

Welcome

Who doesn't want to be great!? I remember one of my first moments where I was poised for greatness. It was Jr. High. I've always loved to sing, so I took choir as my elective. It was my chance to spread my wings and sing like the songbird that was in my heart, a songbird that was a majestic eagle of music.

We were rehearsing for an upcoming concert - I remember we were singing the song "American Pie" by Don McLean. We had to change the words "Them good ole boys were drinking whisky and rye" to "Them good ole boys were drinking Canada Dry" because hello we were twelve years old. Our choir director, Ms. Cheney, wasn't dumb!

Anyway, Ms. Cheney was mixing us all up, from the usual spots where we stood and she put me in the front row, in the center. Whoa. I was going to be a star *for sure*. And then... I could hardly believe this... she put Nikki right next to me. Nikki was the cutest girl in 8th grade. She was the girl all the boys wanted to date.

And she was standing right next to me. We got to sing together, make little jokes. Did I need any more proof this was my God-ordained moment?

I assure you, my 12-year-old self did not.

Then the night of the concert came. We lined up, Nikki behind me. She was in a black dress. I was in a black and gold cummerbund. We walked out, standing shoulder-to-shoulder at center stage. This was it, the very moment for me to let my inner song-eagle soar. The audience would erupt into thunderous applause, shower me with roses and all those song producers would have to wait while Nikki and I finally and very dramatically held hands and gazed awkwardly at each other.

And then, just before we began, Ms. Cheney came over to me and stage-whispered in my ear between me and Nikki. "You tend to be pretty pitchy, so try not to sing so loud."

I was devastated. Pitchy? Why did she wait until *this moment* to tell me? Why did she put me front and center? And then I saw the look in Nikki's eyes... pity.

My song eagle would not spread his wings this night, my friends. No roses. No awkward adolescent hand-holding. My dream had been crushed.

I wish that story had some sort of happier ending but it doesn't. That's how my dream of being a singer ended, more or less. I was still in choirs off and on. I was even a lead screamer for a metal band for a while (because screaming is a lot easier to do on pitch).

But I will never forget that feeling, that moment when all the wind blew out of my sails.

Have you ever had a dream crushed like that? Have you ever had a vision of the future that felt so real and exciting to you and had someone bring it crashing down?

I want to talk with you about dreams today - dreams that have way more stakes than 8th grade choir. I want to talk about dangerous dreams, dreams that threaten the status quo. Dreams that provoke a response from those in charge of the status quo.

And I want to ask what happens when those dreams are from God. And, as we dream about the future of Catalyst, how God calls us to respond.

Message

Our summer series is called "The Way, Way Back". Hopefully that calls to mind summer vacations, road trips and fights over who got to ride in the way, way back of the station wagon. (I know, no one drives station wagons anymore because we got SUVs and convinced ourselves they're different.) This series is all about the things we learn when we're willing to leave home - aka our comfort zones.

We're in the book of Genesis, following the patriarchs and matriarchs of our faith as they follow God on road trips of their own. One of the consistent things we've seen over this series is that this family has a lot of problems. They've passed that dysfunction down, generation to generation. And you'll see Jacob (who goes by Israel now), has passed on that dysfunction to his eleven sons.

We've seen in every generation of this family so far that God has chosen the younger sibling. Abraham had two sons - Ishmael and Isaac. Isaac became the child of promise. Isaac had twins - Esau and Jacob. And Jacob, the younger, became the child of promise. Now Jacob has eleven sons and Joseph is the youngest. (If you're thinking, wait, I thought he had 12 and Benjamin is the youngest, you're right, but Benjamin won't be born for another few years from the time of this story.)

Joseph is the youngest, which we as readers know means he's probably favored by God. We're right - Joseph has a supernatural ability to access the dream world. Over the next three weeks we spend with Joseph, this is a huge factor in his story. Today, you'll see he has a couple of dreams about his future. Next week, you'll see he has the ability to interpret and understand other people's dreams.

Let's meet Joseph, then talk about the nature of dreams:

Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other children because Joseph had been born to him in his old age. So one day Jacob had a special gift made for Joseph—a beautiful robe. But his brothers hated Joseph because their father loved him more than the rest of them. They couldn't say a kind word to him.

One night Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers about it, they hated him more than ever. "Listen to this dream," he said. "We were out in the field, tying up bundles of grain. Suddenly my bundle stood up, and your bundles all gathered around and bowed low before mine!"

His brothers responded, “So you think you will be our king, do you? Do you actually think you will reign over us?” And they hated him all the more because of his dreams and the way he talked about them.

Soon Joseph had another dream, and again he told his brothers about it. “Listen, I have had another dream,” he said. “The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed low before me!”

This time he told the dream to his father as well as to his brothers, but his father scolded him. “What kind of dream is that?” he asked. “Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow to the ground before you?” But while his brothers were jealous of Joseph, his father wondered what the dreams meant. -- Genesis 37:3-11

We think we know instinctively why Joseph's brothers are angry with him. We live in a post-Freud world, where dreams are expressions of our subconscious desires. So we see Joseph in this story as a brat. He's the youngest son, the one who will receive the tiniest part of their father's great wealth. So deep down, he wants to be in control.

But that understanding of dreams is not even 200 years old. In the world of the Bible, dreams were something much more provocative, much more powerful. Dreams could be - and often were - messages from the gods. They were often understood as messages about the future.

So Joseph's brothers aren't angry because they have an annoying kid brother. They're angry because *Joseph's dreams threaten their status quo*. How could the *youngest* brother be chosen as God's messenger? That's not how their world works - the firstborn is the child of promise!

And how could these dreams promise that everyone *even his mother and father* (the sun and the moon) bowed down to Joseph? It was one thing to suggest that Joseph would be the greatest of his brothers, but to suggest that the son would outshine his father? Impossible. It broke every rule their culture held sacred.

Dreams are a form of imagination. Dreams see the world not as it is, but as it could be. And, when these dreams come from God, they see the world as it *should* be. We call these dreams prophetic. Prophets aren't fortune tellers - they're not looking into a fixed future and making predictions. Prophets make imaginative invitations. They say, "Look at what *could be*! Look at what *should be*!"

Prophets help us see what should be and invite us there. They speak to all of us living in the status quo and help us imagine a better, more just, more holy world.

You know who doesn't like dreamers? The folks who benefit from the status quo. In Joseph's story, it was his brothers, and his father. As the men in positions of greater privilege in a patriarchal society, for them to bow down and serve Joseph would cost them - literally. They would have to give up positions they had earned (in the case of Jacob) or had been born into (in the case of Joseph's older brothers).

Joseph's story illustrates the two kinds of reactions we see from people who are threatened by dreams. The first is the one we expect: we might call it active resistance. It's what Joseph's brothers do - if you read on through the rest of chapter 37, you see that when Joseph goes to visit them, they throw him in a pit, take his amazing technicolor coat, sell him into slavery and tell his father he was killed by a lion. They don't like Joseph's dream, so they actively resist. They take steps to ensure that dream won't come true. (We'll see over the next two weeks that our evil intentions can't stop God's plans, but that doesn't stop us from trying.)

We look at them and say, "They're resisting the Dream."

Well... yeah. The active resisters are pretty obvious.

But Joseph's story warns us of another kind of resistance to the Dream, one that's a lot more subtle and insidious.

Look again at Joseph's second dream: **This time he told the dream to his father as well as to his brothers, but his father scolded him. "What kind of dream is that?" he asked. "Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow to the ground before you?" But while his brothers were jealous of Joseph, his father wondered what the dreams meant. -- Genesis 37:10-11**

His father scolded him. And while his brothers were *jealous*, his father wondered.

That doesn't sound so bad, does it?

But this is what we might call *passive resistance* to the dream. Jacob doesn't sell his kid into slavery. But he doesn't do anything to bring about the realization of the dream either. Instead he scolds the dreamer.

When we hear a Dream from God, a dream that disrupts our status quo, we have three choices: We can actively resist the dream, like Joseph's brothers.

We can resist passively, like Jacob. We can sit on our hands and shrug and say it's too hard, it's unrealistic, it's just going to take time. We can reprimand the Dreamer for being too bold, for being impatient.

Friends, neither of those is working toward the Dream. Neither of those is listening to the voice of God. Neither of those is praying with Jesus, "Let God's kingdom come here on Earth as it is in Heaven."

Our other option is to get on board. To listen to the Dreamer. To strain and work to see the Dream their words are giving shape. And then to ask, "What is my role in making this dream a reality? What is God asking *me* to do? What shape does my "Yes" take?"

As you'll hear over the next couple of weeks, Joseph's journey toward that Dream God gave him persists. His brothers' active resistance couldn't stop it. His father's passive resistance couldn't stop it. Because God will accomplish what God wants in this world.

The question isn't, "Will the Dream come true?" The question is, "What part will I play in the story of the Dream coming true?"

CATALYST DREAMS

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What better world can you see that's just over there? Maybe it's your dream, maybe someone else has been telling it.

Don't resist the dream, friends. God will accomplish God's purposes. The good news is that God is inviting you to be part of it.

Communion + Examen

Jesus spent years teaching us the Dream of God's Kingdom. And plenty of people resisted his dream - both those who crucified him and those who stood by and watched.

But we come to this table today because Jesus set a table both for the betrayers and those who would stand by. Jesus invites us all to the table with him that we might see the new world he's bringing about through his Death...

1. What Dream have I sensed God inviting me to be a part of in the last week?
2. How have I resisted that Dream, either actively or passively?
3. How might I be tempted to resist, either active or passively in the next week?
4. How can I join in the Dream God is calling me to be part of this week?

Blessing/Assignment

God will accomplish God's purposes. Go dream God-sized Dreams!