

From Prison to Palace

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There is a wonderful account in the Old Testament that is familiar to many of us. It gives us real insight into the ways of God, and if we allow the Holy Spirit to take these truths and apply them to our lives today, I believe we will be greatly encouraged. The history of the life of Joseph is found in Genesis chapters 37 to 50. I encourage you to read the entire account, but we will briefly summarize it here.

When Joseph was a young boy of 17, God gave him several dreams. Neither Joseph, his brothers, nor his father understood the implications of the dreams, but they were prophecies of what would happen in Joseph's life in later years. Because Joseph's father favored him, his brothers hated him. The dreams increased their hatred because they thought the dreams stemmed from pride in Joseph's heart. Their hatred was so great that they looked for an opportunity to kill Joseph. One day, they had their chance, and if not for the intervention of Joseph's older brother Judah, they may have carried out their plan. Instead of killing Joseph, however, they sold him as a slave into Egypt.

While in Egypt, God blessed Joseph. Because of his faithful service, Joseph rose to being in charge of the house of a very high officer of Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt. While carrying out his responsibilities of his job, his master's wife tried to get Joseph to lie with her and sin. He refused and ran from the sin, but was falsely accused and put into prison. But even in prison, God blessed Joseph. Eventually the whole prison was put under his authority.

While Joseph was in prison, two other members of Pharaoh's household were also imprisoned. Joseph was faithful to these men, doing good to them, and with the ability given to him by God, he interpreted their dreams. He asked one of the men he befriended to remember him to Pharaoh and help him get out of prison, but his goodness towards the man was forgotten and Joseph stayed in prison.

One day Pharaoh had some dreams that were very troubling. He asked his wise men to interpret the meaning of his dreams, but they were unable to do so. At this point, the man Joseph had befriended in prison remembered Joseph and recommended him to the king. Joseph was summoned and was able to tell Pharaoh the meaning of the dreams. Because of this, and because of the prophecy contained in the dreams, Pharaoh took Joseph out of prison and put him in charge of Egypt to prepare for the predicted famine in the land. Because of Joseph, Egypt was prepared for the famine and the nation survived.

In the middle of the famine, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt for food. In this situation, the prophecy in his long-ago dream came true. Joseph recognized his brothers, and in a deeply touching encounter, he forgave them for their sinful actions against him. In all of this, Joseph was an instrument in God's hand for good.

The entire account of Joseph's life can be viewed as a picture of Christ, and there are many lessons we can learn as the Holy Spirit illuminates the account to our understanding. But for now, let us concentrate on just one aspect that I believe can strongly encourage us.

If any man had a right to become bitter, it was Joseph. God had given him dreams and the gift of interpretation. For telling the dreams to his brothers, he was sold into slavery. While in slavery, he was faithful before God in serving his master, yet was falsely accused after taking a stand for righteousness. For this he was thrown into prison. While in prison, Joseph kept his relationship with God right and was faithful before God in serving others. Yet men forgot his good deeds when they got out and had a

chance to help him. Yes, Joseph had the "right" to be bitter about his circumstances.

At this time, God needed somebody He could depend on for a great responsibility. It is amazing to see where God went for such a man. He did not go to the universities of Egypt or to the household of Pharaoh. Rather he went to the depths of a prison and chose a man who had been faithful to Him there. Joseph had remained true to God in every trial. He could hear God and be useful for God's purposes. In one day, God took Joseph from prison and set him on the throne of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. If you have not read this incredible narrative, take time to read it now. If we let the account speak to us of the ways of God, I believe it can help us greatly in the situations we find ourselves in.

All of us may find ourselves "in prison." A "prison" is the circumstances that we cannot change. It may be the place we live, the job we are "stuck in," the person we married, or a hundred other things that may constitute the boundaries of our life. We often struggle to change these circumstances and are either unsuccessful, or successful but now finding ourselves in a stronger prison--our new circumstances. In these conditions it is easy to blame God for our circumstances, to complain, and even to become bitter against others and against God. There seems to be no way out, and God has forgotten us. Does this sound familiar?

When does a prison cease to be a prison? Isn't it when we stop trying to get out? When we stop shaking the bars or looking for a hole in the wall, we become free to look around at other things. We notice others in the prison with us, and we can see ways to help them. The change is not in the circumstances, but in our hearts.

In our new freedom, we begin looking to God for ways to serve others and help them out of their "prisons." Who is most greatly benefited when we do this? Yes, others are helped, but we are the greater winners. Why? Because a working begins to take place in our hearts. Now instead of getting bitter, we get sweeter in Jesus each day. When we let His love control us, we find that our "prison" is no longer a prison but a great training ground for God's purposes.

If God could take Joseph from prison and set him on a throne in one day, will He not do the same for us? Is He the same God today that He was in Joseph's day? I believe He is, but the great question is this: Will we trust God in our prison as Joseph did in his? Are you willing to see your prison as a place to get to know God, rather than something to try to escape from? If you will really get to know God in your present circumstances, God can change those circumstances anytime He sees fit. We must leave those things in God's hand, and set our attention on knowing and experiencing God's love where we are. God will do the rest.

There is one more application I would like to draw from this account. In many ways, our whole life on this earth is a "prison." So many things that we would like to change, we can't, and we may never see God change the circumstances of our lives the way we think He should. But if we are faithful to respond to Him in this life, one day God will change our circumstances. He will lift us out of this world into another world, where we will rule and reign with Him forever. This is the blessed hope of each child of God. But for this hope to be real, we must allow God to prepare us for Himself in the "prison" of this life. We will be prepared as we abide in Christ. This is His plan, and because He is perfect, it is a perfect plan. Will we walk in this by faith?

May I challenge you to consider how you are viewing your "prison"? Are you becoming bitter, thinking God has forsaken you, or are you seeing things more from God's viewpoint and becoming sweet in Jesus? God gives us this choice. Let Christ be your Lord today, and one day He will take you from your prison and set you on a throne. He knows what He's doing. Don't miss the opportunity that is

before you.