

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Old Testament types of the Lord

The glory of Joseph

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
The New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Introduction

Today we continue our series on 'Old Testament types of the Lord' with a talk entitled 'The glory of Joseph.'

The subject of today's talk was one of the greatest Israelites, but he wasn't a king because he wasn't from the tribe of Judah. He was never a priest, nor could he have been because he wasn't from the tribe of Levi. He wasn't a judge, and he wasn't even his father's firstborn son! He didn't have a tribe of Israel named after him, or utter great prophecies of future judgements and blessings, nor does he have a book of the Bible named after him. But he **was** given a name that may mean 'saviour of the world' and he **was** one of the greatest rulers that Israel ever produced, even though he never ruled over Israel! He was also the recipient of one of the most fulsome blessings in the Old Testament, indeed of the whole Bible. Of course, his name was Joseph, and he was the first son born to his mother Rachel, and he stands as a wonderful type, or picture, of Jesus Christ in His exaltation and future kingdom rule. In fact, the Bible never explicitly states that Joseph is a type of Christ in the way that, for example, Hebrews plainly says that Melchizedec is a type of Christ as high priest, and states that Isaac being offered by Abraham was a picture of Jesus dying and rising again. But it is very plain that the exaltation of Joseph in Egypt, following on from his betrayal, false accusation and unjust imprisonment, wonderfully prefigures the exaltation that the Lord Jesus will experience in the future, after all that He has suffered.

Saviour of the world

Pharaoh gives Joseph the name Zaphnath-Paaneah. There seem to be two major possibilities for what this means. One is, 'revealer of secrets', the other is 'saviour of the world.' You can certainly see how Joseph was **both** things, regardless of what the name actually means. Joseph revealed the secret of both the content and the meaning of Pharaoh's dreams. He also saved the lives of countless thousands of people across the middle east by his wise counsel about storing up food during seven years of plenty before seven years of famine came. Perhaps it is best to say that God Himself revealed the secrets and saved those lives, but to Pharaoh, the immediate source of those blessings was Joseph. If we need further justification for regarding Joseph as a saviour of the world, we have the direct testimony of the people of Egypt recorded in Genesis 47:25, "You have saved our lives."

Whether or not Joseph had this name or title, it certainly belongs to Christ Jesus. The One who revealed the secrets of God's love, and His way of salvation, in so doing, became the only one who can save this world. That is true both at the level of the individual salvation of each sinner that puts their trust in Christ, and as describing the way Jesus will yet reign across the whole world, bringing in unimaginable blessing and joy. There have been any number of national rulers who have declared their intention of bringing great blessing and prosperity. Some of them have been well intentioned, many not so; but all of them have shared the flaws of human weakness and an

inability to control all the forces of politics or nature. Even the best systems of governance that human beings have devised, in the best of circumstances, with well-intentioned leaders, are never able to deliver universal prosperity and blessing. When Christ reigns, He will do exactly that! Joseph doubtless reigned with great wisdom and I'm sure he was a fantastic leader and administrator. These make him a suitable picture of how Christ will one day rule this world perfectly, but, like every type, Joseph falls well short of that which is being typified. You might say that the greatness of Christ's wisdom and blessing will start where Joseph left off!

Second only to Pharaoh

There is a lovely string of statements that Pharaoh makes about Joseph in chapter 41 of Genesis. "There is no one as discerning and wise as you" (v.39), says Pharaoh, which is no small statement given that the intelligentsia of Egypt were regarded as the greatest wise men of their time. He continues by stating, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt" (v.41), which was the great regional power of that time. He then gives to Joseph: a "Signet ring", "Garments of fine linen" and a "Gold chain" (v.42). After which he has proclaimed before Joseph wherever he goes, "Bow the knee!" (v.43) and tells Joseph that, "Without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt" (v.44).

It isn't very hard to see how each of these applies to our Lord Jesus. Who could possibly be as discerning and wise as the One who has the very wisdom of God and the discernment of the One who, according to Isaiah 46:10, is capable of, "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying My counsel shall stand"? We know how much insight and wisdom it takes to manage our own families or our own jobs, or at least to try! There are always things we didn't anticipate or cannot fully understand; we are seldom fully confident what the best course of action is in any given situation at the time we face it. Imagine what phenomenal insight, understanding and wisdom would be required to rule the whole world and to do so with fairness, compassion and love, producing only the best of all possible outcomes for everybody concerned! We will be forever thankful that this is exactly the level of wisdom and discernment that Christ has, which is why this world will never be put to rights until He is the sole ruler over it.

Joseph was set over all the land of Egypt. We've already mentioned the greatness and significance of Egypt at that time, but Christ will be set over every land and every nation. It isn't considered politically correct to sing Isaac Watt's hymn (1719), which starts with the verse,

"Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does its successive journeys run,
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more."

But the hymn is strongly grounded in biblical descriptions of Christ's reign and draws attention to both the extent of that kingdom, and the wonderful blessings it will bring to all those who experience it.

We noticed three items that Pharaoh gave to Joseph:

A signet ring

This would have imparted the authority and decision-making powers of Pharaoh to Joseph. In that day, the imprint of a ruler's signet ring into wax would indicate that the document thus sealed was authorised by the owner of the ring. Therefore, if the signet ring was the ruler's, any commandments or regulations in that document had the full authority of the king. The same process is seen when Jesus' tomb was sealed after his crucifixion and burial. To break such a seal was to flout the authority of the owner of the ring and might have been punishable by death. So, in giving Joseph a signet ring, Pharaoh was not endowing him with a nice piece of jewellery; he was transferring vast amounts of authority! When Christ rules in this world, He will do so with all the

authority of God, since He is God and since God the Father will give His Son the right to rule over the world that He created through Him.

Garments of fine linen

If you are a student of the Scriptures, you may already know that fine linen often represents practical righteousness. You can see this in Revelation 19:8 which says about the Church, there portrayed as the Lamb's wife, "To her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." The imagery is also found in the Old Testament where the tunics for Aaron the priest and his sons were of fine linen (see Exodus chapters 28 and 39) and the outer wall of the Tabernacle consisted of hangings made of fine twined linen, as were various other elements of the Tabernacle. This linen was both finely made and was as white as it was possible to make any fabric at that time, which is why it is used to picture righteousness. Pharaoh probably just used it because it would have been very expensive, and therefore exclusive to the wealthy and powerful, but I have no doubt God meant it to picture the purity and righteousness of His Son, of whom Joseph was acting as a type.

A gold chain

This would have indicated office and rank. Gold has always been valued for its rarity and the fact that it doesn't corrode or decay. Pharaoh was wanting to indicate that Joseph was to be honoured and respected as a man of great standing in the kingdom. Nobody will have greater standing in the coming Kingdom of God than the Christ who not only echoes but excels Joseph in all these things.

Pharaoh is expressly placing Joseph in charge of everything. "Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do" he says in Genesis 41:55. If anybody had tried to consult another Egyptian dignitary, or gone directly to Pharaoh in relation to the matters of food and administration, no doubt the response would have been, "Go to Joseph." We sometimes use this illustration when talking about the Gospel. If anybody seeks to find any other way to approach God the answer is, "Go to Jesus"; He is the only source of help and salvation. There is nothing wrong in applying this statement about Joseph to the gospel, but in the picture of Christ in His glory that we are following this morning, the idea is more that Christ will be the Sole source of authority and decision making when He reigns in glory. We sometimes use the phrase about somebody with power that, "whatever he says, goes." That will certainly be the case when the Lord Jesus takes His throne. In that day, anybody who does not do whatever He says, will face summary judgement.

If we had time to read through Genesis chapter 47, we would see that by the end of the seven years of famine, Joseph had brought everything, and everyone, in Egypt under Pharaoh's control. All the money, all the livestock and land; finally, all the people themselves, had been purchased for Pharaoh in exchange for the food that the people could not live without.

Once again, this illustrates for us both the universality of Christ's reign, and also the way in which He will reign on behalf of God the Father. We get an indication of this order in 1 Corinthians 15:24 when we read, "Then comes the end, when [Christ] delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power." It is one of the mysteries of the Godhead, that the Father and the Son are both one God, and yet there is subjection of Son to Father. As verse 28 of 1 Corinthians 15 says, "Now when all things are made subject to [Christ], then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all." Perhaps we see something of that wonderful relationship illustrated, when we read Joseph's instructions to his brothers in relation to his father, Jacob, in Genesis 45:13, "So you shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen."

Consistent in character, whatever the circumstances

Some people are quickly corrupted when they have a sudden increase in fortune, or influence. The improvement in situation brings new temptations, and character flaws that were there all along, are exposed by the new circumstances. There is nothing in the Genesis account to suggest

that Joseph was one of those people. If he was quietly faithful, diligent and unassuming before his sudden elevation to power, he appears to have been just the same afterwards. The same is true of Jesus. Hebrews 13:8 declares, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever." The Jesus who is loving and gentle, while at the same time being utterly holy Himself and insisting that we learn to become holy as well, will not be suddenly transformed when He sits on His throne and wears a crown as the Ruler of this world. That doesn't mean that He will tolerate evil or rebellion, as we thought a moment ago, but He will act with the same character that He has today.

Showing mercy

One characteristic that there was not much opportunity for Joseph to show before his exaltation was mercy. He amply displays it though, in his dealings with his brothers once he has assumed power. Joseph had every opportunity to exact revenge on his eleven brothers for the way they had planned his murder and then sold him as a slave instead. When they had been in a place of power and he had been powerless, they had treated him appallingly, would he now turn the tables? His brothers certainly expected him to and could hardly have complained if he did. But Joseph has another perspective and a better approach. Speaking about the way they had sold him as a slave he tells them, "God sent me before you to preserve life." Genesis 45:7. When, after the first stones bearing the ten commandments were broken in response to Israel's disobedience and idolatry, and Jehovah is about to write His commandments on two new tablets of stone, Exodus 34:6 says, "And the LORD passed before [Moses] and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth.'" What a remarkable way for God to identify Himself when He is about to declare unbending laws and is responding to a stiff-necked and rebellious people! Clearly mercy is a fundamental part of God's character. Joseph recognised that and showed mercy when he didn't have to. Christ, when reigning in glory, will be characterised by mercy, even while ruling in righteousness.

Received his 'kingdom' while in exile

One of the unusual things about the story of Joseph is that he was one of the greatest rulers that Israel ever produced, but he ruled in the land of Egypt! I know that Israel had not yet been given their promised land, and the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lived in tents and moved through the land possessing almost no territory of their own. Nevertheless, it is striking that Joseph spends most of his life, and receives all of his honour and glory, in a foreign land. In fact, it is the very country that the Bible often uses to typify 'the world', that is, human civilisation established in independence of, and in opposition to, God. Joseph is given a wife and they have two children, all in Egypt. Joseph's wife was chosen by Pharaoh. She belonged to a family of pagan priests. Her name was Asenath, and its meaning is uncertain. It might mean 'belonging to her father', which sounds quite positive, but it could possibly mean 'belonging to an Egyptian false god'! We can see how this pictures the fact that the Lord Jesus is receiving His Bride today, mostly from among the gentiles. We were the spiritual equivalent of those who belong to false gods but, having been saved and made a new creation in Christ Jesus, we now belong to our heavenly father.

The two sons that Asenath bore to Joseph were named, Manasseh, which means making forgetful, and Ephraim, which means fruitfulness. It appears from the text that Joseph named the boys: Manasseh to indicate that God was making him forget all the trials of his youth, and Ephraim to show that God was replacing his barren years with productive, fruitful ones. The two sons illustrate how Christ is receiving sons and children here and now, whom He will bring with Him when He comes to reign. In the King James Version Isaiah 53:11 reads, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." This refers to those sons and children that Christ is bringing to Himself; those that today we call Christians.

[Just in passing, the descendants of Joseph's two sons are reckoned as two tribes in Israel, which is why there is no tribe bearing Joseph's name.](#)

Recognised by Gentiles before being received by the Jews

In a similar manner to our previous point, Joseph gained recognition and honour from the Gentile Pharaoh before Joseph's dreams of his brothers, father and mother bowing down to him were ever fulfilled. The order was, exalted by the Gentiles then exalted by the Israelites. Christ's exaltation will follow the same order. The church today is overwhelmingly Gentile. Not that Jewish people cannot be saved, indeed some of them are, but since Paul turned from Jews to Gentiles centuries ago, the Church has been composed mostly of non-Israelites. The Bible makes it pretty clear that the nation of Israel will, in future, turn to Christ and receive Him as their national Saviour, after they have passed through dreadful persecution. Joseph's story prefigures this.

Favourite son of his father

It is doubtful that Jacob's preferring of Joseph before all his other sons was very wise, or even morally right. Certainly, the way that he expressed this favouritism was at the root of Joseph's suffering at the hands of his brothers. Even in this unpromising part of the story though, perhaps we can see a little echo of the Son who was "The only begotten of [His] Father" (John 1:14) and "Daily His delight" (Proverbs 8:30).

First sufferings, then glory

Last week's talk was about Joseph as a picture of Christ's sufferings, this week we are focussing on His glory, but they are, of course, intimately connected. 1 Peter has a lot to say on the topic of suffering followed by glory. Peter is very clear that God's order is, first suffering, then glory. The history of Joseph followed that order many hundreds of years before Peter wrote his epistle.

The great blessing

We are going to finish with the wonderful blessing that Jacob pronounces on Joseph near the end of his life. Jacob's blessing covers all twelve of his sons, but the blessing given to Joseph stands out, both in its length and its fulsomeness. It is found in Genesis 49:22-26.

"Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; his branches run over the wall. The archers have bitterly grieved him, shot at him and hated him. But his bow remained in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob (from there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel), by the God of your father who will help you, and by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father have excelled the blessings of my ancestors, up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. They shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers."

We will go back a little over some of the ground we have already covered, but it should provide a useful summary. First, Jacob emphasises Joseph's fruitfulness. He is like a tree branch that is bearing lots of fruit and the tree is next to a well, so there will always be water to sustain the tree and fill out the fruit. I don't think Jacob was only thinking about Joseph's two sons as the fruit, although they may well be included, he is rather making reference to all that Joseph has accomplished in his life, for God, for his family and for others. Indeed, in the next clause, Joseph's branches are said to be "running over the wall." This highlights the way that the fruitfulness of Joseph has reached out to all of Egypt, in fact, to all of the nations around, who would have gone up to Egypt for food during the seven-year famine. Once again, we see an illustration of the way that the blessings that will flow from a glorified Christ will be both bountiful and sustained and will reach out well beyond the nation of Israel, spreading to the whole world.

Next Jacob stresses the sufferings of Joseph, pictured as aggressive archers firing arrows at the innocent Joseph in their hatred of him. But Joseph is an archer as well! He holds a bow, and the strength he needs in his right arm to pull back that bow, is provided by none other than God, the “Mighty God of Jacob.” We note without further comment how this pictures Christ going on from suffering to glory, sustained all along the way by His God and Father.

In an interesting little clause within brackets, Jacob states that from God will come, “The Shepherd, the Stone of Israel.” We know that the Lord Jesus said of Himself, “I am the good shepherd” – no doubt deliberately alluding to Old Testament references to Jehovah as the Shepherd of Israel, such as Psalm 23. In Matthew 21:42 Jesus applies to Himself a quotation from Psalm 118 about, “The stone that the builders rejected”, becoming the “Chief cornerstone.” The Shepherd and the Stone of Israel are clearly messianic references, that is, references to Christ, so within this picture of Christ in the life of Joseph we have buried direct references to Christ Himself!

Next Jacob goes on to ascribe the literal blessings. They are pretty comprehensive! “Blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb.” Blessings all the way from heaven above to the deep beneath! Blessings of having offspring. If that was not comprehensive enough, he goes on to speak of blessings, “Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.” And in case we had any doubts who such blessings were for Jacob declares, “They shall be on the head of Joseph.” It is hard to think of any blessing in the Old Testament that is as comprehensive as this. It should make us realise what a great character Joseph was, but, much more importantly, it should direct our attention towards the Saviour and Lord that Joseph prefigures, the wonderful Lord Jesus Christ. Who but He could really fulfil blessings as glorious as this? But right up to the end the suffering and the glory are inseparable. The sentence doesn’t end at, “The head of Joseph”, but continues on, “And on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers.” Joseph was separate from his brothers: initially in suffering because of their cruelty, but then he achieved his elevation to greatness, an elevation that his brothers could not fully share, so he was separate again. Christ is the one who was, “Separate from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26) in His holiness, but also suffered the separateness of being alone on the Cross for you and me. He is bringing many sons to glory but will reign as the one and only Son of God. What lovely ways Joseph, in his exaltation, pictures to us the marvellous exaltation of Christ Himself.

Heavenly Father, we thank You that You will soon put Your Son, the Lord Jesus, on the throne of this world, where He will rule in perfect righteousness and wisdom, displaying all His glory. Your Son is so important to You that You scattered pictures and prophecies of Him throughout the Bible, long before You first sent Him into the world. Please help us to see and rejoice in these views of our Saviour and, through them, learn to love Him more and serve Him more faithfully. In Jesus own name we ask, amen.

Thank you for listening to this truth for today talk on ‘Old Testament types of the Lord – The glory of Joseph’, talk number T1189.

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