

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Lessons from the Lives of Old Testament Characters: Joseph

Tony Blair was appointed Prime Minister of this country at the age of 44, a young man as Prime Ministers go, but by no means a record. In 1783 William Pitt was appointed to that office aged 24 and the subject of our meditation today is a man who became Prime Minister of one of the most powerful countries of the world at that time at the age of 30; he died aged 110 and was Prime Minister for most of that time. The man's name was Joseph and the country of which he was Prime Minister was the kingdom of Egypt. He was the son of Rachel, the wife of Jacob, recorded in Genesis 30:24, and then his history is given in Genesis 37-50. He is probably the most pertinent type of our Lord Jesus Christ found in the whole of scripture. By this, I mean, that he was a pattern or a figure of the Lord. We have good authority for interpreting Scripture in this way because in Hebrews 9:23-24, we find that inanimate objects, termed the vessels of the ministry that were connected with the tabernacle, the centre of Jewish worship, are referred to as patterns or figures of heavenly things. As to persons, Isaac, offered as a sacrifice by Abraham (Genesis 22), is surely a figure of the Father giving His Son, and Moses himself prophesied that the Lord would raise up a prophet "like unto me" (Deuteronomy 18:15). He was, of course, referring to the Lord Jesus Christ and, similarly, in Joseph we see a portrayal of the Person and features of the Lord.

1 Beloved Son

In Genesis 37:3 we read: "Now Israel (that is, of course, Jacob) loved Joseph more than all his children because he was the son of his old age." Jacob had eleven other sons but Joseph was his favourite; he was the one well beloved by the father. During our Lord's life upon earth, on two occasions God the Father spoke from heaven to proclaim, "This is my beloved Son" (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). Then in Colossians 1:13, he is the Son of the Father's love and in John 1:18, we find that he is always abiding in the Father's bosom, that is, the place of love and affection.

2 Shepherd

The first active reference we have of Joseph is in Genesis 37:2, where we find he is a shepherd. But not only is he looking after the sheep, but it is specifically recorded that he is feeding the sheep. How like our blessed Lord. He who is the good shepherd not only cares for the sheep, but is also the one who feeds them. We read that the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep (John 10:11) and in Colossians 2:19, we find that he is the nourisher. No doubt He does this through His under-shepherds. His last commission to Peter personally was, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:17).

There are two main periods to the life of Joseph: one of suffering and one of exaltation and I would like to say a word about each.

3 Rejected by own brethren

Firstly, we have Joseph as the one who was utterly rejected by his brethren. Although he was the well beloved of the father, this very fact stimulated bitter jealousy and the burning hatred of his own brethren. Their hatred even goes as far as murder and, in Genesis 37:20, we find them hatching a plot to kill him and then afterwards reporting to their father that he had been devoured by some evil beast. And so, in verses 24 and 25, we read that "they took him and cast him into a pit, and the pit was empty, there was no water in it, and they sat down to eat bread". What callousness! Just think of it. Their own brother, and they are willing to do away with him in such a wicked and dastardly way. And so they virtually kill him; it was only a matter of time before he died in the pit. They throw him in and then calmly they sit down to eat their lunch. And what do we read of our Lord Jesus? In the first Chapter of John's Gospel, we read that: "He came unto his own" (John 1:11). By His human birth, He was a Jew and He came to the Jewish nation, His own people, ready to take His place amongst them. But that very verse also tells us that His own received Him not and the gospels show that during His earthly ministry of three years, they were ever intent on His death. Ultimately they, the Jewish leaders, "led Jesus unto the hall of judgment, and it was early, they themselves went not into the judgment hall lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the Passover" (John 18:28). What similarities there are to the experience of Joseph! The Lord Jesus Christ, a perfect sinless man, yet one so hated that nothing less than His death will satisfy His adversaries, and to crown it all they protest that his very presence would defile them. That they might

eat the Passover. What hypocrisy! After the murder, Joseph's brethren sat down to eat bread; the Jews, with the murder of Christ accomplished, will eat the Passover.

4 Suffering

But God, according to His divine purposes, delivers Joseph from the pit and he is carried away to Egypt and there becomes a slave in the house of a prominent Egyptian named Potiphar. Here, despite exemplary service and conduct, he swiftly becomes the object of the hostility of Potiphar's wife and, ultimately is unjustly accused and put in prison. In the pit, he was under the hand of his own brethren. In the prison he is under the hand of the Egyptians, a Gentile nation. Surely here we have a representation of the sufferings of our blessed Lord. He, the perfect man, come from Heaven, becomes the object of hatred of both Jew and Gentile. In Acts 4:27, we find the believers praying together: "For of a truth against thy holy Child Jesus whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were gathered." So we see that the Lord, like Joseph of old, was opposed by all the world, Jew and Gentile. Joseph was a sufferer for righteousness' sake. As such he was constantly under the eye of God. God allows these afflictions and trials as a preparation for the service He had in mind for His man, and of which we read in Genesis 41-50. The prophet Amos in Amos 6:6 laments those "That drank wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the chief ointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." When we think of what our Saviour has suffered; His treatment at the hands of men, even His own brethren; wounded in the house of His friends, betrayed by one of His own disciples, and then what He endured under the hand of God when He became sin for us; we, His redeemed ones, should be grieved for the afflictions of the true Joseph. This is perhaps what the apostle Paul meant when he desired "that he might know the fellowship of His sufferings" (Philippians 3:10). Now I turn to the period of Joseph in his years of power.

5 Death

When he was put into the pit Joseph died in figure. As far as his family and friends were concerned he was dead. Our Lord, actually so. But by death, both Joseph and Christ brought salvation to all.

6 Resurrection and exaltation

Again, God delivers Joseph. His character, ability and conduct in the prison is such that he gains the favour of the governor of the prison and ultimately comes to the knowledge of Pharaoh himself, the King of Egypt. In the prison, he had accurately interpreted, with the guidance of God, of course, the meaning of the dreams of two of his fellow prisoners. Now, Pharaoh has two dreams and no-one can tell him what they mean. But hearing of Joseph, he summons him from prison into his presence. Joseph interprets the dreams. He tells Pharaoh that there will be seven years of rich harvests coming in the land of Egypt. The crops will be more than sufficient, but these will be followed by seven years of famine, not only over Egypt but over the whole world. Joseph not only interprets the dreams but suggests a plan that will bring Egypt through the coming years of famine and difficulty. Pharaoh recognises that here before him is a man in whom the spirit of God is and also that there was none so discreet and wise as he, and he immediately accepts Joseph's plan and puts him in charge of the whole scheme. It will be his responsibility to make provision during the times of plenty and it will be his responsibility to provide during the years of famine. So begins his period of exaltation. He is appointed to the second highest position in the land. Pharaoh says: "Only in the throne will I be greater than thou" (Genesis 41:40). Joseph is now Prime Minister of Egypt. In Potiphar's house, in the prison and, ultimately, in the royal court, he brings blessing to the Gentiles. In the pit, he was in figure dead. In resurrection, he becomes the source of life and blessing and, ultimately, his father's house partake of that blessing too.

7 Salvation

So, Joseph goes to work, he builds store houses and all the corn of Egypt is brought to him for safekeeping, awaiting the day when it will be in scarce supply. And when that day comes, Joseph dispenses corn to all who are in need. It was virtually salvation, for without it the people would have died of hunger. At first, the people went to Pharaoh, crying to him to provide them with corn. Surely it would be the king who would help them. But his answer was: "Go to Joseph! What he says unto you do" (Genesis 41:55). So Joseph became the sole means of salvation to all Egyptians. But not only Egyptians, even his own father and brethren when they, living in the land of Canaan, felt the dearth and, hearing that there was corn in Egypt, went there to buy for themselves. So it is with Christ. Raised from the dead and now in the glory He is ready to give salvation to all who will come to Him. His invitation is "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

8 Ordained by God

When Joseph's brethren first approached him to buy corn, they did not recognise him. But when he finally revealed himself to them, he said these words: "Now therefore, be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that you sold me hither, for God did send me before you to preserve life" (Genesis 45:5). The wicked act of the brethren had resulted in

the salvation of millions, even of the very men who would have put him to death. In 2 Samuel 14:14 we are told that "He (that is God) doth devise means that his banished be not expelled from him." Whoever would have thought that the wickedness of man in crucifying His Son would be the very act which God would use to reconcile sinners to Himself.

But even Joseph in type is not perfect. How could he be? How could a sinful man be a perfect and adequate type of the one who is Himself, the only perfect One. Joseph sold salvation. There was no corn for those who had not the money wherewith to pay for it. But with the salvation of God, it is a free gift: "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Man can accept salvation, the forgiveness of his sins, on no other basis than that of a gratuitous gift from God himself. Sadly today, so many feel that they have to do something, or to give something, in order to obtain the forgiveness of their sins. Not so. The work has been done. Christ has made it available and all man needs to do is to accept it freely from His loving hands. Today salvation is to be found in none other but Christ. Not in our good deeds, or in the church, or in the priest, or in the preacher, or in the Pope. To every enquirer there is only one answer. "Go to Jesus." He alone is the Provider.

There is another contrast between the physical rescue of the people which Joseph put into operation and the spiritual redemption that comes only through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is this. In Egypt the supply of corn never ran out. During those seven years of famine there was always provision for those able and willing to buy. God had promised that He would provide in the years of plenty, and He did. But I have to say, and I would press this upon all who are listening to this broadcast, that the time during which the salvation of man's soul is possible will come to an end. It will be terminated for every man in one of two ways. It may be by death. The Bible declares, and only a fool would argue against it, that "It is appointed unto man once to die" (Hebrews 9:27). When that moment comes the offer of salvation ends, and the second part of the text just quoted comes into effect, "And after this the judgment", and there is no hint in the Scriptures that another opportunity for accepting salvation will ever be given. Then too, the day of salvation may end with the second coming of the Lord. A few weeks ago this subject was spoken about at some length on the Truth for Today programme. It was emphasised that according to the Word of God the time of His coming again, whilst certain, is not known. It is to be expected at any time; it could be today. When that grand event takes place the living believers in the Lord Jesus, that is His true disciples, not just nominal Christians, will go up to be with Him. The Holy Spirit will withdraw from this earth and the gospel of the grace of God will be preached no more. Men will be left in their sins. The opportunity for, and salvation itself, will have been lost forever.

9 A bride

One last point can be made about Joseph, again, in which he is so typical of our Lord Jesus Christ. Whilst he was in Egypt during the days of his exaltation and power, he received a bride; her name was Asenath, and she shared his reign of glory. Our blessed Lord, now in heaven, exalted to the right hand of the Father on high, is at this very moment taking out of the peoples a bride for Himself. The bride is none other than the church which He loved and for which He gave Himself. Soon, the marriage of the Lamb will take place and you may read of it in Revelation 19. Then will begin that wonderful period when the Lord will reign over this earth in righteousness and alongside Him will be his spotless bride, sharing with Him in all the glories of that day.

Will you form one of that number?

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