

THE MAN WHO WAS FAITHFUL TO THE END

Jacob had twelve sons, of whom Joseph was his favorite. Joseph was born in Padan-aram about six years before Jacob returned to Canaan. Jacob was then 90 or 91 years old. Joseph was the eleventh of his twelve sons. He was the son of Rachel, came in answer to prayer, and was the most beautiful of all the children. Jacob showed his favoritism toward Joseph by giving him a coat of many colors. This coat was a gift of affection, a reward of merit, and a badge of office. He received this coat when he was seventeen years of age, and the favoritism displayed by this gift was detrimental to Joseph and his brothers.

I. Joseph Was Hated and Harassed.

The more Jacob loved Joseph the more his elder brothers hated him. Their ill will was increased by two dreams which he had and related to them. These dreams indicated that his father and brothers would some day bow down and do obeisance to him. One day Jacob sent Joseph to inquire about the ten who were away from home. When they beheld Joseph approaching in the distance, they conspired against him and resolved that they would destroy him, and report to their father that a beast had devoured him.

At the suggestion of Reuben, they decided not to kill him, but to cast him into a pit. 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 eating, a caravan of Egyptian traders came along going from Damascus to Egypt. Judah's mind was thrifty so he suggested selling Joseph to them. The brothers decided there was no money in murder, so they sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver, not thinking about how he might be treated. Then the question arose about what explanation they would give Jacob. They killed a kid, dipped Joseph's coat in its blood, and brought it to Jacob, who concluded that Joseph had been torn to pieces. They just told him that they had found the coat, but they did not say it was Joseph's.

Jacob mourned the loss of his favorite son, refusing to be comforted. Note the hypocrisy of his sons as they try to comfort him when they were the soul cause of his grief. Meanwhile, these slave traders carried Joseph down to Egypt and sold him to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. Joseph was not soured on the world, neither was he morbid, sullen, nor despondent. He accepted his position with cheerfulness. He determined that he would not grieve, worry, or brood over the wrongs which were committed against him, but that he would be the best slave possible. He bravely endured his injuries, forgave his brothers, and refused to be discouraged.

Potiphar took Joseph into his own palatial home. He soon recognized his ability and gave him charge of his entire house. He knew full well that, under his control, everything was safe. Joseph had been torn away from his father, his home, his country, and sold to idolaters. Though he had been cast off, he arose among strangers to a place of dignity and honor. He received the unlimited confidence of his master. He did so on account of his own bearing and conduct. He was diligent about his business. Brave and manly, he rose by the very force of his character. He also did so on account of the favor of God. 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 from the paths of virtue, but he refused her amorous advances, whereupon she became his relentless enemy. He repelled her advances in the most heroic and

conscientious way, saying, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" In his refusal he pleaded the law of honor. His master had confidence in him and he refused to repay confidence with treachery. He also pleaded the law of chastity. He argued that it was a moral wrong: that the marriage covenant was sacred; that it was an invasion of another's rights; and that it was a crime against society. Joseph also pleaded the law of piety. It was a heinous sin against God; a violation of his commandment. He was determined to be faithful to God as well as to man.

Joseph won his victory by flight. He did not stay where the temptation was. 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.

Potiphar's wife brought a charge against Joseph of the very crime which she tried so artfully to induce him to commit, but which he so heroically resisted. Due to her false accusations against him, Joseph was imprisoned for the noblest deed of his life. Although he had been sold into slavery, had suffered because he did not sin, and had been forgotten by someone he had helped, Joseph did not grow despondent because God gave him the blessed assurance that He was with him. Instead of considering that he was there on account of the malice of others, he understood that it was a pre-arrangement of the love of God. Joseph said, "God did send me before you to preserve life. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God." Genesis 45:5, 8.

By means of his pleasing personality and remarkable intelligence, Joseph soon captured the prisoners, as well as the keeper of the prison who put him in charge of all the prisoners as a "trusty". Among those in a prison were the "Chief Butler" and the "Chief Baker" of Pharaoh, who had dreams which Joseph interpreted as to their release in three days, the one to be restored to favor and the other to be hanged, and this circumstance led to his own release. Pharaoh also had a peculiar dream, and was urged by the Butler to get Joseph to interpret it, which he did, saying there were to be seven years of plenty, and then seven years of famine. He urged Pharaoh to select someone to be the head of Egypt during these years. Pharaoh was shrewd enough to realize that Joseph was the very man to cater with his suggested plan, and at once selected him.

II. Joseph Was Exalted and Esteemed.

Pharaoh immediately exalted Joseph to the position of Prime Minister of Egypt, which office was second only to his own. The story of this lad of seventeen coming up out of the pit at Dotham by way of the prison house to the palace of Pharaoh and being made Prime Minister of Egypt by the time he was thirty, and all of this through the sheer force of personal ability and the favor of God is indeed a thrilling one. It is another illustration of the fact that God always honors those who honor Him. Men may be slow to notice and to reward faithfulness, but God never fails to do so.

Joseph was set over all the land of Egypt, arrayed in fine linen, encircled with a chain of gold about his neck, made to ride in the second chariot, and became the object of the peoples' adoration. God directed his ways and signally honored him. During the years of famine, Jacob sent his ten sons to Egypt to purchase supplies. When Joseph's brethren arrived in Egypt, they bowed down before him, quite unconscious of the fact that they were literally fulfilling Joseph's two dreams. "Joseph knew his brethren, but they did not know him." He was the very last person they expected to see. They had concluded long ago that he was dead.

On a return trip to Egypt they brought their youngest brother, Benjamin. Joseph issued orders that they should dine with him at noon. Upon Joseph's arrival at home, his brothers, for the second time, "bowed themselves to the earth." Thus we see him exalted and esteemed in the eyes of his brethren.

III. Joseph Was Revealed and Revered.

Bursting into a flood of tears he exclaimed, "I am Joseph," and seeing how astonished and frightened they were, he told them not to be angry or afraid. So far as Joseph was concerned the past was forgiven, freely and willingly. He also conveyed to them the remarkable information that God had sent him before them to preserve life. Joseph assured them that while they meant what they did against him for evil, God had meant it for good. "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. Instead of seeing in their deed the meanness of men, he saw the providence of God. He had learned from experience that God rules and over-rules in order to accomplish His plan. God's meanings often travel over strange paths. But His meanings will ultimately be made clear. When you cannot grasp God's meaning, trust Him. You can trust, even though you may not be able to understand or to explain. Whatever happens, let us hold fast to these words, "God meant it for good." "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28.

From Joseph we learn the value of a high ambition. While yet a lad he was dreaming of future greatness. We also learn a lesson about personal purity. He would not consent to do what would displease and dishonor God. Joseph never lowered the standard in order to win success. Although he was persecuted, slandered, and neglected, he endured it all without complaint.

No matter how great a person is, nor how well he has served God in his own way death must be expected sooner or later. This fact Joseph knew full well. At the age of 110 years, he realized that the time of his departure was near at hand, so, without a fear, Joseph told his brother that he was going to die. Willing or unwilling, this is a thought that all must entertain.

In his farewell address to his brothers, Joseph predicted that one day his relatives and descendents would be leaving Egypt in order to return to Palestine. It was his desire and request that when they did so that they would carry his bones along with them. He persuaded them to promise him that they would do so. Generations later their promise was fulfilled, and his bones were buried at Shechem. Joshua 24:32.