

Joseph, A Type of Christ

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The story of Joseph as given in Genesis (chapters 37 to 50) is perennially fresh and delightful. Young and old alike revel in it. Looked at as an old-world picture of customs and people long-since vanished, there is a freshness and charm about it that stirs the heart and holds our attention in a remarkable way.

But in studying Scripture there is not only the literal application, which is always important, but every part of the Word of God has a spiritual, typical, and dispensational application as well, and in Joseph's character and experience we have a wonderful type of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ordinarily when we speak of any individual in the Old Testament being a type of Christ, we refer to what he is officially, and not to his personal character. David, for instance, in his official capacity is a striking type of our Saviour; Solomon, too, as the king of peace typifies Him who is yet to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords; but neither of these men could be said to typify Christ in their personal characters. With Joseph it is otherwise. His life shines forth from the pages of Holy Scripture as practically flawless. It is not indeed that he was actually sinless, for he had in himself the same corrupt nature that any other child of Adam has, but it has not pleased God to speak of any flaws or blemishes which His holy eye may have discerned in this devoted servant, but He has rather emphasized his faithfulness and practical godliness.

If we study him as a type of Christ, we would first notice him as

The Beloved of the Father's Heart

This comes out clearly in the early part of chapter 37. We read that Israel loved Joseph more than all his children because he was the son of his old age, and he made him a coat of many colors. Here we have more than a hint of the One who from all eternity was the delight of God the Father, the One whom He ever sought to magnify and glorify, for our Lord Jesus Christ was with the Father from all eternity. There are some who question this, and particularly some who would deny His right to the term "Eternal Son"; but if He was not the Eternal Son, then there was no Eternal Father. Sainly J. G. Bellett has well asked, "Had the Father no bosom in the past eternity?" and the answer is clearly found in John 1:18, "The only begotten Son, which is in (or subsisting in) the bosom of the Father." The expression implies a relationship of devoted attachment, of deepest affection. The Father loved Him before the foundation of the world and ever delighted to honor Him.

Then we notice in Joseph the dreamer of dreams with

Premonitions of Coming Glory

He saw in a vision his brethren and all his father's house bowing down to him, and this was the vision granted to our Lord Jesus Christ. His delights were with the sons of men and He ever looked forward to the time when, as the exalted Man, He would be the means of blessing for all His brethren and His Father's house. That

term, "His brethren" includes not only Israel but we read in the epistle to the Hebrews, "He is not ashamed to call us brethren." All the redeemed rejoice to own His authority and gladly bow in submission at His feet. But there is more than this involved in the thought of His coming exaltation for "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2: 10-11).

Joseph comes before us in his first active ministry as the one who left the father's house and went forth

Seeking His Brethren

His father's heart was toward the sons who were caring for the flock, first at Shechem and then at Dothan, and to them Joseph went forth sent by the father to see how they did and to declare the father's concern for them. How truly this sets forth the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ who came "not to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved;" (John 3: 17) who came from the Father's house into this dark world of sin seeking His brethren that He might declare the Father's Name to them and manifest the Father's love. Of this we have more than a hint in the journey of Joseph to distant Dothan, but as the story proceeds how the whole tragedy of the

Rejection of the Son

comes before us in the treatment accorded to him by those whom he sought out for blessing — hating him the more because of his father's love and detesting him because of his superior virtue. Angered too, because of those dreams of glory, they exclaimed in indignation as he drew near, "Behold, this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams" (Gen. 37: 19-20). And so in the sordid tale of their hatred and rejection we have more than a foreshadow of the treatment that Israel and the Gentiles would yet accord to God's beloved Son. While every detail does not, of course, fit perfectly with the experiences of our blessed Lord and His unbelieving brethren after the flesh, yet it is plain to see that the story is one and the same: the love of the Father's heart, the yearning of the Son, and the cruel setting at naught by those whom He loved so tenderly, all are clearly manifested. Hated, spurned by those who should have welcomed him with gladness, Joseph is cast into the pit, which speaks of death, and then sold to the Gentiles and carried down into Egypt. Of course, with our Lord He was sold first and then crucified, but both stories alike tell of the corruption of the human heart and the love of the heart of God.

The scene changes and we next see Joseph as

The Tempted One

and here how his experiences illustrate the testings and triumphs of our Lord who was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4: 15). In Joseph's case we have a man sinful by nature triumphing in the hour of testing because of the fear of the Lord. "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin

against God?" (Gen. 39:9) This was his strength. He had set Jehovah always before him and therefore he was not moved when the hour of trial came. In the case of our Lord, He was, of course, the sinless One and His temptation was but the demonstration of this. "Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," (Hebrews 7:26) it was unthinkable that sin should ever hold dominion over Him. He stood unflinchingly against every attack of the evil one, and He could ever say, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me" (John 14:30). In Joseph's temptation and victory we see clearly set forth the way in which every one of us may overcome. It is as the Word of God is hidden in our hearts that we shall be kept from sinning against Him.

But Joseph's testing was not only in Potiphar's house. There he was tempted in the midst of luxuries. There was a further trial when, falsely accused, he suffered for righteousness' sake in the prison-house. But there his integrity was demonstrated and the fear of God preserved him. He shone just as brightly in the dungeon as he did in the mansion. D. L. Moody once said, "Character is what a man is in the dark," and this indeed comes out wonderfully in the case of Joseph. They put him in fetters of iron, but the prison-cell was only the antechamber to the royal palace.

He is as truly the messenger of Jehovah in the prison, interpreting the dreams of the butler and the baker, as when he told his own dream so long before. It is evident that there was no break in his communion with God. It was as easy for him to interpret a dream as to see visions, for he was under the control of the Holy Spirit.

And so in due time we find him

Exalted in Glory

He who had been despised and rejected, he who had been hated and spurned, given up for dead and sold into slavery, unjustly accused and imprisoned, came forth in due time to share the throne with Pharaoh as the preserver of the lives of both the Egyptians and all his father's house.

His Gentile bride, Asenath, seems to give a hint of the fact that our Lord, while rejected by Israel, has found a Bride among the Gentiles, and Joseph's two sons Manasseh (forgetful) and Ephraim (fruitful), tell how he was made to forget all his sorrows because of the fruitfulness of his ministry by the Spirit among the Gentiles. The day came when all of Egypt and the peoples of distant lands bowed at his feet asking for the sustaining corn. When they cried to Pharaoh and said, "Give us food," his answer was, "Go to Joseph," for he was the custodian of all the treasured corn of Egypt, and so today, as throughout the coming Millennium, all blessing is centered in Christ, and to every seeking soul the Father says,

"Go to Jesus"

"There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12) but the Name which was written above Him when He hung rejected on Calvary's cross, and, thank God, no other name is needed, for He declares, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). He is exalted to God's right hand, speaking peace to all who trust Him and ministering

grace to every seeking soul.

Joseph's dreams were wonderfully fulfilled when his brethren came in their abject need, bowing at his feet, glad to receive from his hand that which would maintain physical life, and so now He who is greater than Joseph gives eternal life to bankrupt sinners who bow before Him confessing their guilt and owning His grace.

The tender heart of Joseph, his deep compassion for his brethren, comes out most clearly when he reveals himself to them, and again when they doubt his love after his father's death. Like the One of whom he was but a foreshadow, he was a man of tears. As he beheld his brethren, he could not refrain from weeping, and when they feared that he would remember their sins after the burial of Jacob, their distrust of his love moved him again to sobs uncontrolled. He loved to be trusted; he could not bear to be doubted, and in this how truly he portrays the character of the Lord Jesus.

But the type falls far short of the reality, and the book of Genesis closes with the death of Joseph and his body placed in a coffin in Egypt. Thank God, He of whom Joseph speaks lives to die no more, but just as Joseph gave commandment concerning his bones, and Israel carried those bones all through the wilderness and at last laid them to rest in the land of Canaan, so a pilgrim people today are called upon to always bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in us. The bones of Joseph were the memorial of death. Suppose a stranger noticed his bier carried reverently throughout the wilderness and inquired concerning it, he might have been answered by something like this, "We were in deep distress, likely to die of famine, but Joseph our brother, whom we had rejected, saved us. Our deliverer died, and we are carrying the memorial through the wilderness to find a resting-place in the land to which we go."

And so we too have that which reminds us of our Saviour's death, "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come" (1 Cor. 11:26). Some day we will be through forever with the memorials of death when we shall have gone to that rest which remains for the people of God, and there we shall have our blessed Lord in all His fulness to be the delight of our hearts throughout an eternity of bliss, while a regenerated world will see Him enthroned in highest glory and all peoples will be nourished by His beneficence and bow at His feet in rapt adoration.