

JOSEPH THE MERCIFUL.

– GEN. 45:1-15. – OCT. 27. –

**"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."
– Rom. 12:21.**

DIVINE PROVIDENCE in the affairs of men is the essence of this lesson. Joseph was now thirty-nine years of age, having been next to Pharaoh in the throne of Egypt for nine years. The seven years of plenty were in the past; the granaries of Egypt were full with enough to spare, and two years of the predicted famine were already past. It would seem that Joseph had made no attempt to communicate with his father and brethren; first, probably because the methods of communication at that time were limited, but more particularly, we opine, because he had for some years been realizing that divine providence was shaping his affairs. He remembered his early dreams, and could see that they were now in a fair way of fulfilment. He would leave to divine supervision this matter, which was evidently beyond his control anyway. He no doubt thought of the famine, and how it would affect Palestine, and thus the interests of his father and brethren, their households, flocks and herds. He no doubt expected that as other people from the vicinity were coming to Egypt to buy grain, so quite probably eventually the Hebrews would come also; and they were forced to come by the close of the second year of the famine.

We may surmise that some law prohibited the sale of grain to foreigners, except by the chief ruler's permission, and that thus Joseph's brethren were obliged to come before him to explain. This thought is sustained by the fact that Joseph, wishing to try his brethren, first cast them into prison as spies – as though they were emissaries of a foreign power; which perceived the wealth of Egypt in food, and was meditating an attack upon the country. This gave Joseph the opportunity of inquiring minutely

respecting the home conditions of his brethren, concerning his father and Benjamin, his younger brother, who was not with the brethren. Finally he gave them the opportunity of proving the truth of their statements, holding Simeon as a ransom until they would come again and bring Benjamin with them, knowing full well that they would be obliged to do this, because the famine would continue. These experiences proved a valuable lesson to the ten brethren, respecting the difficulties in which they were, and called to mind their past wrong conduct in respect to Joseph, for they accepted their present difficulties as retribution. "They said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not hear, therefore is this distress come upon us. And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; – and ye would not hear? Therefore behold also his blood is required. And they knew not that Joseph understood them; for he spake unto them by an interpreter."

Joseph was not hard-hearted, but wise in his treatment of his brethren. Most evidently not a solitary act was inspired by vindictiveness. He was evidently taking God's view of matters; viz., that it is proper that a certain amount of retribution shall come upon evil-doers, so as to impress upon them the more thoroughly the sinfulness of sin. Thus parents and guardians of children should not permit their kindness and sympathy to hinder a reasonable, moderate punishment of wrong-doing. Nevertheless, pity and love should be back of all, as it was in Joseph's case; merely planning for the better opportunity and the larger amount of blessing in due time.

When their grain was exhausted, and want was staring them in the face, Jacob finally consented to let Benjamin go with his brethren for the second purchase of grain; not, however, until Judah had become pledge for Benjamin, that he would not return to his home or family unless Benjamin also returned. The coming

of the brethren to Joseph's house a second time, with the proof of the genuineness of their original story, was sufficient ground for their entertainment most graciously, and for the liberation of Simeon; – the whole company, to their surprise, being invited to dine with the governor, Joseph. They were surprised, too, that by some preconcerted arrangement they were seated at the table in the order of their ages; and further astonished that their younger brother, Benjamin, received five portions, as an evidence of special regard of the governor. They were rejoiced, undoubtedly, at the good fortune that had overtaken them, and making ready started on their homeward journey, doubtless thinking to themselves – We thought that our hardships of the previous time were probably in the nature of retributions, and that God's hand was in it, but after all, it seems that it was merely a natural thing that we should be taken for spies. Now, behold, we are prospered.

But they had not gone far until they were overtaken by the governor's agents, who represented that a theft had been committed, that the governor's valuable silver mug, called by the Egyptians, "Cup of Divination," was missing. They protested their innocence, that they were not that kind of men, and suggested that they be searched thoroughly. Examination was made of the grain sacks of one after another, until finally the cup was found in Benjamin's sack, and the whole company, previously elated, now returned prisoners to the governor of Egypt, whose hospitalities they had so recently enjoyed, and apparently had so poorly requited. Perhaps they began to think about the Joseph matter again, and to say to **[R2893 : page 328]** themselves, The evil that we thought was past is still pursuing us. It was a good lesson undoubtedly, helping to impress upon their minds, not only the value of honesty, but also the thought that although the wheels of justice grind sometimes slowly, they grind surely and very fine.

Benjamin, with the rest, denied that he had stolen the cup, and whether the brothers believed him or not, they would not lay special blame upon him, but generously shared it as a whole company. Judah, speaking for them, said, "What shall we say unto my Lord? What shall we speak, or how shall we clear ourselves? God has found out the iniquities of thy servants. Behold, we are my Lord's servants, both we and he also with whom the cup was found." They did not explain to Joseph the nature of their iniquity, though this evidently was in their minds. Joseph, however, wishing to see to what extent they had still the same evil, jealous disposition which they manifested toward him, proposed to let the others go free and merely to hold Benjamin, as the slave. The ruse was successful, and developed the fact that the brethren had learned lessons and formed characters in the interim which made them now more sympathetic one for another, and for their father. Their wrong course in Joseph's case had not been persisted in, but had been repented of. Judah explained the whole situation to Joseph through the interpreter, and so vividly did he picture Jacob's love for Benjamin, and his sorrow at the supposed death of Joseph, and the interest of the whole family in their father, that Joseph could no longer refrain – could no longer restrain his emotions. He felt that the time had now come to reveal himself to his brethren, and in order that they might feel the less embarrassed under the circumstances he ordered all the Egyptians from the room, and then explained briefly and sympathetically that he himself was their brother Joseph.

What wonder that the brethren were troubled, as they thought probably of how they would be disposed to retaliate were they in his place of power. But Joseph soon convinced them that he had none but kindly feelings for them, that he was merciful, forgiving. The spirit which he exhibited under these circumstances is worthy of emulation, not merely by natural men, but also by the "new creatures in Christ Jesus." How often do we find that the Lord's people are narrow in such matters, instead of

being broad and generous, loving and forgiving. Joseph now speaking to his brethren in the Hebrew tongue, repeated to them the words, "I am Joseph," and added, "whom ye sold into Egypt," that thus they might recognize him, not only by his speech, but by his knowledge of the facts, that it was really their brother who was before them. But this expression was so gracious, and anger and malice were so absent from his every word and act, that they were inspired with confidence, and at his request drew near to him.

Many Christians would have spoiled the whole effect of this great lesson upon their brethren had they been in Joseph's place, by poor judgment, by reading the brethren a lecture; – by telling them what they already knew about the wrong of their conduct, about how now they were in his power, and how he could evil entreat them, but would not. Joseph was too wise and too merciful to take such a course. He took the contrary one, saying, "Be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither." It seems wonderful indeed that a natural man could and would have so much of the spirit of God as is here manifested, and yet we know that Joseph was only a natural man – the holy spirit not having been [R2894 : page 328] poured out upon any of our race until Pentecost. It gives also a suggestion respecting the breadth of character of the ancients, quite in contradiction of the theory of evolution, which would claim that at that early period, man being but slightly above the monkey, would have coarse and brutish sentiments.

Joseph preached a great sermon to his brethren in few words, when he said, "God did send me before you to preserve life" – he thus overruled your wrong course, and has brought out of it a blessing. He gave his brethren credit for ability to understand such things. That the Lord overruled their course for good, did not prove that their course was a good or proper course; it merely proved the divine power and the divine wisdom and divine

providence, that was over Joseph and over all the house of Jacob, causing all things, even the evil thing, to work out for good, according to the divine plan. How great and how lasting a lesson came to Joseph's brethren through their experiences, and through this his short sermon we cannot tell; but there is a great lesson here for all of God's people today along the line of mercy toward those who deliberately sin against us; and also along the line of noting, discerning and referring to divine providence in connection with our affairs. We are not only to note divine providences, but we are to give credit for them, as it is written, "In all thy ways *acknowledge* him." Prov. 3:6.

Joseph could have permitted his experiences to have developed a great deal of personal pride. He might have reasoned to himself, as some would have reasoned, that he was merely lucky, or that he was naturally bright, attractive, smart, and that this was the secret of his success; that this was the reason his father loved him specially; that this was the reason, when sold for a slave, he was bought by a good master in affluent circumstances; that this personal brilliancy was the cause of his rise in Potiphar's house to eminence; that the same effected his rise to a position of authority in the prison; that his keenness of intellect had enabled him to interpret the dreams; and that in general he stood head and shoulders above other men; and that others realized this, and hence he had come by his exaltation in a natural way. But had he thus been heady and high-minded, and self-conceited, we may be sure that it would have led to a fall – that God would not have continued to bless, prosper and advance him. We may be sure, too, that had he thus developed a spirit of pride and self-conceit, his conduct with his brethren would have been very different from what it was. He would have been crowing over them, and mistreating them in order to convince them of his power, and thus would have shown himself to be a very much smaller **[R2894 : page 329]** man than his proper course shows him to have been. He was a great man, and his

greatness was manifested, not merely in his financial management of the kingdom of Egypt, but especially manifested in his reliance upon God, his realization that the divine promise and blessing, through his great-grandfather, Abraham, his grandfather, Isaac, and his father, Jacob, was resting upon him in some manner, and that because of this divine favor things were working as they were.

The spiritual seed of Abraham may draw valuable lessons from this narrative. If it was appropriate that Joseph should acknowledge the Lord as the giver of all his blessings, which were all of an earthly and temporal kind, how much more should the spiritual Seed of Abraham acknowledge the spiritual blessings received at the Father's hand, – and recognize in every mercy and favor opportunities of service; that it is the hand of providence. Surely these should always be on the alert, to realize and to confess, – "It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes." But on the contrary, we are sorry at times to find some of God's spiritual children inclined to be puffed up, and to speak of God's favor, the knowledge of the truth which they have received of the Lord, as though it were something of their own achievement; – as though some honor were due them, as the inventors of the divine plan.

Again, the spiritual Israelite should be even more merciful than Joseph. If he could see that the persecutions he receives, from his brethren and others, are merely incidents of divine providence – which the Lord is using to prepare him for coming blessings and exaltation, should not the spiritual Israelite take his *disappointments* as *God's appointments*? And should he not with a clearer eye of faith, be the better able to see that many of his spiritual advancements have come as a result of persecutions from the world and from false brethren? And should he not, like Joseph, look with great complacency upon all these various agencies which God has been pleased to use in spiritually

uplifting him, to perfect him as a "new creature," an heir of God, a joint-heir with Jesus Christ, his Lord? He surely should. And the only things which can hinder us from seeing that our advancement is of the Lord, and not of ourselves, will be a lack of humility, and a lack of trust in divine providence; and the only things which could hinder us from feeling patient forbearance and kindly sympathy and love for those who have despitefully used and persecuted us, would be a lack of the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of mercy, and a failure to see properly that whatever agencies God may use in our spiritual upbuilding are to be appreciated and sympathized with; – whether they be brethren or of the world – Egyptians.

Then Joseph explained the providence of God, the years of plenty and the years of famine, and how God had been supervising the entire matter, and that this was his means of preserving Abraham's posterity, concluding, "So now, it was not you that sent me hither, but God." We are not to give credit to the evil agencies through which we have received blessings, otherwise we might soon be disposed to call evil good; but we are to give full credit to God, because that which was intended to be evil, and which was evil of itself, divine wisdom, so far above the earthly plane, was able to overrule for our good. It is as we learn the lesson of God's inherent goodness – as we learn to respect his wisdom, love and power that our faith grows stronger and stronger, until we are able to trust the Lord, not only in things which we can see are working out for our good, but able to trust him also in respect to things which seem entirely dark and out of which apparently no good can come; thus we trust him where we cannot trace him. And this is faith; and faith is a *gift* of God in that it is cultivated to acceptable development by the Lord's gracious promises, rightly received, appreciated and acted upon.

While Joseph had patiently waited for the Lord's time to come, and for twenty years had not seen his father's face, having

now witnessed the fulfillment of his first dream, the bowing of his brother's sheaves to his sheaf, he realized that the Lord's time had about come for him again to see his father, when the second dream would be fulfilled. And whereas he was all patience before, now he was all energy and haste, because the time was come, and so he said to his brethren, "Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt. Come down unto me; tarry not." He impressed upon his brethren the glories of his position, not by way of boast or pride, but by way of assuring them of his authority and power to care for them, and so that they might fully assure their father Jacob that his caution might not hinder him from taking advantage of the goodly land of Goshen, now put at their disposal. His brethren and father were not invited to come and share in his throne and regal power, but were invited to come and partake of all the blessings flowing therefrom. Just so during the Millennial age, after the Christ, Head and Body, represented in Joseph shall be in the throne of glory and of power – in the heavenly Father's throne – when the Kingdom of God shall be established in the earth, all who feel a famine, a hunger, for the true bread of heaven, for eternal life, will be invited to come and receive abundantly of it. None, however, of the earthly class will be invited to share in the Kingdom honors, for the Kingdom class will be complete. But they will be invited to come and receive the blessings of the Kingdom, mental, moral and physical, health and strength, under the favor of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

The parting of Joseph and his brethren was an affecting one; they now understood the meaning of their previous experiences, including the cup found in Benjamin's sack; they saw that these matters all were leading up to the present manifestation to them of the love and sympathy of Joseph, and now, as expressing his special love for Benjamin he kissed him first, weeping tears of joy and recognition, and then did to all the others similarly, and sent them on their way. There is power in affection, in love; but

it is necessary that the loving affection be manifested, ere that power can be felt. A difficulty with many parents, husbands, wives, children, is that they do not *manifest* all the affection which they *feel*. Pride or fear or some other thing hinders, restrains them, from [R2894 : page 330] being as frank with each other as they should be. Joseph's example here is worthy of emulation. He was the wronged one; he was the one in power; he was the one who should have the dignity, and he, therefore, was the one who could best afford to humble himself, and to kiss and make an ado over his brethren. We may be sure that they appreciated it; that such a manifestation of affection on the part of the highly exalted brother touched a tender spot in their hearts, and doubtless worked good for them to the remainder of their lives. And so we may find it with our friends and relatives, that a manifestation of our love and kind feeling toward them will not only be reciprocated, but will do them good; and that our affection restrained of expression will leave an icy coldness, which nothing else will remove, and that such coldness will affect not only them but ourselves also unfavorably – sapping all of life's joy-springs. [R2895 : page 330]

Let us remember, in this connection, the words of our text, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Joseph exemplified this advice. He not only did not permit the evil course of his brethren to overcome him, and make him evil and bitter, but he overcame their evil tendencies, characters and dispositions by his love, his mercy, his kindness, his generosity, – affecting them favorably, no doubt, for the remainder of their days. Such a course is much more incumbent upon us than upon Joseph. He did it spontaneously; we have had the example and precepts of our Lord and his Apostles, and, as well, the begetting of the spirit of holiness. "What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy living and God-likeness?"
