

That gnawing feeling...

Genesis 41:1-38

Certain things keep bugging us - leaving us with a feeling that we can't shake but we want to resolve. And they keep bugging us until we find a way to satisfy them. An itch somewhere on the body... a 'what was the *name* of that guy? - ah, that's going to annoy me now!'... a dripping tap in the house...

More profoundly, at some point along the way we human beings experience this kind of gnawing feeling about something deeper. It's like there's something troubling us, *all the time*, that we can't put our finger on and don't know how to satisfy.

Well, some of these gnawing feelings are easily sorted. You can scratch the itch (and many of you did when I mentioned feeling itchy...). You can ask a friend what that guy's name was, or maybe whip the phone out and look it up with a quick search on social media. You can get a plumber to fix the dripping tap (although it doesn't always get sorted as *quickly* as you'd like...)

But the deeper, profound gnawing feeling that dawns on you one day and won't go away... what do you do with *that*? In Genesis 41:1-36, we read about Pharaoh experiencing this kind of feeling and looking for answers. We read about how God makes Himself known in the midst of that. And we read about how Joseph, God's man-on-the-ground, plays his part both for God and for unsatisfied Pharaoh in a way that changes lives completely.

The passage starts by narrating the dream that Pharaoh has - a repeated dream in different forms, but a thing that keeps coming to him and won't go away. And in v.8, we read that Pharaoh's 'mind was troubled.' That gnawing feeling... This wasn't like any old dream where you'd wake up going, 'That was weird' before shaking it off. Something about it was eating Pharaoh up.

So he started looking for answers in the places that people in his culture looked for answers. As we said last week, when people were troubled by dreams in this time and place, they would seek the services of professional dream interpreters (nice work if you can get it, but not such a market for it today). Pharaoh goes to the 'magicians and wise men of Egypt,' but none of them have any answers for him. None of them can scratch the itch.

We're not Pharaohs, and the gnawing feeling you've been living with might not come from some strange dream. But we're not so different from Pharaoh really. That profound, disturbed sense of something not being satisfied

dawns within us. For the most part, we crack on quietly and smile at work, the school gates, the pub; before dropping the smile with exhaustion at home.

And like Pharaoh, we look for answers and satisfaction in the places that people do in our culture. In immersing ourselves in work or the family to crowd out the gnawing feeling. In throwing off cares and responsibilities in alcohol, drugs or simply heading off somewhere for the weekend to drown out the gnawing feeling.

In sex or social media, searching for intimacy in different ways from different people, to at least get a temporary hit for fulfilling the gnawing feeling, before it fades again. In possessions - the toys we buy at every age in life to distract us from the gnawing feeling.

If you know this feeling that I'm describing; if it has emerged upon you - then you'll know too that none of these things scratch the itch. Never enough. At best it's temporary relief that you experience. At worst, it's emotional damage, debt and death. It's never *peace*, though.

Pharaoh's mind was troubled, and the answers that his culture had for him couldn't deal with it. Our generation is troubled too. And you are too, aren't you? You *know* this feeling I'm talking about; you've felt it for a while now, and the more you become aware of it, the more you don't know how it's ever going to stop.

The answers our culture has for us aren't cutting it. But if you've got the ears to hear it, this is what I believe God wants you to know today. Both the answers to this profound gnawing need you have, and the *gnawing feeling itself*, come from Him.

In vv.25-32, Joseph affirms three times that these dreams that were the root of Pharaoh's gnawing feeling were given to him by God. God wants to get Pharaoh's attention. But the King of Heaven doesn't do it by simply stating some claim to the King of Egypt who has never paid attention to Him before. God starts by giving Pharaoh a thirst, before providing the answers that quench it.

If you're experiencing this gnawing feeling that demands satisfaction but can't find it in bright lights, liquor, love, lottery or the lounge in your house, then be encouraged with this news: That thirst you've got - that's God giving you a gift. You're at a crucial crossroads in life now. We'll talk about the thirst-

quencher that God's going to follow up with in a minute, and whether you're going to take Him up on it or not. But first...

Have you ever known this unsatisfied gnawing feeling? Was it ever satisfied in a lasting way? If so, how?

vv.25-32 don't just tell us that God gave Pharaoh these dreams. Joseph tells Pharaoh the *reason* for the dreams. v.25, 'God has revealed to Pharaoh what He is about to do.' v.28, 'It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do.' v.32, 'The *reason* the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon.'

And we learn that what God is going to do is to send seven years of great agricultural abundance in the land of Egypt; followed by seven starkly opposite years of famine. God reveals to Pharaoh something that, as the King of this nation, he needs to *know*.

But more than that, it's something that Pharaoh needs to *act on*. Joseph spells that out in vv.33-36. 'Look, your Majesty, since God's revealed this is His firm plan, you need to appoint a team and appoint a leader to manage storing the surplus that we'll start with for when the hard times hit.'

For God's part, He reveals what He has firmly decided, what Pharaoh needs to know, and what Pharaoh needs to act on - not only for Pharaoh to satisfy that gnawing feeling, but for many thousands of lives to be saved.

For Pharaoh's part, he needs to know what God has revealed to him, and he needs to act on it. He needs someone to explain to him the news that God has published, and he needs to do something with what he's heard. Here's the thing though - Pharaoh will only act on it if he *believes* it.

We stopped reading at v.36. But what happens next? Maybe Pharaoh thinks it over for minute, then says... 'Nah. I don't buy it. And I'm not going to change my nation's entire economic policy on the word of some foreign prisoner. Who knows? Maybe everything will just work out alright and this destiny I'm being warned about will never happen. Why reshuffle our lives over this guy's message about what this God of his has decided to do?'

If Pharaoh *had* gone that way, thousands of people in the entire region would have lost their lives in a seven year famine that nobody believed in and nobody prepared for. But as you read on, you discover that in this crucial

crossroads moment, Pharaoh doesn't do that. He hears Joseph's message, believes it, and acts on it. Consistently, for seven years, he sticks by it. And one day, he discovers how vital it was that he did.

We don't get to read anything about what was going through Pharaoh's mind at that moment except for this in v.38 - he recognises that Joseph's message carries divine authority. What Joseph's saying... it's got the ring of truth. It makes sense of these dreams that have been gnawing at him. It *adds up*. So Pharaoh takes the risk of investing a whole nation's welfare in the truth of what God is making known to him through this guy Joseph.

Now let's come to you. Because God has revealed to *you* what He wants *you* to know and act on too. If you do, it will save your life. And who knows - it may save thousands of others too. But you'll only act on it if you not only *know* it, but *believe* it. And it all starts with that gnawing feeling we talked about earlier...

Here's the news that Jesus published, and that He wants you to know. It's in John 14:1-6...

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house there are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.'

Thomas said to Him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?'

Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.'

Here's the news from God. He is a Father. He has a house. And He wants you home. That gnawing feeling you've got? That's homesickness. You're feeling that pang of being away from the place where your identity truly lies, and where you are completely safe, welcome and loved. And that pang just won't go away *until you are home*.

Jesus said, 'I'm making up a place for you to be home with God the Father. And you know the way home.' Maybe you don't. Maybe you've looked for it; maybe you didn't even realise that you were looking for anything.

But when one of the guys near him expresses confusion about this, Jesus tells him what He tells you now: 'I am the way, the truth and the life. Nobody comes to the Father except through me.'

Jesus is the way home. He died on a cross voluntarily for you. Why? Because the Father's house is the place that is the absence of everything that is contrary to God's perfect, full, fantastic creation of life.

And all the anger, jealousy, lies, hidden actions and masked attitudes, self interested, greedy stains of sin that are so much a part of us that we even surprise ourselves with it, was a barrier to coming home. But God *wants* you home. So Jesus died for all that stuff. So you can be free. Forgiven. Home with God. That gnawing feeling gone for good.

This is what God reveals to *you*. This is what He has firmly decided the reality is, and what it takes to deal with it. It takes someone to tell you that. It probably helps if it's not just me as a Minister telling you that in two minutes. I pray too that there's someone in your life who can tell you this news. Again and again. Like the repeated dreams of Pharaoh. Until you know it, believe it and act on it.

How do you act on it? It's like this: Admit to God that you miss Him, and that you want to come home. Turn your back on the stuff that doesn't fit the family likeness. Trust that Jesus' death has dealt with all of that stuff. And trust that Jesus' resurrection really happened, and means that this home you're coming to isn't just today, but beyond death.

So... what happens next? 'Nah. I don't buy it. And I'm not going to change everything my life revolves around based on the word of my Christian pal or their minister. Who knows? Maybe everything will just work out alright and this being-apart-from-God-and-life-forever destiny I'm being warned about will never happen? Why reshuffle my life over what these Christians are saying their God has decided to do?'

Or...

'This has got the ring of truth. It's making sense of that gnawing feeling. God... God's actually *speaking* to me. This *adds up*. And I'm going to take the risk of investing my life in the truth of what God is making known through these people in my life.'

What's it going to be?

Why do you think Pharaoh chose to act on what Joseph was telling him that God was saying?

Well I can imagine that amongst those of you here who are Christians, something like this is going through some of your minds: 'How's Scott managing to squeeze an evangelistic sermon out of this chapter about Joseph? That's great for our visitors and our people new to the church, but we know all this. What's the passage *really* saying to us?'

Well, I'm unashamedly taking every opportunity to share the news that God wants to share that will make people safe and bring people home. That is, after all, the point of the whole Bible. It's why God's spoken it to us.

But if my fellow Christians want something to learn from in this passage, apart from being reminded just how great it is that God has brought us home already, here's one for you.

Be unafraid to testify to what God says and does. One minute, Joseph's in a prison cell. The next minute, he's standing in front of a King pinning his hopes on Joseph's ability to interpret a dream. Read v.14, and you get the sense from the word 'quickly' of how this is all happening so fast for Joseph.

He's had no time to process. He's been flung into this situation, he's dressed funny and he's got no beard for probably the first time in his adult life (Hebrews were bearded, Egyptians were clean shaven and Joseph was told to shave before he stood before Pharaoh). Everything about this is sudden, and on the spot.

Joseph doesn't lose his confidence or his humility as God's man in this moment. 'I've heard that you can interpret dreams...' enquires Pharaoh. Joseph doesn't panic, and say, 'No, I can't, there's been a mistake.' Nor even, 'Well, I could give it a go, but I'm not so sure...'

But he doesn't try to grab the moment to make himself the hero here either. He doesn't say, 'Yeah, I can do that for you. Tell me, I'll sort it.' Instead, Joseph's confidence and humility is rooted in this response: 'I can't do it, but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.'

Just like in our last chapter, when someone expresses a need for help, and Joseph knows that it's something he can help with, he takes the opportunity to point to God as the real source of the help and solution. Do you do that?

Don't lose confidence in the God-given ability you've got to bless others. When they ask, go for it. But don't be cocky with it, and don't let the light shine on you. When you get a 'you're the best' or 'you're just so kind,' turn the light on to God, and how He's the One who has made you able to share what you can share.

Talking about God in your conversations with people who need Him is *vital*. As well as making God the first focus of his first response to Pharaoh's gnawing feeling; as we've seen Joseph mentions God and His purposes three times in vv.25-32. Do you mention Him *once* when you recognise that moment when your friend is talking about that gnawing feeling in their life?

There are lots of things going on in Finlay's baptism today. One of them is God's declaration that Finlay belongs in His house and home, because Ian and Gillian's family are part of God's family until they choose not to be. One of them is Ian and Gillian's public commitment to disciple Finlay - to invest *his* whole life and future on what Jesus has made known to us being true.

Have you considered how strong a message Ian and Gillian are sending to you in this? How they are pointing to God in this? They aren't just wetting the boy's head.

They are saying, 'We so believe in Jesus being the way, the truth and the life, that we're going to raise Finlay to believe it too. We're not going to just teach him, 'some people believe this, Finlay.' We're going to say, 'This is *true*, Finlay. Base your life on *this*. We love you, but God loves you more. Our home is your home, but your true home is with your Father God. And we'll apprentice you in following Jesus for as long as we all breathe the air of this world.'

They are telling *Finlay* that - not just in a day, but over a lifetime. And they are telling *every one of you* witnessing this today that as well. You are being pointed home to God - not just through a lengthy sermon, but through the commitments of two parents declaring that they'd stake not just their own lives, but their son's life too, on knowing, believing and acting on the news that God has made known to us through Jesus.

Joseph told Pharaoh what he needed to hear. He did it straightforwardly. No buttering it up, no softening the hard bits to swallow. He valued truth telling over diplomacy (a little like Irish Taoiseach Enda Kenny in the United States this week. Donald Trump swallowed and winced and Kenny spoke just very

calmly and clearly about the history of Irish immigration to the States and the lessons to be learned from the welcome America once showed).

So fellow Christians, don't butter it up, make a big deal of it, or get red faced with either embarrassment or zeal. Just tell people what they need to know and act on. What God has firmly decided on. What Finlay has heard and will continue to hear as he grows. We need to come back home to God. And we need Jesus to do it.