

“... the Lord was with Joseph.”

Over the past several months I have marvelled at the way God's grace and mercy does not depend upon man's goodness or any other trait in him. Rather, the truth of predestination shines through continually. His grace and mercy depend only upon His own glory and will. (See Article A-541: 'Grace and Mercy – what do they mean?').

I further marvelled as we saw Jacob making mistakes, entering into foolishness, and, in the eyes of modern men, sinning. Yet the wonders of God's grace and mercy continued to shower upon him, from a holy God! At the time (and today) this gave me much heart.

Then came even greater trauma in my own life, threatening to devour me totally. It made me to sit still, unable to speak or eat or sleep. With David I could speak of my bones turning to water as fear struck my heart. Every moment was filled with high anxiety and terror as the attacks hit at my very existence.

Then, brethren began to write to me with such love and care! My family rallied. My dear wife was with me. I could not pray adequately, or do anything, and I realised what despair really was. I slowly began to think of God's peace and knew that without it I had no possibility of survival. I saw that His peace can only rest upon faith. I could not muster that faith humanly, for I was at the end of my strength and could not even think properly. Thus, faith had to be a gift of God, and not within my control.

Agonisingly, I pleaded for this gift, praying that the proof of its possession would be the very peace I sought. But, how to get it I did not know – for it was in God's hands! Then, yesterday, my wife and I had to get some food. Since losing my job the matter of money and food was also out of my control, and provision was made by God through the brethren. Yesterday, just as we were about to go to the supermarket with a very small amount of cash, a letter arrived, with encouragement and enough cash to buy food!

But, I was still gripped by despair. For a week I had almost been mute and my poor wife suffered as a consequence, not knowing what to do (though simply by being there, she acted as my strength). We got in the car and started to go to the nearest store. As we got there I turned off and instead drove to a store 30 miles away... I simply had to get away from my home town,

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where recent memories were sullied by the deeds of wicked men who wanted my demise. I knew it was an avoidance of reality, but my fear and a mounting depression gripped my soul.

We shopped, getting the minimum we could. Again my wife asked if I wanted anything in particular to eat. Again, I could not say, for though hungry I was unable to eat when food touched my lips. I suggested we try a slice of turkey from the counter and promised I would at least try again.

So, we left and started to return home. On the way up I was completely silent, because I could not speak or even think. Just before home I again turned off and drove instead to the sea-front of a decayed part of a nearby town. It was very windy and cold, but my wife went with me... she was willing to freeze for my sake. As we walked – not for long – I again prayed as much as I could, for the peace I could not muster. I desperately needed proof that God was dealing with everything, even if I had made mistakes, or been stupid, or maybe sinned. Though I was convinced I had done nothing wrong, mortals can often be in error.

The short walk did me good in some way, but I was still quiet. We reached home and I decided to get on with this Sunday study, making myself deal with it. Originally, I wanted to just sit there, silently, and not hold a meeting. As I started to write, I was aware of how Joseph was so badly treated and again pleaded with God for the peace I sought, for without it I was doomed. I wrote an update to those on my news list, again seeking prayer, and sent off the email. Because my shoulder was still painful, I did the first part and sat down in the lounge for a while and rested.

My wife tried me with the turkey slice sandwich, cleverly cut into smaller pieces! This time I ate, a small piece at a time, though I did not wish to. After that I quickly drifted into sleep on the sofa. When I awoke I felt different! I cannot explain it, but the despair was lifted and I felt normal again! Was this my peace from God? I took it to be so and continued with the study, with joy in my heart. I knew that if the peace was genuine it would remain with me to the next day, and would be reflected in sleep at night. Well, the sleep came and I still have no despair as I finish this study. I thank God for the way He has shown me mercy I do not deserve, and for the love He has shown through the brethren.

The issues that caused the sudden despair have still to be dealt with but now I believe the answer has been given – we shall see over the next few weeks. But, I know now that whatever arises and comes about will be part of His plan. “Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God: defend me from them that rise up against me.” As Psalm 59 shows, men lie in wait to destroy

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me, wicked men, but “the God of my mercy shall prevent me...” Thus, “Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing: for God is my defence, and the God of my mercy.”

There is still much to be rid of before the danger is past, but I now have that wondrous peace, so laboured over in my heart but given freely by Almighty God! As Psalm 50 says, “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me.” God also said, “...call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” God has shown me in dramatic ways that I cannot win in my own strength, but only in His. I thank God for this revelation to my soul and ask that the wickedness still pressing upon me will be quickly dealt with. Amen. (2014 Note: Those who are unaware of what I am referring to above are welcome to a summary, on request).

Verses 1-4

1.

“And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmeelites, which had brought him down thither.

2.

And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.

3.

And his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand.

4.

And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand.”

Joseph finally reached Egypt and was taken to the slave market; it might have been a separate market, or just one ‘stall’ amongst others, as slaves were no more than products to be bought and sold. We are told that Potiphar (‘belonging to the sun’), captain of the Pharaoh’s guard and

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chief executioner, bought Joseph.

“The Lord (Jehovah) was with Joseph.” What does this mean? It must mean that whatever he did and thought was blessed by God, because he was faithful to the Lord. And so he became ‘prosperous’, meaning either that he was successful in his job, or that he was both successful and well-rewarded for doing so well.

It seems that Joseph was simply an ordinary house-servant at first, but whatever he did he did well and did not shirk. I believe this trait is essential in all Believers, even when they work for unbelievers, or nasty employers. We must work hard, giving more than is required, so that others can see we do what is right and good. As with Joseph this led to his master treating him well – but it is not always like this, for many would treat a Christian with contempt, even if his work was excellent. Even so, the work must continue to be of the very best, as a testimony to the Christian’s heritage and Lord.

This gives earthly benefits to the unjust man, but why does the Lord allow this to occur when the servant is maltreated? Probably, the benefits are given not as an outward, obvious reward, but as a testimony to the purity of action of the Christian, and, also, as a stumblingblock to the unjust man who ‘owns’ him. The many good works and continuous good service glaringly show-up the deficiencies and sins of the unjust man, and so he cannot escape his judgement for maltreating a child of God. Indeed, his maltreatment piles coals of judgment upon his head.

In Joseph’s case, however, he had an excellent master who recognised that God was with his servant, who turned all his good work into benefits for the household. Therefore, after a while, having served his master well, Potiphar liked what he saw and promoted Joseph to be his chief servant, or ‘overseer’, paqad... the same as a chief steward.

This was no mere senior job: as overseer, Joseph had total control over a high-ranking officer’s home, together with all its servants, contents and finances. We are shown that Potiphar was unaware of what he had, for Joseph alone knew the whole ‘business’, inside-out. Thus, everyone, including Potiphar, relied on Joseph for everything. In this we see the true character of Joseph: he was open, honest, reliable, faithful to God, and transparent in his dealings.

Verses 5&6

1.

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“And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field.

2.

And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat. And Joseph was a goodly person, and well favoured.”

Joseph's character is here made plain – a character I would love to have for myself. By being in Potiphar's household, Joseph brought many blessings. You will note that the blessings were given to unbelievers, for the sake of the believer. The blessings extended to everyone and everything in, and connected with, the household. This occurs today when employers or any other group have a true Christian in their midst.

All Potiphar needed was to have his clothing and food needs met, which was what happened. Joseph did everything well, in such a way as to make life easy for his master. For this reason Joseph was seen to be a 'goodly person' who was 'well favoured'. 'Goodly' means to be handsome with manly stature; and 'well-favoured' has a similar meaning; the text is preparing us for the next statement...

Verses 7-10

1.

“And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me.

2.

But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand;

3.

There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?

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4.

And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her.”

The trouble with good-looks is the trouble they can bring! Though Joseph had no designs on the woman, Potiphar’s wife certainly wanted him carnally and she made this very plain, by asking him to ‘lay’ with her.

As the mistress of the house, she no doubt thought that she could command the liaison, because Joseph was only a slave. Joseph was quick to protect himself by saying that Potiphar entrusted him with everything he had (including persons), and he did not wish to commit such an improper act with his wife.

Joseph summed up why it would be wrong: it would be a ‘great wickedness’ and a ‘sin against God’. The word ‘wicked’ describes something malignant, giving pain and misery, of bad intrinsic value... that is, worthless. The word ‘sin’ has very similar meanings to those found in the New Testament: to miss the way, to incur guilt, to take the wrong path, to miss the mark.

In our modern day, adultery is but a slight thing, but Joseph describes it for what it really is – a massive reason for guilt and a step that offends God to the utmost, causing the sinner to ‘lose his way’ and true calling. As a mere man I cannot be judgmental about this sin, when people take this often cruel path of sin... but I must always teach against it, in all humility. I can only pray that I will myself be protected from its awfulness, and hope to counsel those who have fallen to the terrible lie. Thus, we must judge without being judgmental.

Potiphar’s wife tried her best to seduce Joseph over many days, but Joseph staunchly refused to obey her requests. It is possible that he might have been tempted, but I do not think so, given his character. Very often we are seduced not by something foreign to us, but by things we might secretly have wanted. But here the sense appears to be that Joseph resisted easily, because his heart and soul were pure.

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In Christian circles it is often said that we must repress our sinful desires. But, this is dangerous, for it allows temptation to arise and not be dealt with. We must never repress sin, but must deal it a death-blow every time. In this way, it cannot fester under the surface and erupt when we least expect it. Joseph could have harboured secret desires, but he did not, though such relationships were probably very common amongst the rich and powerful, as it was in old Rome. His resoluteness brought both his salvation and his downfall... sometimes being faithful to God leads to our demise, if only temporary!

Verses 11&12

1.

“And it came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men of the house there within.

2.

And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.”

During this time of attempted seduction, Joseph had to spend time on his administrative work inside the house... but there were no other men inside at the time. Taking her opportunity, Potiphar's wife again tried to seduce Joseph, catching him by his loose outer coat, trying to bring him closer. Again, she demanded that he lay with her, but he literally fled and left the house, leaving his coat in her hand.

As I have known in my own life, the most ordinary of items or actions can lead to devastating lies in the mouth of liars and those who wish to do us harm. We cannot cover every possible angle (as I have found to my cost), but all Christians should beware of placing themselves in precarious or potentially damaging circumstances. Far better to avoid situations than to invite trouble, especially in these days of mass sexualisation.

Verses 13-20

1.

“And it came to pass, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and was fled forth,

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2.

That she called unto the men of her house, and spake unto them, saying, See, he hath brought in an Hebrew unto us to mock us; he came in unto me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice:

3.

And it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled, and got him out.

4.

And she laid up his garment by her, until his lord came home.

5.

And she spake unto him according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me:

6.

And it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled out.”

The evil wife of Potiphar then called to some male servants and said that she rued the day that her husband brought an Hebrew into the house – look, she said, he only came to sport with us, and he tried to make me lay with him! She said she only escaped when she cried out for help and he ran away, leaving his coat with her.

The word ‘Hebrew’ did not have a special national significance at that time. It was used to describe a foreigner, or Ibriy – ‘one from beyond’. Only later did it come to refer to the Jewish patriarchs and the Jewish people, such as when the Hebrews were later held captive in Egypt. It is also based on the area where Joseph came from, Eber, ‘the region beyond’, named after the great grandson of Shem.

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And so the woman prepared the way for her lies. A woman shunned can often turn very nasty indeed, and will plot the downfall of men who resist them. It can also happen if a man has a woman as his superior, and he somehow manages to show himself to be better at his tasks than she is... then she will try to discredit him by any means.

When Potiphar came home, he had a shock, as his wife related the fake attack on her by Joseph. The fact that the account did not sit well with Joseph's character and faithful service did not make any difference to Potiphar. We can only put ourselves in his place; if he did not know his wife was a seductress, he had no option but to believe a free-woman over a slave.

Verses 19-20

1.

“And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spake unto him, saying, After this manner did thy servant to me; that his wrath was kindled.

2.

And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison.”

In an agitated and extremely angry state he had Joseph arrested and removed to the prison under the king's palace. (Note that 'king' is used instead of 'pharaoh' in this text). Being a “kings' prisoner” he could be kept imprisoned indefinitely. So, his future looked very bleak at that time.

Verses 21-23

1.

“But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

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And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it.

The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the LORD was with him, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper.”

“But the LORD was with Joseph”! Though incarcerated in prison, the prison-keeper or captain thought a great deal of him, for even there his good character shone through. And so the keeper showed him mercy and kindness. As with Potiphar's household, the captain of the place gave Joseph the full run of the prison, making him the manager of everything there, including the prisoners. And, as at the household, whatever Joseph did was good and came to fruition, to the keeper's delight and blessing.

In our own lives, what seems awful and stressful may well be God's way of moving us towards a different goal, one we know nothing of at the time. We may, for a while, know agitation or even depression, but these are only manifestations of our feeble human souls. God's will works its way in our lives regardless, and so every situation should be regarded as a precursor to hope and joy.

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