

## **Faith and Fear**

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Genesis 45:1-8

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This past week during Bible School I played the part of Ramses, an Egyptian guard who was assigned to Joseph. It was an interesting role because it made me look at Joseph's life from a whole different perspective. See, most of the time I read his story with the end in mind. But this time I saw his life on a moment by moment basis. One moment he was the favored son. The next moment he is thrown in a cistern, sold into slavery, and bought by an Egyptian Captain named Potiphar. You and I know that he was wrongly accused and thrown into prison, but no one else did (except for Potiphar's wife). You and I know that in the end God's plan would be revealed, but no one who was watching Joseph's life could have possibly imagined that God was working even during the dark times. Joseph was thrown into prison, and to an Egyptian Guard, not even the God of the Jews works through a person in prison.

I suspect this Egyptian who guarded Joseph while he was in prison looked at the situation and concluded that this God the Hebrew people talked about did not exist. But not Joseph. Through it all Joseph seems to be holding on to something that brought him through the dark times; through the valleys; through the trials, so that in the end he did not lose his faith. Actually it seems his faith has been strengthened. Read Genesis 45:1-8

In the few years Joseph spent at home, I'm sure his father (Jacob) told him many stories about God. Jacob probably spoke often about how God worked in the lives of his grandfather (Isaac) and his great grandfather (Abraham). And through those stories a foundation was laid that Joseph would use to keep his faith, especially during the dark times in prison. I am sure that if Joseph did not know about God's promises, or if he did not have the right kind of faith, he would have spent a lot of nights shaking his fist at God. He would have seen these terrible circumstances as proof that God did not care or that God did not exist.

Anyway, all this talk about Joseph and his time in prison made me think about how he must have acted. Instead of being such a grump pants, he remains hopeful

and pleasant. Why else would the Warden put him in charge? And Joseph must have kept his eyes on God, not his situation, because in a moment he is quick to give God credit. Now for a person who has the right attitude about God and faith in God, they will find hope and assurance no matter what the circumstance. But to someone like Ramses, this Egyptian guard, prison meant God had abandoned him.

Every now and then we meet someone from the Old Testament that seems to have this same strength (like Job, for example). Even though their situation looks bleak, and they find themselves in a really tough situation, they continue to hold on to something that helps them endure. We find this in the New Testament as well. In Acts we read that the believers asked God for more confidence to speak about Jesus even after being threatened and beaten. Instead of shaking their fist at God complaining about their circumstances, and instead of asking God to remove the opposition, they ask for great boldness. *“And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word.”* (Acts 4:29).

I believe Joseph endured his trials because of faith and fear. His faith was built upon the promises of God. “This is who our God is”, his family would tell him. “Our God does not fail”, they would remind Joseph as a boy. “Our God keeps His promises”, they assured him. And it is upon these promises that Joseph built his faith. We build our faith in the exact same promises. God has promised that He will watch over us (*And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.* Luke 12:7). He has promised to never let us go (*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand.* John 10:28-29). He has assured us that if only we believe, we will have eternal life (*For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.* John 3:16).

The same kind of faith we see in Joseph and in many other people mentioned in the Bible can be yours as well. But you won't find it within yourself. This kind of faith, faith that helps you remain strong even when the whole world comes crashing in, is actually a gift from God. And a person receives this when they call Jesus their

Lord and their savior. Trust me, without Jesus in your heart, you're going to find it really hard to face the tough times in your life. Without Jesus holding on to you, you're whole life is going to seem like a prison.

But there is another attitude I see in Joseph that seems to be missing today, and that is a proper attitude about God. Joseph had within him something called the "Fear of the Lord". No, he wasn't afraid of the Lord, but he understood his position. He knew that God was the master and that he was His servant. The New Testament Believers had this same attitude. They understood that they were God's servants. And as His servants, they were willing to let God accomplish His will through them. That's the other thing I see in Joseph. He understood that God was working to accomplish His plan through him. And part of that plan involved a few years of slavery and prison. Had he never been thrown in that cistern, the fate of his whole family would have been quite different.

So a person can find the faith they need to endure hardship by making Jesus their Lord and Savior. But once a person becomes Born Again (a Christian), they also need to develop a proper attitude about themselves. God does not exist to serve them, but they become God's servants.

This is what we see in Joseph. Faith and Fear. It was Faith in God and the Fear of God that helped him endure that terrible time in slavery and in prison. It's what helped Peter and John endure their beatings by the Jewish authorities. It's what helped the Apostle Paul endure trial after trial as he told anyone who would listen about the Son of God. It's what will help you face your own trials.

In the midst of your trials you can find hope. And hope is a gift of your faith. Your faith comes when you believe in God's promises. God's promises for you and me are found in Jesus. Also, in the midst of your trials you can find assurance that God is not trying to destroy you. He might just be working through you for some great purpose you do not yet know. This assurance comes from Fear (a proper attitude about God). Fear begins by wisdom. And wisdom comes to the person who prays.

Who knew I could learn all of this from some Egyptian Guard.