

## The Lord was with Joseph

HN 11/07/04 pm

Reading: Genesis 39, Matthew 25:14f

Study: Genesis 39

Psalms: 105:1-6, 105:7-12, 105:15-19, 121

They were expecting their first child. So much planning had gone into having this baby. It was not just the months of the pregnancy but long before they had worked hard to save up and make sure this child had everything. With great excitement and anticipation, they awaited the birth. The baby was born but then came the news – the baby had Downes syndrome. Within a moment, their whole life was thrust into chaos and despair. All their plans for a 'perfect baby' evaporated. How could this happen to me? What did I do to deserve this?

There is a book entitled 'when bad things happen to good people'. I have not read it but I hope it refers to the life of Joseph. Now I know we cannot really call anyone good for *no one is good except God alone* (Luke 18:19). We are all sinners and it is only by the grace of God that we enjoy the blessings that we do. We are not good and do not deserve his mercy. But that is not the lesson of this chapter. Joseph did honour the Lord; he did refrain from a specific sin against God and yet suffered as a result of that decision.

We would normally look at the events and seek to draw out the lesson, but in this case, the lesson is given right at the beginning – and again at the end – *the Lord was with Joseph*. The Lord was with him and gave him success in all that he did.

We are not told much of how Joseph felt being a slave, or what he did to warrant favour in the eyes of his master. The emphasis is placed upon the Lord and his grace. The only thing Joseph did was to disobey the master's wife. But in this, one action was revealed the depth of his integrity toward his master and the unwavering fear of God in his heart.

### **In Egypt**

At just 17 years of age, Joseph was taken down to Egypt and sold as a slave. Although he had done nothing wrong, his older brothers hated him intensely and wanted to get rid of him. But even then, we saw how the Lord in his sovereignty, overruling in the circumstances and in the hearts of these wicked brothers, kept Joseph alive. Joseph was bought by Potiphar an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard. He was an important man, having a large house with numerous servants.

Abraham had a brief escapade into Egypt during a famine in Canaan. He was not confident that the Lord would protect him there. He made his own plan to save himself from death. But the Lord was with him. The Lord struck Pharaoh with plague when he took Abrahams wife. Isaac was told not to go down to Egypt during another famine – he stayed among the Philistines.

Now Egypt enters the story again and soon we will see that famine will again drive Jacob down to Egypt. In the fullness of time, the Lord will again use Egypt to save the infant Son of Abraham and Son of David from death at the hands of the wicked king Herod (Matthew 2).

Away from home and living among the heathen, Joseph could well have fallen into sinful ways. He was dragged away against his will. He did not choose to be a slave in Egypt. What a contrast between

Joseph and his older brother Judah in the previous chapter. Judah departed from his brothers of his own free will to live among the Canaanites. We saw the immoral life that he lived – the lust that led him to a prostitute. What a contrast to the fidelity of Joseph in the face of pressing and persistent temptation.

Joseph could well have thought there is no fear of God in this place. God is not here. He could have adopted the ways and the worship of the Egyptians. He was only 17 remember. Judah was a grown man. But no, the Lord was with Joseph, and Joseph set his heart on living for the Lord in this ungodly place. He determined to obey God and to please him in all that he did. Probably like Daniel, he also set his heart on worshipping the Lord.

### **In Prosperity**

*The Lord was with Joseph – and he was a successful man.* A slave in the house of a foreigner. No pay, no rights, and harsh treatment. Not sort of job you aspire to is it? Joseph could well have become sullen and bitter. He could have become corrupt and immoral. Many take this attitude even in good jobs. They try to justify ripping off the boss or the system. They will do whatever it takes to move up the ladder – to become more successful in this world. Joseph became successful because the Lord was with him.

In our house in India, we found that all the cupboards and even the fridge had locks on them. These were useful to keep the kids out of things – good for dieting also I suppose. But we later learnt that people locked things up to stop their servants from stealing food. We had people to help us in the house but could not adopt this practice of locking cupboards all the time. We explained to the helper that we wanted to trust her. She soon realized that being trustworthy pleased us and she was successful in terms of extra help we could give her children. Maybe this was one small thing that led to her becoming a Christian.

The Lord was with Joseph and his master saw this. What did he see? He saw that all Joseph set his hand to do was successful. And more – he attributed this success to the Lord. Now that is hard to imagine for a servant. Sweeping the floors, cooking the meals, tending the garden – yes even in the mundane things of life this man noticed something different about Joseph.

There is no indication of the Lord working miracles through Joseph. But Potiphar knew he was a Hebrew, he knew he worshipped the God of Israel. Potiphar was an idol worshipper like our servant in India. He would have worshipped the gods out of fear, expecting very little from them. Having observed other servants who probably complained all the time and stole things, he saw something different about Joseph. Joseph was honest, he was dedicated, he was hard working, and he was capable.

Everything that Joseph did was successful – the floors were clean, cleaner than ever before. The garden was such a picture that all the neighbours complimented Potiphar on his garden. And his food tasted better than ever. Potiphar kept giving Joseph more and more responsibility and each time he was successful. Finally, he trusted him with managing his whole household. He got up, ate his breakfast, and went to work without any worry whatsoever. Everything in his house would run like clockwork – the bills would be paid on time, the food brought in, the other servant would do their jobs- all because Joseph was in charge.

Joseph was a tremendous blessing to his master, and his master realised this. He realized that the Lord was with Joseph, although as Calvin commented, he failed to seek the Lord for himself. The Lord was at this time preparing Joseph for what lay ahead. He was preparing him for the greater task of managing not just this household but the whole of Egypt. Joseph was being faithful with the one talent and so the

Lord would entrust him with more talents (Matthew 25).

### **In Adversity**

From being the most trusted servant of Potiphar, from being overseer of his house, Joseph was suddenly thrown into prison, *the place where the king's prisoners were confined. And he was there in prison.* And he had done nothing wrong. He was the target of Potiphar's lustful wife. She was after him day after day but he refused to lie with her or to be with her alone. Finally, that lust turned to lies, lies by which she had Joseph incarcerated.

*They hurt his feet with fetters  
He was laid up in irons.* Psalm 105:18

But note the very next verse (39:21). *But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy.* Being put in prison was not a sign of being abandoned by the Lord. Far from it – the Lord was still with him. In fact, he could well have been executed for adultery but his master, before whom the Lord had granted him favour, was not convinced of his wife's accusation.

In prison, Joseph again found favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison- because the Lord was with him and granted him such favour. Even in prison, they recognized something different about the man Joseph. They noticed that the Lord was with him. And so Joseph was put in charge of other prisoners and the affairs of the prison. He was given authority such that the keeper of the prison, like his master Potiphar, did not have to worry about anything that Joseph was in charge of. He was a blessed man and all that he did was blessed by the Lord.

That reminds us of the promise the Lord gave to Abraham. *I will bless you and make your name great and you shall be a blessing* (12:2). No matter where he was, no matter what his circumstances, the Lord was with Joseph and the Lord blessed him. Joseph knew that, and he lived by that promise, by that truth.

Do you believe that promise? Is it a promise that you can take hold of today? Do you live as one who believes that promise? The apostle Paul believed it and lived by it. He said he had learned to be content in whatever state he was in (Philippians 4:11). He knew what it was to have plenty, to be well fed, to be rich, and he knew what it was to suffer, to be hungry and poor.

Joseph pointed forward to Christ. Praised one day as he entered Jerusalem, and a few days later they were shouting crucify him. Paul looked back to Christ who never doubted that his Father was with him, even in the face of death.

Are you up at the moment or are you feeling down? Remember that if you are his child the Lord is with you – always, everyday and for evermore.

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