

Truth for Today

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Lessons from the life of Joseph: Always Faithful – Genesis 39

There is a story about a farmer who was well known for training working farm dogs to be very obedient. It is said that every so often he would test his dog's obedience by telling the dog to stay and then place a piece of meat on the floor. The dog being well trained did not move and neither did it look at the meat on the floor. The dog unflinchingly gazed at its master waiting faithfully for the permission to move. In a situation which naturally speaking was very tempting for the dog, it was not the temptation that the dog was occupied with but its master.

Joseph – Always Faithful

Faithfulness is invariably linked with testing. We will find that this is true as we consider our subject, "Always Faithful" as found in the testing times of Joseph. Genesis 39 is concerned mainly with his time as a slave in the household of an Egyptian captain called Potiphar. Slavery was not uncommon in countries of the Middle East and the economies of such countries largely depended upon cheap labour. Potiphar appeared to be a land owner and it is possible that the majority of the work force were slaves. Slaves were not always badly treated as is evident in this chapter. The Spirit of God has recorded twice in this chapter that "The LORD was with Joseph", verses 2 and 21. Both occasions where this statement is made are at the commencement of his slavery and later on when Joseph is unjustly confined to prison.

The title of this talk is "Always Faithful". Some of the definitions found in a dictionary to describe the word faithful are: loyal, constant, fulfils promises and duty, to name but a few. These characteristics are evident even with a cursory reading of the chapter. Potiphar quickly came to appreciate that the LORD was both with Joseph and that whatever he did it prospered. Joseph was successful and very soon that success was rewarded with promotion. As a result of Joseph being promoted, verse 5 states, "The LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake". So confident was Potiphar in Joseph's ability, verse 6 tells us that he did not know what he had as far as his estate was concerned except for the fact that food was always available at meal times.

In verse 6 we have some further details concerning Joseph. The verse states that "Joseph was handsome in form and appearance." However, Joseph's good looks brought unwelcome and unsought attention from the wife of Potiphar. If we have seen in the chapter that Joseph was faithful in his handling of his master's property, we now see that morally Joseph was equally faithful. The scriptures are clear that adultery is totally unacceptable with God. Joseph's reaction is entirely consistent with his belief in God and the statements that "The LORD was with Joseph" could not be made if he held to double standards. Potiphar's wife would not take no for an answer and Joseph was approached on this matter day after day. Eventually Potiphar's wife lies and accuses Joseph and Potiphar is forced to take action. Now Potiphar would, in this situation, normally have a slave executed! However Joseph is placed in prison. Did Potiphar believe his wife concerning Joseph? Did he know what kind of person she was?

Now there is a change of circumstances and Joseph is in prison. But it is in this situation where we have the second statement that "The LORD was with Joseph". Once again Joseph is found to be a faithful person and the head jailor very soon commits into the hands of Joseph the running of the prison. The jailor is so confident that he does not even bother to check up on Joseph, see verse 23.

Joseph is seen to be faithful in the most unjust and degrading of circumstances, that of slavery and imprisonment. Does he resent his God? No! Joseph remains faithful. Joseph was a living example of Romans 8:28, "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God."

Many Bible expositors consider Joseph as a picture of the Lord Jesus. It is very true that a study of the life of Joseph brings out many profitable and encouraging parallels. However wonderful the types or illustrative characters we find in Scripture, the Lord Jesus always excels them all.

In Luke 2:52 we have a remarkable statement concerning the Lord as a boy of twelve years old, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men." Jesus as a man in this world and even in boyhood grew up in perfection. God always saw perfection in Jesus. The people who lived round about where Jesus lived and grew up, saw only perfection. There were no double standards with Jesus.

Matthew 4, recounts the temptations of Jesus by Satan after the forty days in the wilderness. We are brought to the conclusion that if there is to be a faithful life lived, then it must be according to the same guiding principles that the Lord Jesus used in His approach to temptations. The Lord Jesus used the expression, “It is written”, as He answered Satan’s temptations. Jesus relied upon the scriptures. Joseph by his actions was a man guided by God before God had the scriptures documented. The Lord Jesus was able to turn to Deuteronomy and defeat Satan’s suggestions by referring to God’s word.

Let us just consider briefly the replies that the Lord Jesus made. Jesus was hungry after having nothing to eat for forty days. “Turn stones into bread” said Satan. Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” The Lord bypassed the natural need to satisfy hunger and drew attention to a greater need that real life is only sustained by feeding on the word of God.

In the next temptation, Satan misuses scripture to try and get the Lord to use His authority and power for personal gain. Once again the Lord refers to the word of God and says, “You shall not tempt the LORD your God.”

The last temptation concerns the issue of worship and Satan seeks to bribe the Lord with all the kingdoms of the world in exchange for worship. This brings a double response from the Lord Jesus, both dismissing Satan from His presence and answering what scripture teaches about worship. Matthew 4:10, “Then Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.”’”

In the consideration of the Lord Jesus during the temptation in the wilderness one glaringly obvious point to be observed and acted upon by every Christian is the total reliance upon the scriptures. This must always be our first line of defence in any situation. Not only when tempted into wrong activities etc but for total direction in order to live a godly and faithful life.

You might say, “Well it was all right for those Old Testament believers and of course, the Lord was not going to fail as He was perfect and sinless.” The sinlessness of the Lord is confirmed in the scriptures as follows;

- 2 Corinthians 5:21, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”
- Hebrews 4:15, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”
- 1 Peter 2:22, “Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth.”
- 1 John 3:5, “And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.”

Nevertheless the temptations endured by the Lord Jesus were very real to Him. We read in Hebrews 2:18, “He Himself has suffered, being tempted”.

Being Found Faithful with the Scriptures

Let us therefore take some New Testament examples for us today. In 1 Corinthians 4:2 we have this statement from the Apostle Paul, “It is required in stewards that one be found faithful.” In context, Paul was speaking concerning the revelation of the mysteries of God which had been committed to him to make known to Christians. It was Paul’s intention to pass on what had been revealed to him in a true and faithful manner. Remember, we have already considered how Satan misquoted scripture. Satan has always deliberately misquoted scripture. It is very dodgy ground for a Christian to deliberately misquote the word of God. Satan attempts to deceive, damage and destroy. I know we might misquote the scriptures because of failing memory. Where misquoting is deliberate, there is always a selfish end in view. How the church of God has been damaged because of selfish ends. Every Christian is a steward of the word of God. We are expected to keep what is in the scriptures and live our lives according to it. It is wrong to preach one thing and do something opposite. This was the problem with the Pharisees. We are expected, like Paul, to communicate the scriptures accurately and not put our own interpretation upon them. We are to act as faithful stewards. We could apply the expression “It is required in stewards that one be found faithful”, to every part of our life, not only to handling the scriptures. This was Joseph’s attitude whether handling the business on his master’s farm, rejecting adultery or working in the prison.

Handling Temptation

Let us consider one of the damaging activities of some who profess to be Christian leaders and yet use Christianity and the preaching of the Gospel as a route to wealth and riches. 1 Timothy 6:9-12 gives a challenge regarding our objectives in life as believers. “Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the

good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”

A desire to be rich indicates what our hearts are focused on. The previous verses to this in chapter 6 refer to godliness and contentment in the situation we find ourselves. Such life styles avoid the snare of a desire to be rich. We are surely reminded of the parable of the sower in Matthew 13 where some of the seed fell among thorns which choked the seed and prevented growth. The Lord's explanation from Matthew 13:22 is “Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.” There is a great danger in the pursuit of riches that everything else, including God and the true Christian life style, be entirely lost to such a person. Verses 9 and 10 give some serious warnings as to the dangers of focusing on riches: for the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Almost daily in the news are reports concerning people who seek wealth and the desperate and evil activities which are employed in the pursuit of their goals.

However, Paul in this epistle gives the challenge and encouragement to Timothy, “You, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.” So the exhortation is to keep as far away as necessary from this wrong desire. It should be said that there is nothing wrong in riches. A rich person may have different opportunities to you and me in their service for God and our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the desire for riches which causes the snare to the Christian life.

The need to flee away is not confined to riches. In 1 Corinthians 6:18, “Flee sexual immorality.” Then in 1 Corinthians 10:14, “Flee from idolatry.” And in 2 Timothy 2:22, “Flee also youthful lusts.” So we find that it is not only the desire to be rich but other issues which have to be “avoided like the plague” (to use an old expression). Christians are to put distance between themselves and these issues which will only be damaging to an effective Christian testimony. To counter balance the things we are told to flee from, the Bible teaches that we have things to follow after. 2 Timothy 2:22, “Pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”

The challenge that Timothy was given was to fight the good fight of faith. This could be paraphrased as seeking to be always faithful in every part of our lives and well pleasing unto God. The phrase “man of God” is not limited to Timothy or men only; it is extensive and applies to all, brothers and sisters in Christ.

A Faithful God

In 1 Corinthians 10:13 we find a word of comfort because we may well daily experience temptations and trials of various kinds. Recently, I read this catchy phrase, “A gem cannot be polished without friction, nor can Christians be perfected without testing.”

In verse 13 we are reminded that there is Someone who knows our strength of Christian character better than ourselves. Let us read the verse, “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

There are a number of points to draw out of this verse. “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man.” I am well aware that when we are in a difficult temptation we might think that no one else goes through this kind of difficulty. Yet God states that others will experience the same kind of things. As a Christian, we may well be more aware of the trial and wonder what lesson our God is teaching! At the heart of this verse is the total assurance that “God is faithful”. A faithful God desires only the best for His children although the pathway may be extremely rough. The next thing we find in this verse is a very remarkable statement that God “will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able”. I remember when at school, in what we called “metal work lessons”, that the furnace and the hammer were very essential facilities in the toughening process. The metal would not reach the desired strength without the experience of the heat and hammer. A trial in the hands of a loving and faithful God may well be the same. We have the assurance that we can bear the trial because we are in the hand of the Father and the hand of the Lord Jesus, see John 10:28-29. Lastly the verse provides that final statement of encouragement and assurance, “with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” We are told that we can tolerate the trial and not collapse under its weight. We are promised that it will finish; there will be “a way of escape”. Confidence in this verse is a challenge to our own personal faith. I do not under estimate the sense of desolation that may sometimes come over a Christian in times of testing. Joseph may well often have asked, “Why?”, when he was a slave and then imprisoned.

The Results of Faithfulness

In the end, Joseph was used by God for great blessing. Joseph's God given wisdom enabled him to be a “saviour” to a world devastated by famine. We might not all be Josephs, but God will use our experiences for His glory. How and when we might not know or understand. But there might come a moment when we can put our arm around a fellow Christian and truly say, “I understand”, and then provide the support to someone who is going through a testing time!

Let us pray.

Our God and Father, how many of Your people go through times of difficulty. Give them a very real sense of Your presence and assurance from Your word. Help us to care for others whom we see going through times of trial. Bless us this day in our fellowship with other Christians. We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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