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As we continue our worship this morning for our scripture reading, turn with me to the book of Joel. It's nice to get into the minor prophets every once in a while, keep those pages unstuck in our Bibles. Joel chapter 2. We have here an apocalyptic prophecy.

You think, well, we are in the midst of, in our Genesis study, the life and career of Joseph. We've seen the butler and the baker or the cup bearer and the baker have their dreams. One has his head lifted and restored, the other has his head lifted and he's hanged on a tree.

And the issue there is they both have the same dream on the same night or a similar dream on the same night. They both come to Joseph and almost literally one goes up and one goes down. And the watershed in their lives is their meeting with Joseph and the interpretation of these dreams.

And of course, we don't have any literal issue of faith or repentance or anything else. These are pagan Egyptians, but it's the picture that counts, the record of this. And what it conveys in a symbolic fashion is what is at issue.

You have two individuals who are both sort of high and mighty. They fall from grace, as it were, in the eyes of Pharaoh and they are both in prison and condemned. One of them, after meeting with Joseph, is restored.

The other, after his meeting with Joseph, is destroyed. And this conveys something. God puts Joseph at the center of that.

Without Joseph, none of this would happen. None of it makes any sense. There would have been no one to interpret the dreams.

God probably would not have sent the dreams in the first place. It all focuses on Joseph. These men and their careers, their rise, their fall, their dreams and their fate all exist like the filigree in the settings around a gem, which is Joseph.

It is all designed to complement and bring him to the fore and make an issue of him in particular ways. We're going to see that this entire national destiny of Egypt that is going to be reflected in Pharaoh's dream does the same thing. And you think, what a tremendous thing it is that God does in shaping the destiny of a nation, the rise and fall of an entire generation or generations within a nation, all in order to create this picture that is recorded in Scripture and serves to rebuke, correct and instruct in righteousness for thousands of years after the fact.

These things happened some 3,800 years ago, 3,700 years ago, nearly four millennia ago that these things took place. And at the time, of course, the people were caught up in their future, in their fate, their well-being. Would they survive the famine and so forth?

But once they die and turn to dust, the record of what God did in that generation is what stands.

And that has been a reality that has been looked at by every generation in Israel and every generation in the church since. And the grand sweeping purposes of God in history, from the microscopic to the macroscopic, is a reminder to us that we have to step outside ourselves. We have to have the ability to look beyond ourselves and see where we are in the plan of God, because the plan of God is a self-evident truth, but it's huge.

It is the thing. And we sometimes think that God and His plan, and we don't do this consciously, but we wind up treating it as though it is just one of many factors that affects our life, instead of the fact that that is the reality, that is the big picture, and we are called to find our place in it. Well, when we come to Joel chapter 2 for our Scripture reading, this, in essence, was one of the things that the prophets tried to bring to the minds of people in Israel, from generation to generation, to remind them that it wasn't about their crops and their fields, their livestock, their marriages, their sons, their daughters, their issues of interpersonal conflict and so forth, to remind them that when they compromise, when they start living too much in the world, when they begin to accept the ideas from outside of Israel and from beyond what God had prescribed in the law, that this had repercussions that went well beyond just their personal future.

So, in chapter 2, the message from God through Joel says, Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain. Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand. A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, like the morning clouds spread over the mountains.

A people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been, nor will there ever be any such after them, even for many successive generations. A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the Garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness.

Surely nothing shall escape them. Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, and like swift steeds, so they run. With a noise like chariots, over mountaintops they leap, like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble, like a strong people set in battle array.

Before them the people writhe in pain, all faces are drained of color. They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like men of war. Every one marches in formation, and they do not break ranks.

By the way, when you start in verse 3, this is the plague of locusts. I've never seen a better description of this than in Laura Ingalls Wilder's books, in the Little House on the Prairie series. And when they lived out on the prairie, they had a locust invasion sweep across

their farms and fields.

And it's an eyewitness account, just a hundred years ago, of what this is like. And in class a couple of years ago, I actually read that section out of those books, because this is what Joel is speaking of. A fire devours before them, behind them a flame burns.

It's like the Garden of Eden in front of them, and behind them it's complete waste and desolation. And when you hear Laura describe what took place when those locusts came through, and there was not a stick, there was not a leaf, there was not a twig behind them, it was as though the land had been burned. And how they marched in ranks, when they came to their cabin, they had to close the window, because they were marching in ranks, and they marched right through the window, and in through the cabin, and out the other window.

And they had to shut the window to keep them from marching right through. They climbed up on the baby. Yes, before they got the window closed, their youngest was sitting in a high chair, crawled right up and over her and back down, all heading west.

Anyway, they're like lemmings or something. This group that went through where the Ingalls farm was, were heading west. And so on the east side of the house, they had to close all the windows and so forth, because they stopped for nothing.

And this is what Joel is describing, when he says, their appearance is like the appearance of horses, like swift steeds, though they run with a noise like chariots. Over mountaintops they leap, and of course sometimes they fly and sometimes they march, like a noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble. And Laura talked about at night, they could hear the chewing, this incessant grinding up of the cellulose and all of the plant life around them.

They chewed and ate everything in their path, and they could hear it. You think, how many would it take for you to be able to hear it outside your house, this gnawing and crunching going on. The noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble, like a strong people set in battle array.

Before them the people writhe in pain, all faces are drained of color. They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like men of war, like someone scaling the ramparts, they just crawl right up and over everything. Everyone marches in formation, and they do not break ranks.

They do not push one another, everyone marches in his own column. Though they lunge between the weapons, they are not cut down. They run to and fro in the city, they run on the wall, they climb into the houses, they enter the windows like a thief.

The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble, the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness. When this cloud of locusts first came, they thought a

storm was brewing, they thought that it was rain clouds coming that obscured the sun. It was a cloud of locusts, and it blackened the sky.

The Lord gives voice before his army, for his camp is very great. Strong is the one who executes his word, for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible. Who can endure it? Now that's the prophecy, that's the setting that is given.

But then look at verse 12. Now therefore, says the Lord, turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. So rend your heart, and not your garments.

Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and he relents from doing harm. Who knows if he will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God. Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly, gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes.

Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber and the bride from her dressing room. Let the priests who minister to the Lord weep between the porch and the altar. Let them say, spare your people, O Lord, and do not give your heritage to reproach that the nations should rule over them.

Why should they say among the peoples, where is their God? Then the Lord will be zealous for his land and pity his people. The Lord will answer and say to his people, behold, I will send you grain and new wine and oil, and you will be satisfied by them. I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations.

I will remove far from you the northern army and will drive him away into a barren and desolate land. With his face toward the eastern sea and his back toward the western sea, his stench will come up and his foul odor will rise because he has done monstrous things. Fear not, O land, be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done marvelous things.

Do not be afraid, you beasts of the field, for the open pastures are springing up and the tree bears its fruit. The fig tree and the vine yield their strength. Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given you the former rain faithfully, and he will cause the rain to come down for you, the former rain and the latter rain, in the first month.

The threshing floor shall be full of wheat and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil. I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten. The crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, my great army which I sent among you, you shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you, and my people shall never be put to shame.

Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel. I am the Lord your God, and there is

no other. My people shall never be put to shame.

It shall come to pass afterward I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. Also on my menservants and my maidservants I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood and fire and pillars of smoke.

The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon into blood before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord, and it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the remnant whom the Lord calls. It's a terrific chapter.

There is so much in here. I could divide this up and do a series, but the thing for our purposes in our study of Genesis and in particular this phase of the life of Joseph is that destruction is foretold, but it has a purpose. Its purpose is to create the need and create the opportunity for repentance.

Verse 12 and following, Therefore, says the Lord God, because these things are coming, there's a reason that they're coming, and it is apathy and indifference and rejection and neglect of the things of God. So God says, Turn to Me with all your heart. You need to be fasting and weeping and mourning.

And I know everything that's been said about how there's no emotional component to confession and the sorrow is not required and so forth, but at the same time, if we truly understand the magnitude of our offenses, if we understand the greatness of God's mercy, just like the lady who was forgiven much and came and washed the Lord Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair, there is going to be a natural response in our souls and the emotional side of our nature was created by God and it should not drive the train, it should not be the captain of the ship, but it is the responder in the soul and when we see the gulf between ourselves and our behavior and what God calls us to, when we see that we have sinned, there are times when there ought to be a response of what has been called godly sorrow and that's what's reflected here. God says, Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning. And this turning, we ought to be mourning not only for ourselves, but for the course that has been charted by the leadership of our nation and by the cultural influences in our nation.

It ought to create in us some sadness and in turning to the Lord and turning away from these things and seeing the wasted time and the wasted effort and the consequences of neglecting the things of God, that ought to engender a response. But the point is, this warning is given ahead of time. There is always grace before judgment and God says, One of the ways you know that I am God is that I tell you what's going to happen before it happens.

Nobody else is like God in that regard who can know the end from the beginning and who tells us of things to come. Isaiah talks about this in detail. So when God foretells destruction, when He sends His prophets indicating that judgment is coming, it isn't just to prove that He's God and He knows what's going to happen.

It creates the opportunity for repentance, for a change of mind away from the evil or the dead works or whatever it is the people of God are involved in and the opportunity to avoid that destruction. And that is particularly pertinent as we return to our study now in Genesis chapter 40 and 41. We saw at the end of chapter 40 this episode after Joseph has been imprisoned through the false accusation of Potiphar's wife, yet he is favored by God.

He rises to be the authority in the prison. These political prisoners or these friends of the king, these ministers of the king, cabinet officials, the cupbearer and the baker are in prison. Joseph is put in charge of them.

They have their dreams. He interprets it for them. He asks the cupbearer to remember him to Pharaoh when he is restored, but of course he forgets.

And we saw last time that the things that Joseph is asking the cupbearer to do are things that God has said He does for us. He is the one who remembers. He is the one who gives grace, who does chesed.

So now in chapter 41, it came to pass at the end of two full years that Pharaoh had a dream and behold, he stood by the river. Suddenly there came up out of the river seven cows, fine looking and fat. We'll be returning to that phrase in a moment.

And they fed in the meadow. Then behold, seven other cows came up after them out of the river, ugly and gaunt, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the river. And the ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven fine looking and fat cows.

So Pharaoh awoke. This was not just sort of a Pacific pastoral scene there. Well, here's some cows.

What did that look like, a cow eating a cow? Cows are not by nature carnivorous, but for them to eat the other cows, and the appearance of these lean cows was such that it woke Pharaoh up. I think all of us at one time or another have had a dream that was so awful that it woke us up. And it leaves a lingering sense of disaster or foreboding or fear or whatever it might have been after a nightmare like that.

When you start thinking about nightmares in that category that you've had, you can still now remember the aftershock of that when you wake up. And it takes you a while to realign yourself and realize, well, that was a dream, this is reality, that didn't really happen. People have horrible dreams about the death of children or the loss of a child and unable to find them or some disaster befalling a relative or someone you love and

being unable to do anything about it and these sense of helplessness and so forth.

Well, Pharaoh awakens from this dream with this awful sense. And some of us have also had this experience where after you kind of get over that, you get up and get a drink of water or you talk to your spouse or whatever, you wake them up from their perfectly calm, sound sleep and try to share the misery a little bit. You know, Mrs. Pharaoh might have gotten a shake on the shoulder there and Pharaoh tells about this terrible dream.

But then he slept and dreamed a second time. Sometimes you just have one of these others. It might have been something you ate.

In this case, it's from the Lord. He slept and dreamed a second time and suddenly, seven heads of grain came up on one stalk, plump and good. Then, behold, seven thin heads, blighted by the east wind, sprang up after them.

And the seven thin heads devoured the seven plump and full heads. So Pharaoh awoke and indeed it was a dream. You get the idea that indeed it was a nightmare.

And he wakes again with the cold sweats. And you would think, well, what's so scary? My daughter's had much more scary dreams than that, than cows eating cows or grains swallowing grain. But he has the foreboding and the awful sense of impending disaster that has a nameless, undefinable quality to it and he doesn't sleep, apparently, for the rest of the night because it came to pass in the morning his spirit was troubled.

Sometimes you wake up and you say, well, that was terrible, but you go on and you have a nice fine day. But Pharaoh doesn't get over this. It troubles him deeply.

And in Egypt, their mindset is perfect for this kind of thing because the Pharaoh, of course, is kind of a demigod figure. He's the closest to Isis and all of these other gods of Egypt and he's supposed to be divine himself and dreams were assigned great significance. There were people whose job it was to do nothing but listen to and interpret dreams.

But for the Pharaoh himself to have a dream, this was assumed to be from the gods. And Pharaoh might have any kind of a dream and he would call his magicians or his diviners and they would come and assign an interpretation. They had a whole dictionary of what symbols meant and so forth.

But when he stands here and calls for the magicians of Egypt and its wise men, he told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh. This doesn't mean that they didn't try or that they didn't run something up the pole to see if Pharaoh would salute, if it would satisfy him as to what his dream meant. But the symbols in these dreams are, as I said last time, and I got this word out of a commentary, polyvalent.

The last time I heard about valence was when I was studying electrons and what their energy level was. But the valence, the value that they can have, was multiple because cows were associated with the god Isis. They were also associated with the nation of Egypt itself.

They were also symbolic of the Nile, the strength and the power and the cyclical nature of the benefits of the Nile. And so what do these cows mean? Does it symbolize Isis? Does it symbolize Pharaoh himself? Does it symbolize the river Nile? Is it the nation? Well, there were so many different possible things that could be assigned to this that the magicians can't agree or they can't offer something where Pharaoh says, ah, that has the ring of truth. That's got to be it.

So I'm sure they tried. Your head can roll. You remember later on with Nebuchadnezzar, he has a dream and when they can't interpret it, he says, kill them all.

So I'm sure they tried something, but Pharaoh just says, no, I just don't think so. All the magicians and wise men. So then the chief butler spoke to Pharaoh.

Of course, he's floating around the vicinity of the throne there because he's a high mucky-muck in Egypt. I remember my faults this day. When he says I remember my faults or my sins this day, is he saying I've been remiss in not fulfilling Joseph's request? I don't think so because to open his speech to Pharaoh in this way, Pharaoh has no knowledge of Joseph or what Joseph asked him to do and we have no record that he agreed to do what Joseph asked him to do to remember him to Pharaoh.

When he says I remember my faults this day, he's saying, oh, mighty Pharaoh, you remember two years ago when I was on the outs and I got imprisoned. I'm remembering my faults. He doesn't say I remember your harsh judgment on me.

He has to bring this up in order to introduce Joseph. So this is sort of obsequious. He says, oh, I'm thinking about what a bad guy I was two years ago when you had to lock me up.

I remember my faults this day. When Pharaoh was angry with his servants and put me in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, both me and the chief baker, we each had a dream in one night, he and I. Each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his own dream. Now, there was a young Hebrew man with us there, a servant of the captain of the guard.

Notice he remembers him as being the servant of Potiphar. So Potiphar's been in the picture all along. We told him that he interpreted our dreams for us to each man he interpreted according to his own dream and it came to pass just as he interpreted for us, so it happened.

He restored me to my office and he hanged him. And he says this in the third person.

You have to wonder, well, he's not saying to Pharaoh, you restored me and you hanged him.

He's saying in the interpretation, Joseph restored me and Joseph... But isn't it interesting the language here? Because it's tied back to what Joseph said. Joseph prophetically restored me to my office and Joseph prophetically hanged him. And of course, Pharaoh knows and remembers that that's exactly what happened.

So the he there in verse 13 refers to Joseph. It is as though his interpretation brought it about in the mind of the cupbearer. And this is significant when we very soon start reviewing the symbolic value of Joseph's career and his operation in these different episodes.

This is very significant. He restored me to my office and he hanged him. Almost makes Joseph responsible for their fate rather than Pharaoh.

So Pharaoh sent and called Joseph and they brought him quickly out of the dungeon and he shaved, changed his clothing and came to Pharaoh. You remember from Egyptian tomb paintings and things that you've seen that the Egyptians were clean-shaven. They sometimes had kind of a long goatee thing coming off the chin of the Pharaoh or somebody royal.

But in general, somebody other than Pharaoh didn't have this ceremonial beard type of thing. And most of the times, they were completely clean-shaven. They often even shaved their heads.

But the Egyptians shaved all their body hair. And I mean all. And this was a part of their ideas of cleanliness and hygiene.

And it was very difficult to keep free of lice and this kind of thing. So the Egyptians shaved all their body hair as a regular thing. Of course, this is much different than the Semites up north and the Israelites, the family of Jacob in particular, historically has always worn full beards.

Even today in the Middle East, you very seldom see a clean-shaven man because the mustache in particular is associated with their virility and then coming of age and so forth. The vast majority, some of them that are very westernized, don't. But almost everyone wears at least a mustache and often a mustache and beard over there.

And so amongst the Israelis and the Arabs and everyone, it goes back for centuries. And when you think ahead to the inability of Joseph's brothers to recognize him, this is one of the reasons. As soon as they could start growing their whiskers, they did.

And all of these brothers are going to have a full beard and mustache and so on. And their brother, when they eventually see him, of course, he's going to be clean-shaven.

And if he had grown his beard by the time he was 17, well, that of course would be gone.

But they're just not used to recognizing people without their facial hair. And apparently Joseph in prison, being a Hebrew, had let his hair grow. And so now he's shaved to be brought into the presence of the mighty Pharaoh.

And they changed his clothing. The third time Joseph has had an issue with his clothing, his coat of many colors was stripped from him. His garment in the hand of Potiphar's wife was stripped from him.

This time he gets a garment. And things are looking up for Joseph because he gets a garment instead of having his garment taken away. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, I have had a dream and there is no one who can interpret it, but I have heard it said of you that you can understand a dream to interpret it.

You can hear a dream to interpret it. So Joseph answered Pharaoh saying, it is not in me. God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace.

And you remember Joseph made the same point when he talked to the butler or the cupbearer and the baker that these things come from God. And even in the presence of Pharaoh himself, Joseph makes a point of the fact that it is God. He doesn't deny that he can hear and interpret dreams, but he says the answer will come from God.

The answer of peace will come from God. Pharaoh said to Joseph, and now Joseph is going to hear the retelling of the dream by Pharaoh. And we're going to get this again.

Why? There are a lot of twos involved in this. Pharaoh has two dreams. We're going to get the retelling of these dreams twice.

And Joseph is going to make a point of the fact that there are two dreams in a moment. But it's interesting to review because the narrator gave us the content of the dreams in the first part of this chapter. And we had a very balanced picture of the healthy cows and the lean cows, the healthy grain and the dried up grain.

But now we're going to see a contrast because when Pharaoh tells this dream, there are going to be some differences. We're going to get his impressions that were not included in the first. So watch for that.

Behold, in my dream, I stood on the bank of the river. Suddenly, seven cows came up out of the river, fine-looking and fat. And this is the same phrase we saw back in verse 2. This fine-looking, by the way, is Yafet Mar'et in Hebrew.

And the only reason I inflict that on you is if you turn back to chapter 39, verse 6, when it says, Joseph was handsome in form and appearance, that is Yafet of form and Yafet Mar'et. The very same phrase that is used. That's the second part where it says he was

handsome in form and handsome in appearance.

That handsome in appearance is exactly what Pharaoh says about these cows. They were handsome in appearance. And fat.

And they fed in the meadow. And this is fat of flesh. The word basar, which is the Hebrew word for flesh, is in there.

So they were handsome in appearance and fat of flesh. And they fed in the meadow. Of course, this meadow is right next to the river.

And this would be the river Nile. They came Min Ha-Yor. And Ha-Yor is the river.

And that's the Nile. That is the river in Egypt. And so they are in this meadow by the river.

Of course, this is going to be a rich meadow because of the silt that comes from the Nile and so on. Then in verse 19, Behold, seven other cows came up after them, poor, very ugly, and gaunt. And this is evil in appearance.

That mar-eh that I gave you earlier. M-A-R-E-H. This is the word for appearance.

And these are evil. Ra-ah. R-A-A-H.

When you study Hebrew, you have a couple of different gutturals. There's the Aleph, which is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. And it's not so much a consonant as a very primitive form of vowel.

And it's a guttural. I can't make the noise. If you heard somebody speaking Arabic and you hear this thing that sounds like they're trying to get something out of the back of their throat, it's kind of a lock sound.

That's what Aleph makes. Well, Ayan is another one of those words. Aleph and Ayan.

And one of the hardest things when you're studying Hebrew is to remember these words. You can remember that there's a vowel letter there, a matris lectionis there. But to remember, well, is it an Aleph or is it an Ayan? But Ra-ah is real easy because I always think of the evil Ayan.

And Ayan is in the word for evil. And interestingly, it's in a lot of words that have a negative connotation. And Aleph is in a lot of words that have a positive connotation.

So this has the evil Ayan in it. R-A-A-H. The A that's in there is held in place by an Ayan.

So these are evil in appearance and thin of flesh, is what it literally says. And you have the word basar there again. Such as I have never seen in all the land of Egypt.

This is a new detail. I've never seen cows that were so horrible looking as this. They weren't just skinny cows.

They were evil in appearance and gaunt of flesh. So these must have just been what you would imagine seeing in a leper colony or something that's horrific to look at in terms of you can't even believe they're alive and walking. They were skeletal, just putrid looking cows.

And this is why he was so horrified in his dream. And the gaunt and ugly cows ate up the first seven, the fat cows. And this is another new detail in verse 21.

When they had eaten them up, no one would have known that they had eaten them, for they were just as ugly as at the beginning. So I awoke. And he probably enjoyed seeing this pastoral scene with the green meadow and the fine fat cows.

And then these awful horror cows come out and swallow up the fat cows and have this bloody slime coming out of their mouth. I'm embellishing. But it had to be horrible enough to wake Pharaoh up and to disturb him to this extent that he would call all of his magicians in.

So then he says the second one. In my dream, verse 22, suddenly seven heads came up on one stalk, full and good. Then behold, seven heads withered thin and blighted by the east wind.

The east wind was notorious. We have other scriptures in Ezekiel and so forth that talk about the east wind that would come. It was so hot and dry.

And it was the dryness of that east wind. The east, of course, is where the Arabi is, the desert. And there's no water there.

So this is why they still find dried, preserved corpses every so often. When the sand dunes shift and somebody that was lost 30 or 40 years ago, they'll find them mummified because the air is so dry that it desiccates the flesh before it can putrefy, before it can rot away. And so they're dried like dried fruit and preserved.

That's why the mummies have lasted so long in Egypt because there's very little moisture. Well, this east wind just sucks the moisture out of the crops and dries them in place. So they were dried by the east wind.

They sprang up after them and the thin heads devoured the seven good heads. So I told this to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me. And Joseph says in verse 25, the dreams of Pharaoh are one.

And then he's going to go on and give the interpretation. But the thing to remember here is you have a contrast of fine and ugly, of pleasing and plentiful and bountiful and

healthy and a picture of blessing. And you have something that is a picture of blight and cursing and destruction.

Remember the cupbearer and the baker? Restoration, fullness and blessing contrasted with blight and destruction. And that foreshadowed what we have in these dreams of Pharaoh. And he has two dreams, and in each of them you have these two things contrasted.

When you go back and think about our Scripture reading this morning in Joel 2, there is the blight, this plague of locusts, total destruction, fear in front of it and destruction behind it, people writhing in pain when they see it coming. And yet, in the same chapter, God promises blessing and bounty and the fig tree and the vine and all of these other things. In the simplest of terms, when you look at passages like this and you think about our life and our calling as believers, it's like what God told Israel at Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim.

It's like what Joshua faced them with when they crossed the Jordan into the land. I place before you this day life and death, good and evil. Choose you this day whom ye will serve.

When you have these two things set in such stark contrast, it creates and requires a choice. It creates the situation where a choice is required. You have to choose.

Jesus Christ Himself, the rock made without hands, He is either the rock of salvation or He is the stone of stumbling and the rock of offense. But you cannot remain neutral on the issue of Jesus Christ. We as believers cannot remain neutral about the issue of God's calling and God's purpose for us in this life.

We think, well, I've just kind of got one foot in each. I'm doing enough to get by. I'll get a C or a C plus in the grading.

When God threw out the Bible, it's an all or nothing proposition. It is either blessing and prosperity or it is destruction. There's not this middle ground that we like to create in our minds.

And it should remind us, it should bring us to that point of decision and bring us to the point of commitment. In some circles that we've been exposed to, the idea of commitment has been sort of a bad idea. But God requires commitment from us to recognize who we are and why we're here and to commit to put it all on the altar as the hymn says.

Situations like this require an all or nothing decision. And that's what we are called to. We're going to pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to see Joseph's interpretation of this dream. It's

something you may not have noticed about the dream and the outcome that flows from it. But let's pause here and take our break.