

PATIENT ENDURANCE IN ADVERSITY

– GENESIS 39:20-23; 40:1-15. – *APRIL 28.* –

Golden Text: – "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." – Rev. 2:10.

THE story of Joseph's trials and difficulties is a most pathetic one: yet we see that in all these things the blessing of the Lord was with him, and he, faithfully responding, his experiences, instead of doing him injury, were on the contrary greatly to his advantage. Although Joseph lived long before the Pentecostal blessing as we experience it – long before the bringing to light of the exceeding great and precious promises of the heavenly nature and Kingdom glories and invitation to the elect to share therein – though Joseph had only the indefinite revelation of God's mercy contained in the great Oath-Bound Covenant given to Abraham, nevertheless his faithfulness and patient endurance constitute a wonderful lesson to the household of the Spirit-begotten sons of God of this Gospel age. If he could endure so patiently and so faithfully, what should not we, so much more highly favored, be able to endure? The secret of his success and ours is the same, namely, a fast hold by faith to the Abrahamic Covenant, which, as the Apostle says, we have as an anchor to our souls, sure and steadfast, entering into that which is beyond the veil. (Heb. 6:19.) The consideration of this lesson should nerve, energize, every one of the Lord's consecrated people to still further endurance and faithfulness under the circumstances and conditions that the Lord's providence may mark out for them.

JOSEPH A SLAVE IN EGYPT

The Ishmaelitish traders, to whom Joseph's brethren sold him for twenty pieces of silver, took him to Egypt, where he was exposed for sale in the open market, as was the custom of the

time. We can well imagine the anguish of the poor boy. Delivered from the pit in which his brethren had put him to die he soon realized that they had not repented at heart, but merely changed the form of their murderous envy. Passing not many miles distant from his father's abode the dejection of the boy of seventeen can be better imagined than described, and arriving in the Egyptian metropolis, the center of civilization at that time, and beholding there wonderful things entirely new to him as a shepherd's son, his heart must have been full of suspense and wonder as to who would purchase him and what would be his future lot in life. There was plenty of room in all of these experiences he had recently passed through for him to lose faith in God – to wonder why he should be left to the mercy of his pitiless brethren, why he should be allowed to become a slave, separated from his father's home. Yet we have no intimation that his faith forsook him.

In the Lord's providence he was purchased by a wealthy official of Egypt named Potiphar. As a servant in this man's house he was faithful to his duties small and great, and grew in his master's confidence and esteem until, at the age of twenty-two, he was made manager of his entire estate. When twenty-seven years of age – ten years after coming to Egypt, in the prime of young manhood, he unwittingly attracted to himself the love of his master's wife, but when it manifested itself he persistently resisted it on the lofty grounds of faithfulness to God and faithfulness to his master. Dr. Blakie pointedly remarks of this

TRIAL OF JOSEPH'S VIRTUE,

"We may believe that it was no ordinary temptation when, day after day, the mistress of the house, expert in amorous arts, came to spread the net, with every allurements which her skill and her passion could devise. We may conceive how even Joseph might be moved by the thought that, slave as he was, he had

attracted the admiration of a woman of such rank, and how the vision might flit before him that through her influence he might recover his liberty and in a bright career realize his dreams after all."

The conduct of Potiphar's wife well illustrates how love may be changed to bitterest hate. In her determination she grasped Joseph by the coat, but he slipped out of it, and then her rage and resentment became bitter. She kept the coat and told her husband that his favorite servant had endeavored to entice her to do evil, and that when she made outcry he fled, leaving his coat in her possession. What a turn this was in Joseph's affairs! Why should the Lord permit him to be thus scandalized, not only in the eyes of his master, but amongst all those with whom he had formed an acquaintance in the ten years of his residence there? Why should the Lord permit his virtue to be so evil spoken of?

This probably seemed to Joseph a mysterious providence, yet in the light of the subsequent story we can see how the Lord's providence had not forsaken him, but was ready to make even this experience work out to his further instruction in righteousness, patience, experience, faithfulness, and to prepare him for still greater blessings by and by – on the throne. The lesson for us of this spirit dispensation is most evident and most striking: as it was not because of Joseph's unfaithfulness that the Lord permitted this trial to come upon him, so it does not speak unfaithfulness on our part and retribution from the Lord if trials and difficulties may be permitted to come upon us. Are we not learning every day more and more to trust the Lord where we cannot trace him in his providences, when we cannot see the end of the way? If we could see the end would it be faith at all? Is it not our lack of knowledge of the future that constitutes the very virtue of faith in the present time? **[R3973 : page 109]**

"ABANDON US NOT IN TEMPTATION"

The great Spurgeon once remarked, "In contending with certain sins there remains no mode of victory but by flight. The ancient naturalists wrote much of basilisks, whose eyes fascinated their victims and rendered them easy victims; so the moral gaze of wickedness puts us in solemn danger." In harmony with this thought the Apostle wrote to Timothy, "Flee youthful lusts." (2 Tim. 2:22.) Jesus' example in this matter is a wonderful lesson to us all respecting loyalty to the principles of righteousness even to the extent of hazarding the brightest hopes and prospects of an earthly kind. And if we may well copy this lesson of fleeing from temptation, we may also note with the Prophet another lesson in this connection, for when Joseph's master Potiphar was very angry with him, so far as the evidence shows, Joseph contented himself with merely denying the allegation without attempting to demean Potiphar's wife by relating the facts of the case. What a noble example is here given us of avoiding evil speaking, even when that would be the truth!

Joseph's noble heart probably reasoned that while it would have been no more than justice to have revealed the wickedness of the woman, such a course would not only have damaged the wife but have dealt an irreparable blow to Potiphar's affection for her, thus destroying his master's confidence and breaking up his home. Willingness to endure under such conditions is a marvelous illustration of high and noble integrity – *character*. *Such a man was indeed fit for a throne* – but not yet; God had other experiences for him before he would be ready for the exaltation intended. So with us: God has called us to the throne of the Millennial Kingdom to be associated with our Lord and Redeemer in his great work; but first we must be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, and trials and buffetings and testings of patient endurance are essential to the development of such character as the Lord seeks.

THE STRENGTHENING OF CHARACTER

A lump of rock candy is pure carbon and a diamond is pure carbon, yet there is a difference between them which consists mainly in the fact that the diamond has been crystallized to an extreme degree of hardness, firmness, solidity. So there is a difference between the states and conditions of the New Creatures in Christ. At one time we are mere "babes in Christ," but if faithful through patient endurance and the Lord's instructions and disciplines of providence we are to become strong in the Lord and in the power of his might – the "babe in Christ" corresponds then to the pure carbon in the form of rock candy, while the mature Christian, developed in the furnace of affliction, etc., corresponds to the diamond. We remember in this connection the Lord's assurance that at the close of our trial time in the end of the Gospel age, at his second coming, he will make up his "jewels."

At that time undoubtedly an official of Potiphar's rank would have been permitted to kill his slave under such a charge, and the fact that, instead, Joseph was imprisoned, may therefore be taken as an intimation that Potiphar was not fully convinced of the treachery of the man who had served him faithfully for ten years. But a prison in olden times differed greatly from a modern prison in civilized lands. Joseph, in mentioning the prison, "dungeon" (v. 15) in the Hebrew calls it a "hole," and a minister familiar with oriental prisons of today says: –

"We have visited many a prison in the Levant; we have seen...intolerable filth and want of ventilation, the excess of vermin, the unmerciful stocks in which the feet are made fast. We may well pity virtuous Joseph, who was indeed, as claimed by tradition, put into the prison dungeon of the present city of Cairo, which is composed of dark, loathsome and pestilential passages where the prisoners are chained to the wall."

Joseph's experiences in prison are referred to by the Psalmist (Psa. 105:18), saying, "Whose feet they hurt with fetters; he was laid in irons."

What was the effect of this new experience upon Joseph? Was he discouraged, cast down, embittered in soul? Did he say to himself or to others, If this be the reward of virtue, give me vice? Did he repine against the Lord's providences in permitting this experience, or was he patiently submissive, trustful? Joseph was in all these experiences the most wonderful, model example of the proper course of a true Christian and saint. And again we suggest that if he could be faithful with as little light as he enjoyed respecting the Lord's permission of this evil, what might not the Lord reasonably expect of us who have been blest with so much greater light and instruction, and with the noble example of Joseph and scores of others in the Scriptures and in our own experiences – what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy living and godliness and faith in God?

For very shame's sake we should strive at least to come up to the standard of Joseph – we who have the exceeding great and precious promises – we who have the explanation of why our trials and difficulties are permitted and how they are to prepare us for the Kingdom and its glorious work. Can we not readily see how Joseph's trials and difficulties developed character in him? and how, as he overcame in one instance after another, he was becoming stronger – his character was crystallizing? Ah! no wonder he will be amongst the "ancient worthies" who, in the future, after the glorification of the Church, will be made princes in all the earth for the ruling and blessing and uplifting of the entire human family, under the guidance and direction of the Christ, Head and body. Most evidently the Lord knows how, not only to select the wonderful characters for his service, but also to develop these characters and prove and test them, and make them strong for his service and their blessing.

"THE LORD WAS WITH HIM"

Joseph's experience in the stocks was a limited one. Evidently the prison-keeper discerned that he had a prisoner of no ordinary character and ability, [R3973 : page 110] whatever might be charged against him. His reverence for the Lord and his faithfulness to duty made him a marked man, and the keeper of the prison was glad to give over one responsibility after another into Joseph's hands. According to the story, Joseph's own experiences made him tender hearted toward the other prisoners, whose degradations and sorrows he was enabled to enter into by reason of his own experiences. He was learning noble lessons, which would fit and prepare him for higher usefulness as the governor of Egypt. The secret of the whole matter is told in the lesson in a few words, "The Lord was with him, and that which he did the Lord made to prosper."

Whoever has reverence for the Lord in any degree will be proportionately blessed: much faith, much reverence, much obedience will surely lead to much blessing in heart and life – to much supporting and steadying of character, whatever it may have been by nature – to much of the spirit of a sound mind, however erratic the person may have been naturally to begin with. In all these respects we who have the instructions of the Lord's Word or the encouragement of his promises and the guidance of the spirit of a sound mind are greatly blessed. In proportion as we make use of them and develop the proper character we shall have the ultimate reward and hear the Master's voice, saying, It is enough, come up higher. Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.

We should never forget, as "New Creatures in Christ Jesus," the exhortation of the Golden Text to faithfulness – to the Lord (which includes faithfulness to the brethren, to the truth, to

righteousness in every sense of the word). This faithfulness must be tried, tested, proven, clear down to the end of life's journey – until we go into the prison-house of death. "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life." The Lord whom we serve is able and willing to open the prison-doors and bring us forth in the First Resurrection to a share in the glory, honor and immortality of his own Kingdom. Hallelujah, what a Savior! what a salvation! and for what a peculiar people these are intended! Such thoughts incite us – as was the divine intention – to strive to make our calling and election sure.

PROSPERING IN PRISON

Well might the chief jailor be content to leave the care of the prison in Joseph's hands. We may well imagine the cleaning up of the dungeon effected under his direction, and that a measure of peace would reign within those dark walls quite in contrast with the bedlam that had previously prevailed. Wisdom, mercy, gentleness, patience, were all, we may be sure, needed and exercised; and the model prison not only effected a blessing upon those who were incarcerated, but brought a blessing also to Joseph in his own heart-development, and additionally in that our own joy and peace **[R3974 : page 110]** are always ministered to when we endeavor to solace the woes of others.

A picture of how Joseph dealt with the prisoners is given in the lesson: instead of treating them rudely and roughly, he looked after their interests to such an extent that he noticed one morning that two of the prisoners were of peculiarly sad countenance, and he tenderly inquired, "Wherefore look ye so sadly today?" They had dreamed, and they were in trouble lest their dreams boded further adversity. Joseph said unto them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me them, I pray you." How evidently the secret of Joseph's faithfulness and strength of character lay in the fact that he had faith in God – that he believed in the great Oath-

Bound Covenant that God had made with his great-grandfather Abraham, confirmed to his grandfather Isaac, and again to his father Jacob, and of which he was an heir. What a power faith has in life to hold it steady in every storm and cloudy trouble!

One of the dreams bore a most favorable interpretation, and Joseph requested the one who would so shortly be set at liberty and restored to the king's favor that he would remember him and his kind attentions to him while in the prison, and speak a good word to the king on his behalf, that he might be relieved from the dungeon. And in explaining the matter let us not overlook the fact that he neither incriminated his brethren nor Potiphar's wife, but merely said as an excuse for his being in prison, "For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon." It was not necessary that he should speak evil of any in order to plead his cause, and he abstained. What an evidence we here have that our race 3,000 years ago were neither monkeys nor savages. On the contrary, this natural man, not begotten of the holy Spirit (which did not come upon any until the Gospel dispensation – Pentecost), had such a marvelous development of generosity, love, that he seems not even to have been severely tempted along the lines of evil speaking – and that without any instruction, either oral or written.

How this story should shame many who have named the name of Christ and have professed to turn their backs upon sin and every evil work and who well know that evil speaking is closely related to the works of the flesh and of the devil. Joseph had not the instructions of our Lord and the apostles to the effect that love is the principal thing, that love thinketh no evil, suffereth long and is kind, is not easily provoked, etc.; and that this love is not only appropriate amongst the Lord's people, who should love one another as he has loved us, but must be extended also to our neighbors, that we may love our neighbors as ourselves – yea,

beyond this, to our enemies, who are to be fed and clothed by us if they need our assistance. Thank God for the lesson of Joseph – enduring affliction, yet full of faith, mercy, gentleness, patience, kindness. How evidently the mind had to do with all this character-development. Without the hopes set before him in the Abrahamic promise, Joseph might have been as dispirited and characterless as the majority of mankind. Remember, too, that it is the same promise that we are heirs to, as the Apostle declares – Christ is the heir, and if we be Christ's then are we Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. – Gal. 3:16,29.

"Virtue may be assailed but never hurt;
Surprised by unjust force, but not enthralled;
Yea, even that, which mischief meant most harm,
Shall in the happy trial prove most glory."
