

ON BEING FAITHFUL

But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Genesis 50:20

Jacob had twelve sons, ten of whom were away in the fields, so one day he sent Joseph, his eleventh son, to inquire about them. When Joseph had reached the age of seventeen, Jacob had shown his favoritism by giving him a coat of many colors, but this gift of affection, reward of merit, and badge of office caused his older brothers to be very jealous of him. When the brothers beheld Joseph approaching them, their longstanding jealousy came to a head. They conspired against him and resolved to kill him, but, at the suggestion of Reuben, they decided to cast him into a pit instead. They stripped him of his coat, took him by force, threw him into a pit, and seated themselves nearby to enjoy the dainties he had brought from home. While they were eating, a caravan of Egyptian traders from Damascus came along on their way to Egypt. At the suggestion of Judah, they sold Joseph to these traders for twenty pieces of silver, not thinking about how he might be treated. Their excuse for their evil deed was their father's favoritism, but the reason for it was their own wickedness. Early in life Joseph had taken a stand for righteousness and refused to join his brothers in doing things which they knew their father would condemn. This, of course, angered the brothers and turned them against Joseph. Naturally it made it difficult for him as it will today for anyone who will live by godly principles. God thwarted their evil designs and brought Joseph to the place of mighty power. If we will do what Joseph did, God will do for us what He did for him.

It is never popular to oppose evil, to condemn sin, or to live a godly life. If you live in conformity to the will of God, you may expect opposition instead of applause. Rectitude always makes evildoers uncomfortable. Those who live and do right are a constant reminder of the evil doings of those who do not and therefore engender their hatred.

Joseph, this young man of great personal character and strength, stood alone in the hardest place in the world--in the midst of his own family. He, like all others, revealed in youth what he was going to be in maturity. There is a certain mellowing by age and maturity by experience, but youth is always an accurate gauge of how high we will climb and how far we will go. It was so in Joseph's case. He yielded and surrendered to the molding influences of God. God was at work in the young man. That is the most glorious thing that can be said of any person. The happiest discovery you can ever make is God at work in your life. What a thrill! What an honor! What a prospect!

Perhaps it was from the back of a camel that Joseph saw the land of his fathers fade away on the horizon like the sunset of hope, and in all probability he was perplexed as to the purpose and plan of God. When they arrived in Egypt these traders sold Joseph to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. Joseph was determined that he would not worry and brood over the wrongs which were committed against him, but that he would be the best slave possible. Bravely he endured his injuries, forgave his brothers, and refused to be discouraged.

Potiphar took Joseph into his palatial home. He soon recognized his ability and dependability and gave him charge of his entire house. By virtue of his character and on account of the favor of God, he rose to a place of dignity and honor. God was with him and blessed him. God honors those who honor Him.

Potiphar's wife admired Joseph and became infatuated with him. She attempted to seduce him, but he refused her amorous advances and solicitations and said, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Because of his honorable repulse Joseph was falsely accused of attempted adultery, even though he fled from the temptation. When he fled he lost his reputation but not his character. He knew that it was better to leave his coat than his virtue; his liberty than his honor. Due to her false accusation, Joseph was imprisoned for the noblest deed of his life.

What a shock to this young idealist that he should be imprisoned because he retained his purity! Perhaps he was tempted to become bitter, but the record shows that he did not yield to the temptation. Had he not known God, it might have appeared to him that it pays to sin. The secret of victorious living and endurance was repeatedly and beautifully expressed in the statement, "The Lord was with him."

While a prisoner Joseph interpreted the dream of the butler, who assured him that he would remember what he had done for him as soon as he was restored to royal favor. Because he was forgotten by this man, one can imagine Joseph was tempted to lose faith in human nature altogether. But his faith in God stood the test, and God gave him the assurance that he was with him through all the abuse and trials to which he was subjected.

A turn in the fortune of Joseph came when Pharaoh, the king, had a dream which no one could interpret. The butler informed Pharaoh of Joseph's ability to interpret dreams, whereupon he had him brought to him. Impressed by Joseph's modesty and ability, and hearing that there would soon be a famine in the land, Pharaoh wanted someone with exceptional wisdom to take matters in hand, so he offered Joseph the second place in the kingdom of Egypt.

Through of all his trying experiences, Joseph had been brought into the place of his greatest usefulness. Of course, Joseph did not know this when he was being mistreated so terribly, but his faith did not waver. Doubtless it would have been considerably easier for him to endure this hatred and ill-treatment had he known that he would some day arrive in the chair of the prime minister. But he did not know. It would have been so much easier had Paul known that his thron in the flesh was an advantage rather than a disability. It would be much easier for you if you knew now that the thing you are suffering is God's means to something greater. But you cannot know today what lies ahead of you any more than Joseph knew that the road the slave traders of Midian were taking would lead him to the house of Potiphar, and then to prison, but at last to the chair of the prime minister. But he trusted God, and you must do the same thing. For Joseph adversity was not a penalty for wrongdoing or a method of discipline, but the way of triumphant living. Men may be slow to notice and to reward faithfulness, but God never fails to do so.

Occupying the office of prime minister, the wise and faithful Joseph was not spoiled by good fortune any more than he had been by the bad. Evil was doing its worst, but God was doing His best. Joseph's faith remained the same through bad and good fortune. As he looked back over the strange road which he had traveled, how he had been sold by his brothers, imprisoned for adherence to right principle, and neglected by those whom he had assisted, he could see that his troubles had been stepping stones to a higher and richer life. Often calamity is the gateway to success. Whatever adversity of blessing came into his life Joseph was willing to go all the way with God. As a result we read that "the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man." Through all of his hardships, sufferings, and humiliation, Joseph firmly believed that he was in

the hands of God and he remained faithful and submissive to Him. He did not complain or rebel against God. He adjusted as best he could to his situation, worked willingly at his tasks, and did everything that was required of him to the very best of his ability. Fully aware that he had been treated wrongfully, Joseph knew that rebellion and struggling were useless. He recognized something far greater, namely, that God was with him and that He had a purpose in his adversities.

Once again the scriptural principle had been fulfilled--"them that honor me I will honor." God was remembering Joseph because Joseph remembered God. God was making much of Joseph because Joseph made much of God.

One day Joseph's brothers appeared before him for the purpose of obtaining grain. At first he did not disclose his identity, but on a later trip for additional supplies he said, "I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him for they were troubled at his presence." They thought that Joseph would wreak vengeance on them for selling him when he was a lad. When they whined for kind treatment Joseph said, "Now be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life." So far as he was concerned the past was forgiven freely and willingly. Aware of God's overruling, he refused to be resentful toward those who had injured him. The thing for which he was most grateful was the fact that God had changed the course of his life. It takes a great man to forgive and forget personal injuries, but it takes an even greater one to confess to those who have wronged him that the injury has turned out for his advantage, yet Joseph did just that. He might have emphasized the wrong his brothers had done to him, but he had a better and the right attitude toward his trials and tribulations. He saw in them not the meanness of men but the purpose and providence of God. If vengeance was to be taken, God, to Whom all vengeance belongeth, would take care of that.

Joseph made this statement to his brothers: "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good." God made the wrath of men to praise Him. The purpose of God is that by which He orders or permits whatever comes to pass. The plan of God is the method by which He brings things to pass. We must never cease to believe in the goodness of God because we cannot see at any given time how what is happening to us is going to be for our ultimate good. It may take time to grasp the divine purpose. It does not always appear on the surface or at once. Joseph had to wait for years before God's meaning was made clear to him. At length the meaning became clear, and he said, "God meant it for good." He realized that God was back of things, and that this universe was ruled by Him. God is always master of the situation.

Out of the record of God's dealings with Joseph comes this important lesson--when you cannot grasp God's meaning, trust Him. We can trust Him when we cannot understand the peculiar situations which arise in our lives. Whatever happens, hold fast to these words, "God meant it for good." Paul wrote: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). Even when the way is dark we can trust God and rely upon Him. We can be assured that God is always good and whatever happens He always means good.

The Lord was with Joseph. Of this the Bible says: "Because the Lord was with him, and that which he did the Lord made it to prosper" (Genesis 39:23). From the life and ministry of Joseph one can learn an unforgettable lesson, namely, that God is always faithful to those who are faithful to Him. To the person who has the assurance that he is in the pathway of God's will there will be

the consciousness of the divine presence and blessing which will be an unspeakable comfort. God and right and truth will ultimately prevail, and it is the task of God's children to wait quietly and patiently, to go forward humbly, to live faithfully, and to trust God implicitly so that He may be glorified in their lives.