

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Not I's: Not you, but God/Did not I command thee?

Our present series consisting of only three talks is entitled - "Not I's". Today we come to the third and last of these talks. In the first and second talks we considered words written by the Apostle Paul, in the New Testament. In his first epistle to the Corinthians he says, "*Yet not I, but the Lord...*" (1 Corinthians 7:10-11), to give authority to what he is saying to them. How necessary this is for us today to rely upon the authority of the Lord and that of His word, the Scriptures. Later, again to the Corinthians, he speaks of his labour amongst the church of God and says, "*Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me*" (1 Corinthians 15:10) And what a valuable lesson that is to us too, that anything we do for the Master is only done with His help and His grace. When Paul wrote to the Galatians he said, "*Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me*" (Galatians 2:20). I believe that while every Christian can say with Paul, "*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live*" (Galatians 2:20), Paul's condition was equal to his position. Christ truly was the apostle's life - what a challenge that is to me!

If you have missed the first two talks, or want to listen again, or download the transcripts for any of these talks, you can do this via our website.

And so we come today to our third and last talk in this present series. Something not many of you will know is that it was the oldest member of the *Truth for Today* team who suggested this series. Thinking about this, it occurred to me that no matter how experienced we are on the Christian pathway, we need reminded of our complete reliance on our Lord Jesus Christ for every step. Remember Jacob, when he came to the end of his long and eventful life, he acknowledged that it was God who fed, or as it could be translated, that "*had shepherded him*" all his life (see Genesis 48:15, JN Darby Translation). I'm sure in the same way many of our older listeners today will be able to reflect upon God's goodness to them over many years!

Let us read together some words spoken by Joseph, and then some words spoken by the LORD to Joshua. Turning to Genesis 45:8, we hear Joseph saying to his brothers, "*So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God...*", and again in Genesis 50:20, he says to his brothers, "*But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good...*" Joseph was only aged seventeen when he was sold into slavery by his brothers, and would only be about forty years of age as he reflected upon this, and spoke these words to his brothers who, because of a famine, had come up to Egypt for food.

Passing over the remainder of the books of the Pentateuch (the books of Moses) we come to the book of Joshua. Joshua was the one chosen to follow after Moses as leader of the nation of Israel, the people of God in the Old Testament. Beginning at the first verse we read, "*Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people...*" (Joshua 1:1-2). Joshua would have been about eighty-five when he heard the LORD speaking to him, telling him to lead the children of Israel through the Jordan into Canaan, which was the Promised Land. In Joshua 1:9 we read, "*Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.*"

Now these verses have been selected from the Scriptures as we continue our series of, "Not I's", and I suggest we will only get the full blessing from this study if we know the background to these verses. We shall look first at the story of Joseph and see what we can learn from what he said to his brothers, and then look at the words which the LORD spoke to Joshua and apply them to us today. As an outline, I suggest we see God's providence and purpose in the words Joseph spoke to his brothers, and God's power and presence in the words the LORD spoke to Joshua.

We go back to the story of Jacob (who was later called Israel) and see that as a younger man, he was one who showed favouritism. In fairness, he had grown up in a home where favouritism was known (his father favoured Esau, his brother, but his mother favoured him, see Genesis 25:28), and so it is hardly surprising that he learned to show favouritism. Those of us with children, are we surprised when we see our children behaving like us or see our characteristics coming out in their lives as they grow up? Jacob had a favourite wife (now that's another subject), he had two wives and two concubines who gave him twelve sons and at least one daughter. His favourite wife, Rachael, bore him two sons, Joseph and Benjamin. Sadly she died as she gave birth to Benjamin and no doubt this contributed to Joseph and his younger brother, Benjamin, being favoured by their father. Of course this created friction in the

family; in Genesis 37, where the story of Joseph begins, we read "*Israel loved Joseph...*" (Genesis 37:3) but that his half-brothers "*hated him*" (Genesis 37:4). It is good if we look for types (or pictures) in the Old Testament which speak of the Lord Jesus Christ and what a rich study is to be found in the life of Joseph. Mr Scofield lists the following in the footnotes of his study Bible: "Both were especial objects of a father's love; both were hated by their brethren; the superior claims of both were rejected by their brethren; the brethren of both conspired against them to slay them. Joseph was, in intent and in figure, slain by his brethren, as was Christ; each became a blessing among the Gentiles, and gained a Gentile bride. As Joseph reconciled his brethren to himself, and afterward exalted them, so will it be with Christ and His Jewish brethren". And I'm sure you will be able to add many more similarities to that list.

So because of their envy and hatred of Joseph, the sons of Jacob (all except Benjamin who wasn't there) sought to kill Joseph (Genesis 37:18-20), and were only persuaded by Reuben (Genesis 37:21-22) and then by Judah to spare his life (Genesis 37:26-27). Nevertheless we read that they sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver to the Ishmeelites who took him to Egypt (Genesis 37:28). Can we read this without thinking of Judas Iscariot who, for thirty pieces of silver (see Matthew 26:15, Matthew 27:3-9), betrayed the Lord Jesus Christ to sinful men intent on His death? As far as the brothers were concerned, Joseph was dead, and they fabricated evidence (Joseph's coat of many colours torn and dipped in goat's blood) to deceive their father (see Genesis 37:31-35). And that was the last they knew of Joseph.

However, the eye of a loving God was tracking Joseph's journey into Egypt (see Genesis 39:2). Of course, He could have stopped the caravan procession of the Ishmeelites, and delivered Joseph, but that was not in His Divine purpose. God had a plan for Joseph that he could not know. Perhaps you know this poem?

*My life is but a weaving
Between my Lord and me;
I cannot choose the colours
He worketh steadily.*

*Oft times He weaveth sorrow
And I, in foolish pride,
Forget He sees the upper,
And I the underside.*

*Not till the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly,
Shall God unroll the canvas
And explain the reason why.*

*The dark threads are as needful
In the Weaver's skillful hand,
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.*

*He knows, He loves, He cares,
Nothing this truth can dim.
He gives His very best to those
Who choose to walk with Him.*

Anon

We need to remember God's providence and His purpose, not only in the circumstances of our individual lives, but in the whole world. JN Darby wrote, "God's ways are behind the scenes; but He moves all the scenes which He is behind. We have to learn this, and let Him work, and not think much of man's busy movements: they will accomplish God's. The rest of them all perish and disappear. We have only peacefully to do His will".

Now knowing this will have a great practical impact on our lives. We'll spend more time praying than we will spend protesting. God is over all and His purpose will be brought to pass, and no power or person can stop it being fulfilled. Now we may accept this as a principle, but how we personally fit it to the purpose of God is perhaps more difficult for us to see. Well, returning to the story of Joseph we see that while he perhaps didn't understand why these things were happening to him, he continued to live a faithful, God honouring life, and we read, "*The LORD was with Joseph*" (Genesis 39:2, 21). He was sold into slavery (Genesis 37:36), but soon found himself in a position of authority in the house of Potiphar (Genesis 39:1-6). He was tempted by his master's wife to lie with her, but he fled (Genesis 39:7-12). This is a valuable lesson for us as to how to deal with temptations. He didn't flirt with her or play her games. He didn't rely on his own strength to resist temptation - he fled! She lied about him and as a result he was wrongfully imprisoned (Genesis 39:13-20). We don't hear Joseph complaining or protesting even although it

certainly was a miscarriage of justice. As far as I know we don't read of Joseph praying either, although I'm sure he did. When the Apostle Peter writes concerning the Lord Jesus and His suffering for sins, which were not His own, he says, *"Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously"* (see 1 Peter 2:22-23). Here is the example for us, and the apostle's exhortation is to *"follow his steps"* (1 Peter 2:21).

I've heard it said that we don't read anything negative about Joseph in the Bible. Well, I don't agree. When Joseph was in prison God helped him to interpret the dreams of two fellow-prisoners (Genesis 40:1-23). He was able to foretell that while Pharaoh's baker would lose his life (Genesis 40:19, 22), the butler would be restored to his former position, the cupbearer of Pharaoh (Genesis 40:13, 21). Afterwards, Joseph asked the butler to speak to Pharaoh that he might get out of prison (Genesis 40:14). Now have you ever wondered what would have happened if the butler had remembered to do that? I have, and perhaps Joseph would have been released from prison, and we may never have heard of him again. And so, even the fact that the butler forgot about Joseph for two years was in the providence of God (Genesis 40:23-41:13). God's eye remained on this faithful young man, and at the right moment Joseph was brought out of the prison to stand before Pharaoh (Genesis 40:14). Within no time at all, Joseph went from being a prisoner to being the prime minister, under Pharaoh, the most powerful man in all the land of Egypt! (Genesis 40:41-41). How could that possibly happen? He was a dreamer, but he must have wondered all this time what his dreams meant and if he would ever be in a position where his brothers would bow to him. His brothers had sold him, but God had sent him into Egypt. It is a fascinating story, and well worth reading. Even if you know it well, read it again; it will do you good.

Even after all they had done to him, Joseph didn't resent his brothers. He wept for them and longed to know if his father was still alive (Genesis 43:7). He had seen the ten, but wondered what had become of his younger brother, Benjamin (Genesis 43:7). Whilst Joseph in his teenage years had blurted out his dreams to his brothers, he was now older and wiser and waited until the moment was right to reveal who he was to them. Perhaps we might be tempted to say he waited for God's timing, but there is no evidence of that in the text. It strikes me, that, even if we are not necessarily looking to God for direction, He can still have His purpose fulfilled in our lives. Perhaps there are things which we have experienced which we will never understand or make sense of. Perhaps God will not reveal this to us in our lifetime, and we will have to wait till our lives are reviewed in a coming day, at the Judgment Seat of Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:10) to see that:

*"The dark threads are as needful
In the Weaver's skillful hand,
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned".*

But where we can see His providential ways and His purpose fulfilled in our lives, like Joseph we can say, *"God meant it for good"*! (Genesis 50:20, JN Darby Translation).

Now we want to think about what the LORD said to Joshua. The book of Joshua begins with the death of the great leader, Moses, whom God had raised up miraculously to lead His people out of Egypt. Jacob (or Israel) had come to stay in Egypt with his family, numbering about sixty six souls, but they had multiplied in the land of Goshen. They were safe as long as Joseph was in charge, but their problems began after he died, and a new Pharaoh who did not know Joseph came to power (see Exodus 1:8). The new Pharaoh viewed the Israelites as a threat and put them under severe task-masters. The people of God were in slavery and needed a deliverer, and that deliverer would be Moses. We need to read the beginning of the book of Exodus (particularly Exodus 2:1-10) to read the remarkable story of Moses' birth and subsequent rise to become *"the son of Pharaoh's daughter"* (see Hebrews 11:24). During these awful years of burden and slavery, Joshua was born to a man of the tribe of Ephraim called Nun (See Numbers 13:8). (I don't think the Scriptures give us his mother's name). Joshua was called Oshea meaning "help", but Moses later changed his name to Joshua, meaning "salvation". Joshua is the Old Testament equivalent of the name Jesus in the New Testament - Jehovah the Saviour.

Everything changed for Moses after he had his encounter with the living God at the burning bush (see Exodus 3:1-22). He was to be the deliverer, the one who would lead God's people from Egypt to Canaan. Chosen by God, he stood before Pharaoh and demanded that he must let the Israelites go free! After many plagues had come upon the Egyptians, (see Exodus 7:14-12:30) eventually Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt on the night of the Passover (Exodus 12:31-42). Then when faced with pursuing armies of the Egyptians, and the Red Sea before them (See Exodus 14:1-31), and with the mountains on either side, Moses said, *"Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD"* (Exodus 14:13). It was to Moses that God gave the Law, the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:11-17), and all the instructions and pattern in order that the Tabernacle, the 'tent of meeting', could be built so that God could dwell amongst His people. What a great leader Moses was, praying for the people when they had sinned (see Numbers 14:11-25), and bringing God's provision to them for forty years as they wandered in the

wilderness. Think of the serpent of bronze (Numbers 21:5-9), think of the manna, fresh every day (Numbers 11:1-14), and the water that flowed from the rock (Exodus 17:1-7). But perhaps the greatest thing of all was that we read, *"The LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend"* (see Exodus 33:11). Sadly one sin kept him from leading the people of God into the Promised Land, but nevertheless he was a great man, and a great servant of the LORD.

Joshua, too, was a great man. He was a soldier, he was a spy (see Numbers 13:1-33), and he was the servant of Moses. We can think of his great victory over Amalek (see Exodus 17:8-16) in the battle which lasted all day, *"until the going down of the sun"* (see Exodus 17:12). (You'll remember that Aaron and Hur held up Moses' hands, and Israel, led by Joshua, prevailed). Perhaps like me, from Sunday School days you sang,

*"Twelve men went to spy in Canaan,
Ten were bad, two were good."*

Hugh Mitchell

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The good spies were Joshua and Caleb who said, *"It is an exceeding good land ... a land which floweth with milk and honey"* (see Numbers 13:1-14:45) and encouraged the people to conquer it. And we read that even as a younger man, he was the servant of Moses (see Numbers 11:28). Doubtless Joshua was being trained in the school of God for the task ahead and the Scriptures record that he was *"full of the spirit of wisdom"* (see Deuteronomy 34:9).

However, I'm sure the thought of succeeding Moses was a very daunting prospect for Joshua. I'm sure he would have been thinking, how can I follow in the footsteps of this great leader? The nation of Israel had multiplied and there were perhaps as many as three million Israelites at this time. Now, I doubt very much if God will ever ask us to do such an enormous task, but perhaps even in much smaller things we feel inadequate. Perhaps as we consider the great servants of God from the past, and in our day and generation too, we feel that we just don't measure up. Well, what we need is exactly what Joshua needed, that is the word of the LORD. What a tremendous encouragement it must have been to Joshua to hear the LORD say, *"As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee... Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest"* (see Joshua 1: 5, 9).

At that moment, Joshua was assured both of the power and the presence of the LORD with him. He would have many great days ahead, but many difficult ones too, but he could always depend upon God's word, and so can we! As believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who is God! And as the Apostle John reminds us, *"Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world"* (see 1 John 4:4). The Apostle Paul, who certainly knew adversity said, *"I have strength for all things in him that gives me power"* (see Philippians 4:13, JN Darby Translation). And in Hebrews we read, *"[God] hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The LORD is my helper..."* (see Hebrews 13:5-6).

And so, as we come to the end of our talk today, I trust these things will be a blessing to us. Whether, like Joseph, we are going through situations we can't quite understand or make sense of, or like Joshua we are facing a daunting task ahead, let us all take encouragement from the things we have spoken about today, and learn to look for God's loving providence, His unfailing purpose, His almighty power and His gracious presence with us.

May God bless you all.

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