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THEM THAT HONOR ME I WILL HONOR

– GENESIS 41:38-49. – MAY 5. –

Golden Text: – "If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God."
– James 1:5.

JOSEPH'S three years' experience as a prisoner, most of it as the superintendent of the prison, undoubtedly brought to him a rich experience of patience and sympathy, and tended to confirm and deepen those beautiful elements of his character manifested in his boyhood. The Lord had him in training for a great work: not only was it appropriate that his character should be developed, but also that his faith should be tested and made very strong. We have seen that although he trusted the Lord implicitly, this did not hinder him from appealing to Pharaoh's butler, whose dream he interpreted favorably, asking him that when restored to the king's favor he would remember Joseph's kindness to him as a prisoner and speak a word in his interest to secure his liberty. Perhaps he expected much from this man, who certainly would have had many opportunities for requiting his kindness, yet two years rolled around without relief – two years in which, nevertheless, Joseph maintained his confidence in the Lord and waited patiently for the outworkings of his plan.

There could be no better illustration than this for the proper course of all who belong to the New Creation. In a special sense all of our interests are the Lord's, because we [R3978 : page 120] have presented ourselves to him wholly, unreservedly, and have been accepted as members of the body of Christ. It is for such to remember the Master's words, "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of," "The Father himself loveth you," "No man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand," "All things shall work together for good to them that love God." While, therefore, it is proper for us to make use of any and every

reasonable means for the securing of what we consider to be our best interests, we are not to rely upon these but upon the Lord, and to wait patiently for his time and his way for our deliverance from every evil condition.

WAIT PATIENTLY FOR HIM

The Lord's time and method for delivering Joseph from the prison transcended all of Joseph's expectations; and lifted him from the prison to the palace of the greatest nation of that time. It came about eventually through the mediation of the butler, but to the latter's shame it was not because of his appreciation or thoughtfulness. Pharaoh had two dreams which impressed his mind deeply, and he earnestly sought the interpretation of them. He dreamed of seeing seven cows come up out of the river Nile, very fat, and feed upon luxuriant grass of the river side; next he saw seven lean cows come up out of the river, and they devoured the seven fat ones, yet seemed none the fatter themselves. This dream was followed by another in which the king saw a stalk of Egyptian wheat, known as compound wheat; its top was exceedingly large, dividing into seven distinct branches or spikes, indicating a most prolific yield; and following it came up another stalk, with seven thin ears or branches, of the kind common to a time of famine, when lack of moisture and a southeast wind would injure the crop and make it worthless. This last stalk of seven branches devoured the first one.

We are to remember that the Lord in those ancient times gave important dreams not only to some of his own people, as in the case of Joseph, Daniel and others, but also sometimes to the heathen; for instance, to Nebuchadnezzar a dream of the golden image, and again of the fruitful tree, and in the present instance Pharaoh's dreams. We are not to wonder, then, that the king of Egypt desired assistance in the interpretation of his dreams and called for it of the wise men of his court, who, however, were

unable to offer any satisfactory solution. After we have Joseph's interpretation the whole matter seems so simple and plain that we wonder that the wise men and priests had not guessed it: but thus it is with our wisdom; it seems simple after we have it, understand it and appreciate it. Thus it is, too, with the inventions of our day. We wonder why they were not thought of centuries ago.

We are sure that the world is not inclined to give proper credit for wisdom to the great Revealer of secrets, and we are sure, too, that the majority of Christian people are not sufficiently inclined to honor God in respect to such matters. Could the world but realize what we see from the Scriptures – namely, that the present activity of thought along the lines of invention are of divine prearrangement as elements of the "Day of God's Preparation" for the Millennial Kingdom – how it would prick its bubble of pride in our present-day wisdom; how it would show us most effectively that all wisdom comes from above, and that we might be groping almost as blindly as our ancestors were it not that the Lord's due time has come for lifting the vail and helping us to develop the forces of nature as a preparation, not only for the Kingdom, but also a preparation for the great time of trouble by which it will be introduced.

"IN ALL THY WAYS ACKNOWLEDGE HIM"

When the wise men of Egypt were unable to interpret Pharaoh's dream, his butler naturally enough called to mind his own dream and how accurately it had been interpreted by the kind and sympathizing Joseph, and his own promise to do something for the interpreter, and his neglect until this time. Perhaps he was not entirely to blame; he could only be useful to Joseph when God's time for favoring the latter had come. When Pharaoh heard the story of the wonderful interpretation of the dreams of his butler and baker he sent with haste to the prison,

eager to know the meaning of his own dreams. Here we have a further test of Joseph's character. Let us notice carefully how he demeaned himself in the presence of the king. Was he haughty, boastful, self-assertive? Did he throw around himself a mystery and seem to call from the recesses of his mind some deep wisdom? Not so. He was the very personification of modesty, and when the king expressed the hope that he could interpret his dreams he answered, "It is not of me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer."

Here we have one of the secrets of the greatness of Joseph: he honored God, and was therefore of the kind whom God is pleased eventually to honor and exalt. How the Scriptures bear out this thought! Mark our Master's words, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted, he that exalteth himself shall be abased." (Luke 14:11.) Mark the Apostle's words, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." (1 Pet. 5:6.) O, that we all might have this lesson deeply impressed upon our hearts and minds, so that with us it will be true, as with Joseph, in harmony with the instruction, "In all thy ways acknowledge him." – Prov. 3:6.

While such an acknowledgment of the Lord is proper in all the affairs of life, it certainly is especially appropriate in connection with the study of the divine Word and any attempt to give an interpretation thereof. Let none of us speak as of ourselves, nor appropriate wisdom to ourselves, but rather, with hearts full of gratitude to the Lord for blessings received, let us acknowledge him and his Word and his arrangements in connection with his Truth. Especially is this appropriate in those who occupy positions of responsibility in the Church – whom the holy Spirit has made overseers to "feed the flock of Christ." To whatever extent self-seeking is indulged, to whatever extent the honor of men is craved, the Lord as the fountain of wisdom and the channels which he uses in dispensing his Truth are

ignored or belittled by any of us, to that extent we may be sure we are in a dangerous situation and not likely to make real progress in the good way.

SEIZING FAVORABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Pharaoh related his dreams, and after hearing them Joseph promptly gave the interpretation and explained that the two dreams were one – that they taught the same lesson: that thus the Lord had indicated to Pharaoh that there **[R3979 : page 121]** would be seven years of very bountiful harvests which would be followed by seven years of drouth and famine, in which all the surplus of the first seven years would be necessary for the preservation of the lives of the people. A lighter-headed man than Joseph, a man who felt that in interpreting the dream he had confounded the wise men of Egypt, had done a wonderful thing, would have been so overwhelmed with the sense of his own importance that he doubtless would have stood there and received the king's thanks, and have passed out a free man, to be noted by the people as the wise man.

The humility of Joseph was not merely assumed: his crediting of the wisdom to the Lord was the genuine sentiment of his heart, so that he did not feel thus elated when he had delivered the Lord's message, but with coolness and self-possession he proceeded to suggest to the king what might be the proper steps to be taken so that the dream might indeed prove a blessing. He said, "Let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt, and let him appoint officers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years; and let them gather all the fruit of those seven years as the property of Pharaoh, to be kept in store in cities for use in the seven years of famine that will follow." We cannot suppose that Joseph had the slightest suspicion that he would be the one appointed to this work. It would be a most

unnatural expectation that Pharaoh would take from the prison a man of foreign birth and exalt him to a station above the other officers of his empire. Yet this is just what Pharaoh did, and it is here that our lesson proper commences.

COULD WE CHOOSE MORE WISELY THAN GOD?

Addressing his court officers Pharaoh said, Could we find such another one as this Joseph, in whom is the Spirit of God, to be at the head of this great work of preparing for the years of famine of which God has thus forewarned us? Not waiting to have the consent of the officers of his court, but after the manner of the time as an autocrat, he decided the question and said to Joseph, "Forasmuch as God has showed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: thou shalt be over my house [kingdom], and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou. See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt."

So thrilling a transition from slavery and the dungeon to the governorship of the greatest country of the world, and honor and distinction and power next to those of the king, outrivals the pen of fiction in the most attractive novels. It seems so wonderful that it is difficult to believe its truthfulness. Hence it is well for us to remember that while such transitions would not be possible under the democratic conditions of our day and country, they were not out of harmony with the conditions of their time and place. For instance, we know that Daniel was a Hebrew captive and slave, and yet that he was chosen by Nebuchadnezzar to be one of the rulers of the empire of Babylon. We remember also that Daniel was brought to the King's notice in a very similar manner, namely, by the interpretation of a dream. Professor Sayce says, "It was not an unheard-of thing for a Syrian to be thus raised to the highest offices of the Egyptian State, and in the days of Hyksos' dominion it was naturally easier than when a

dynasty of purely native origin was on the throne....For many centuries during the Mohammedan age none but a slave could govern Egypt." We are also reminded that in 1852 the prime minister of Persia, the second in rank in the kingdom but first in power, was the son of a donkey driver; and that the Sultan of Turkey once rewarded a poor dentist who relieved him of pain by making him a peer of the realm.

The exaltation of Joseph from the condition of a slave and from a dungeon to be the second person of power in the world suggests to us further the typical character of Joseph's life. Did not our Lord Jesus take a bondsman's form? and did he not enter the great prison-house of death? and was he not suddenly raised up to the throne – to be next to the Father, the Governor of the universe? And did not the experiences of Jesus under God's providence have to do with preparing him for his great work of the future, the blessing of the whole world? And as Joseph saved the lives of the people of Egypt, will not the antitypical Joseph save the lives of the world? While thinking along these lines let us remember, too, how we are invited to be members of the body of Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together. (Rom. 8:17.) With this thought in our minds, the trials, the difficulties, the sufferings of this present time, its afflictions, disappointments, may all be endured with cheerfulness if we have the proper faith – knowing that all things shall work together for good to them that love God, to the called ones according to his purpose.

"UNTO HIM EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW"

When the time came for King Pharaoh to introduce the new governor or prime minister of the empire to the people he first provided for him suitable apparel, to indicate the rank; next, the second state chariot, and, third, that he should be escorted in parade before the people by criers, who should announce his

rank and call upon the people to bow the knee – to acknowledge him as the king's representative. How this reminds us of the Apostle's words respecting our Lord Jesus and his high exaltation after his trials were concluded. Paul says, "Wherefore God hath also highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth." (Phil. 2:9,10.) And while we contemplate this high exaltation of the Master let us not forget that his Bride is to be joint-heir with him in all of his glory, honor and immortality, and that the privilege of becoming members of the Bride class belongs to the "called, chosen, faithful," the "very elect" of this Gospel age.

If we could but have this in mind continually, what manner of persons would we be in all holy conversation and godliness – how trifling all earthly pleasures and sorrows, all riches and poverty, all weakness and debasement would seem to us! so intense would we be in our desire to make our calling and election sure to those exceeding great and precious promises. Pharaoh gave Joseph a new name, the meaning of which is suggested to be something like – Deliverer from death by the bread of life. We remember how our dear Redeemer said of himself, "I am the bread [R3979 : page 122] that came down from heaven." God provided in Jesus the bread of life, by which the whole world may be saved eventually from Adamic death if they but eat of the divine Word, appropriate its lessons and experiences, under the ministry and discipline of the great Redeemer during his glorious Kingdom. And all this was considerably illustrated in Joseph's course as the governor of Egypt.

DID JOSEPH ENSLAVE THE EGYPTIANS?

Some have severely criticised Joseph's course in dealing with the people on this occasion, but we find no criticism of it in

the Scriptures. His first work was to journey throughout the entire land of Egypt, select suitable sites as granaries, and to give contracts for the building of these. Then throughout the seven years of bountiful harvests he first of all collected from the people their usual tax of one-fifth of the product for the king. Additionally he bought from the people with the king's money all the surplus grain they could spare and thus laid up vast stores of wheat. When the years of drouth and famine came the people in turn were glad to buy from the government the very same grain that they had previously sold. We have no intimation that an exorbitant price was charged for the wheat, no intimation that advantage was taken of the people.

But after the people had spent their money still the famine prevailed, and Joseph, the governor, purchased their cattle and all the people had, which thus became the property of the king. This was not an ideal condition according to our conception of matters, because it left too much of a centralization of power and authority in the hands of an autocrat; but if we could imagine divinely appointed and divinely guided and divinely willed kings and priests in the world, such an autocratic power would be one of the very greatest blessings imaginable to all the people. Indeed we know through the Scriptures that this will practically be the condition of affairs that will prevail during the Millennial age – that the world will not be asked to vote for its rulers and to determine its laws, but simply be required to obey the great Governor of divine appointment, unto whom every knee must bow and every tongue confess to the glory of God.

Here, then, in Joseph we see another illustration or type of the Christ of glory and the manner in which he will bless the world. Our Redeemer has already laid up in store a complete provision of the bread of life, sufficient for every member of our race. In him was life, and he gave it on our behalf. We who are now accepted as his members, and who at once receive this life

by faith when we accept him, and will receive it actually in the First Resurrection, are the predecessors of the world in the matter of these blessings. Only the little flock is now being developed, now being fed, now passing from death unto life, through accepting the bread from heaven – only the Bride and the virgins, her companions. The great work which God has in mind, and for [R3980 : page 122] which he has appointed our Redeemer, is the work of saving the world, and the time and means for this salvation of the world is the Millennial age, the reign of the Kingdom of heaven amongst men.

THE BREAD FROM HEAVEN

During the Millennium the great Provider of the Bread of life and his associated Bride will dispense to the world, through the agency of the ancient worthies, the Bread of life as they will need it and be able to appreciate it. Day by day and year by year, during all that time, the world must bow the knee to the great Ruler and Representative of Jehovah. And during all that time they will be required to give up one thing after another for the attainment of the eternal life, until finally, at the end of the Millennial age, all who remain – not cut off in the Second Death – shall have given their property, their all, including themselves, in exchange for the eternal life represented by this living Bread that came from heaven, of which if a man eat he shall never die.

The abundance of corn gathered by Joseph typically assures us of the abundance of God's provision for granting eternal life to every member of the human family willing to receive it from the Son upon the terms of loving obedience to the extent of full surrender. While the surrender of the will and of all that we possess to a fellow-mortal would be a very dangerous matter indeed, against which we should properly strive, it is not so as respects the Lord. He is the grand exception. To give ourselves wholly and unreservedly to him is to bring to each of us, through

his blessing, the peace of God which passeth all understanding, and to have him mould and fashion our characters with all our interests of life to our highest welfare and his glory. What a blessed prospect then is before the world! and how we who by faith eat of this Bread in advance, and participate with the antitypical Joseph in all of his trials and sufferings for righteousness' sake, may rejoice in our privilege.

"IF ANY MAN LACK WISDOM LET HIM ASK"

Our Golden Text should not be forgotten here. Surely we all lack wisdom, and we appreciate our lack the more as we come to clearly and yet more clearly appreciate the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of God's loving provision for us in Christ.

Once life was to us a maze, like as to the remainder of the world, – a round of duties and responsibilities for which we could see no adequate result or reward. We are born, we eat, we drink, we sleep, we learn in the school, we labor, and, to a greater or less extent, we enjoy our life of mingled labor, suffering and pleasure, but appreciate not the purpose of all these. Now, with increasing wisdom from on high, some of us see with the eyes of our understanding the great divine plan of the ages, and the divine purpose and lovingkindness toward us in Christ Jesus, and that we shall be heirs of God and joint-heirs with our Redeemer if so be we suffer with him.

Seeing this has changed the entire current of life for us. Now, indeed, to be living is sublime – full of interest, full of importance. The days, hours, go swiftly by, and we feel them none too many for the grand purposes of God which we see are being accomplished in us and for us, and with which we are in fullest accord and sympathy. Still, we lack wisdom, and the more we gain the more we see we still lack. We need, therefore, to continually go to the fountain of all grace and wisdom and truth,

that we may profitably use each experience of life as it comes to us, to the intent that ultimately we may come off conquerors – yea, more than conquerors – through him who loved us and bought us with his precious blood. – Rom. 8:37.
