

12. From Prison Cell to Palace

Biblical material: Gen. 37:2–41:40.

Quotes

- You cannot consistently perform in a manner which is inconsistent with the way you see yourself. *Zig Ziglar*
- All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence; then success is sure. *Mark Twain*
- It seems to me that people have vast potential. Most people can do extraordinary things if they have the confidence or take the risks. Yet most people don't. They sit in front of the telly and treat life as if it goes on forever. *Philip Adams*
- Overconfidence can be deadly. *The Princess Bride*

Questions

By their deception, how did Joseph's brothers betray both their brother and their father and themselves? What lessons did all involved need to learn? How is God represented by Joseph? What underlying theme comes through this all-too-human account? What lessons do we learn from this "ancient history"?

Discussion

Imagine the truly demonically-inspired plan of Joseph's brothers. To fabricate evidence of Joseph's death, knowing what this would do to their father. And to sell Joseph into slavery, and perhaps eventual death at the hands of his masters. Their contempt for his life is inexcusable, whatever the truth of Joseph's arrogance and superior attitude to them.

It's interesting to note that two of Joseph's brothers tried to hold back their more murderous siblings, but once things were in motion, all went along with the plan. Such is peer pressure, and the importance placed on maintaining a lie.

Yet Joseph's relationship to his brothers was hardly the best. The fact that Jacob/Israel loved him the most made him the "favorite son." Joseph ran to his father to tell tales about his brothers. He then shared his dream of them all bowing down to him. Hardly calculated to win him his brothers' love and affection! Then there was the coat of many colors...

Joseph's moral behavior and sincerity does not immediately win him appreciation. In fact, his desire to be faithful leads him into jail, falsely accused. Yet even there he finds a way to witness for the God he knows, and eventually he is released and raised to high position.

The arrival of his brothers brings an opportunity for revenge. They are in his power. But even though Joseph has the chance for payback, he does not do so, instead he hides his identity and through his own scheme tries to find out the kind of men they have become. It's interesting that Joseph does not allow his bitter experiences at their hands to control his judgment, while he still is cautious about revealing who he is. There is no rush to judgment.

Resolution comes only when he knows they are different, that they have changed and no longer think as they did when they sold him into slavery. The at-one-ment that results, the reconciliation of those once estranged, is one of the most heart-warming stories in scripture. It is illustrative of our loving Lord whom we despised, hated and sold into the slavery of death, and

yet who still wishes to win us back, to welcome us to the palace, and to restore the saving relationship that only he can bring.

Comment

One major attribute of Joseph was confidence. Even when in difficult situations such as prison, Joseph does not seem to be fazed. In fact his early experience might lead one to conclude he was over-confident. And such over-confidence seems to be related to his own self-reliance. From this “spoilt brat” to senior statesman has taken many experiences. Perhaps it was while in that dry cistern that he came to know God better, or perhaps in jail. Certainly he gives God the credit when speaking to his fellow-prisoners, and also to Pharaoh. In fact when Pharaoh asks him, he admits he cannot interpret the dream. But like Daniel later, he points to the God in heaven who can interpret dreams.

Joseph’s deference to God and his loyalty to God’s cause are impressive. This is a far cry from the youth who boldly proclaimed that all his brothers would be bowing down to him, and happily wearing the prized coat of many colors. No doubt Pharaoh was impressed by the dream’s interpretation but also his clear convictions and sincerity—there must have been sufficient evidence for Pharaoh to appoint him to such a responsible position in his government.

So what of the whole issue of confidence? Yes, we should be confident, but not in and of ourselves. Our confidence is in God, and we place our trust in him, without becoming presuming on God’s goodness and grace. Like the question, “Are you saved?” This focuses on us. The best answer is that our confidence and trust is in the One who saves.

Ellen White Comments

The life of Joseph illustrates the life of Christ. It was envy that moved the brothers of Joseph to sell him as a slave; they hoped to prevent him from becoming greater than themselves. And when he was carried to Egypt, they flattered themselves that they were to be no more troubled with his dreams, that they had removed all possibility of their fulfillment. But their own course was overruled by God to bring about the very event that they designed to hinder. So the Jewish priests and elders were jealous of Christ, fearing that He would attract the attention of the people from them. They put Him to death, to prevent Him from becoming king, but they were Joseph, through his bondage in Egypt, became a savior to his father’s family; yet this fact did not lessen the guilt of his brothers. So the crucifixion of Christ by His enemies made Him the Redeemer of mankind, the Saviour of the fallen race, and Ruler over the whole world: but the crime of His murderers was just as heinous as though God’s providential hand had not controlled events for His own glory and the good of man.

As Joseph was sold to the heathen by his own brothers, so Christ was sold to His bitterest enemies by one of His disciples. Joseph was falsely accused and thrust into prison because of his virtue: so Christ was despised and rejected because His righteous, self-denying life was a rebuke to sin; and though guilty of no wrong, He was condemned upon the testimony of false witnesses. And Joseph’s patience and meekness under injustice and oppression, his ready forgiveness and noble benevolence toward his unnatural brothers, represent the Saviour’s uncomplaining endurance of the malice and abuse of wicked men, and His forgiveness, not only of His murderers, but of all who have come to Him confessing their sins and seeking a pardon.

He who receives Christ by living faith . . . has a living connection with God. . . . He carries with him the atmosphere of heaven, which is the grace of God, a treasure that the world

cannot buy. He who is in living connection with God may be in humble stations, yet his moral worth is as precious as was that of Joseph. {CC 79}

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