels were peering out of heaven in anticipation of my reaction to the news of being laid off. Would I panic because my source of income was being terminated? Would I lash out in anger because I didn't think I deserved to be treated that way? Would I fall apart and withdraw for a period of time because someone didn't think I was good enough to continue to be employed by an institution for which I had worked 25 years? Or would I trust that God would provide? Would I find peace even in the midst of uncertainty?

Perhaps I felt heaven was holding its's breath because I too felt the importance of my reaction. I knew that how I responded to the news of my termination would be the determining factor of how I would handle the next few months of my life. My ability to trust and rely on the Lord for continued sustenance depended on that one moment. How I reacted to what had just happened would set the course for the rest of my journey in life.

While all these thoughts were going through my head I remained polite and understanding on the phone with my supervisor. Out of curiosity I asked, "why me?", and she gave me her response; but otherwise the call was short and to the point. I was fired. I had two weeks. I had two years severance pay. I could retire. It may have been the end of this chapter of my life. But thanks to the Lord's faithfulness it was just the beginning of the next – whatever that might be.

After I hung up the phone the Lord reminded me of a Scripture from Psalm 37 which says:

PSALM 37:25

"I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread."

It was from this Scripture that I made a decision then and there not to worry about what tomorrow would bring. I would trust the Lord and not fear over what I would eat. I finished up my work from home and got ready to go to the office. As I drove toward the freeway I saw the usual amount of people begging at the different street corners for bread and I said out loud to the Lord, “Thank you Lord, that I will not be begging bread. You will not forsake me. I will not give in to fear over what tomorrow holds. You hold my tomorrows and I trust you to take care of me. I will NOT be begging bread.”

When I got into the office I discovered that I was not the only one who had been laid off. Others in my group had too and were very vocal about it, complaining loudly, mostly I think out of fear. But I kept quiet about my own termination. I did not want to join in the fear fest. I chose instead to comfort and help others who were angry and fearful over losing their job.

It was not until the end of the day when the official announcement came out that people noticed my name on the list and they were amazed that I hadn’t mentioned it. Because I made the decision to trust, God’s peace filled my heart. I didn’t need to seek solace in complaining or find some company to share my misery. I was secure in God’s future provision for me so I was able to rest in His love and cast doubt and worry aside. Because of the peace that came from trusting God I was the only one who had been laid off that day that was able to bring comfort to others.

We each were given two weeks to complete whatever projects we had been working on. On Friday, November 12, 2004 I worked my last day at Bank of America. I turned in my laptop, cleaned out my office and went home that night not knowing what my future job prospects were going to be. My finances were not in any immediate danger, however. The Bank was offering two years’ worth of severance pay at the time. That meant I would continue to receive my full salary for 24 months even though I did not have to report to work at the Bank. So I had some time to figure out what I was going to do next without the pressure of unpaid bills.

During the final two weeks of my employment I recalled the three dreams that I had had a few months prior and I began to understand what they meant. For instance, when my handle broke on my bank laptop case and I lost control of it, God was telling me I would soon lose control over my job; that my position in the company would not remain secure and my connection to my job would soon be broken.

I also began to understand the two dreams where my Bank ATM card was crumbling in my hands as I purchased gas. God was telling me that my source of income would soon crumble but that I did not have to worry about paying for things. Even though my ATM card would crumble I would still be able to purchase the necessities of life. I did not have to live in fear over losing my job at BofA. I also understood why it crumbled bit my bit. This was symbolic of the fact that I would have two years before my salary would end thanks to the severance pay the Bank provided.

So I continued to walk in faith believing that God would provide. Did He provide, and if so, did He provide before my severance pay ran out? I’ll save the answers to these questions for next week because they are connected to another way God revealed His will to me. But before I close I want to take a look at the faith of Abraham to illustrate my point about dreams and faith.

HEBREWS 11:8-10; 17-19

“By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

“By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God...

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your descendants shall be called.’ He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type.”

God spoke to Abraham in a visit, in a vision, and in a dream. God revealed to Abraham the future of his descendants before he even had any. And after the promised son was born, God asked Abraham to sacrifice him on the altar. By faith Abraham prepared to obey but God intervened and provided a lamb instead. Why was Abraham willing to sacrifice Isaac in obedience to God’s command even though it seemed to contradict what God had previously told Abraham? Because it made more sense to Abraham to walk by faith than it did to walk by sight. Even if Isaac died Abraham believed that God would just raise him from the dead. Abraham was certain that God would fulfill His promise and that Isaac would be the one through whom all his future descendants would come.

I want to make sure you understand that trusting God as Abraham did is not blind faith. Trusting God is yes, going into the unknown, but it is going in with your eyes wide open expecting to see the provision of God. It is expectant faith not blind faith. It is the type of faith that expects God to answer, expects God to provide, expects God to lead the way even when you don’t know where the next step you take will lead. Expectant faith commits itself to God’s care and does not allow fear or doubt to block the view or get in the way of God’s blessing. Expectant faith believes God’s word and acts on it.

Abraham walked in expectant faith. The dreams and visions that God gave him only confirmed and strengthened his faith. Though he did not live to see the fulfillment of all the promises God had given to him, these encounters served to bolster his faith so that it did not waiver in the face of difficulties or the passing of time.

This is the faith that I relied on when the news of my termination came. Granted I had a few dreams of warning beforehand. But whether or not God gives any of us a vision or a dream about something in the future God still expects us to exhibit the same faith as Abraham. He expects us to walk in faith and place our trust in Him regardless of our circumstances. He asks each of us to listen for His voice and obey so when he says “move” we move, even when, like Abraham, we don’t know where we’re going.

Some say this is blind faith. But we don’t walk blind when we walk by faith. When we walk by faith we walk hand in hand with the God of our past, our present, and our future. When we place our trust in Him He directs our path. God will lead us through whatever we encounter in life

until He leads us on our final journey into His presence. God is faithful and will not abandon us to fate. We may not know exactly what the future holds, but we do know who holds the future. When we place our faith and trust in Him He will guide and direct so that when we come to the crossroads of life we will hear His voice behind us saying, *“This is the way you should go.”* And we go because no matter where it leads we know He will be there.

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