

Emblems From the Story of Joseph

by A.B. Simpson

A.B. Simpson's sermon explores the life of Joseph as a profound example of faith, suffering, and divine purpose, paralleling it with the life of Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Genesis 37:3, Genesis 37:5

Topics: "Suffering", "Divine Providence"

Description

A.B. Simpson explores the life of Joseph as a profound example of faith and suffering, drawing parallels between Joseph's experiences and those of Jesus Christ. He emphasizes Joseph's status as the beloved son, his prophetic dreams, and the trials he faced, which serve as a foreshadowing of Christ's own suffering and redemptive work. Simpson encourages believers to find strength in their identity as God's beloved and to maintain integrity and hope amidst trials, recognizing God's providence in their lives. The sermon highlights the importance of learning from suffering and remaining steadfast in faith, as Joseph did, to fulfill God's purpose.

Transcript

The beautiful story of Joseph's life is the worthy climax of the first book in the Bible, and may well stand as one of the stately and colossal pillars in the portal of the Temple of Divine Truth. It is one of the few blameless lives of the Bible, and stands side by side with Enoch and Daniel in its unblemished loveliness. It is full of the most affecting and practical lessons for our Christian life, and touches at every point our experience of suffering and trial as the children of God, and the great principles of Divine Providence which God is ever working out in each of our lives. And, in the higher realm of typical teaching, it foreshadows the character, and sufferings, the grace and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ with a vividness and power unsurpassed by any of the figures in all this wondrous gallery of divine symbolism.

We shall glance at Joseph's life and character in both these connections, with respect not only to our Christian life and character, but also to his great antitype, the Lord Jesus Christ, blending both aspects as the changing panorama may require.

SECTION I -- Joseph's Birth.

He was his father's beloved son, and so the fitting type of the well-beloved Son of God. Nor should we fear to claim the same place and fellowship in Him, for He Himself has taught us that if we are united to Him, and He abides in us, the love wherewith the Father loved Him is in us also, and we are made accepted in

the beloved. It will make our trials easy if we always begin the story of our life like Joseph's, with this blessed certainty that we are God's beloved ones. There is something beautiful in the simplicity with which John calls himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved," without the faintest consciousness of presumption. So let us press close to the Divine heart, and love will usually get the place it claims.

SECTION II -- Joseph's Dreams.

The consciousness of his coming destiny was divinely impressed on the heart of the child, and with ingenuous frankness he gave the fullest expression to what must have seemed his extravagant pretensions and expectations; and although rebuked and ridiculed by his jealous brothers, he still persisted in his confidence and testimony. So upon the consciousness of Christ's early childhood came the foreshadowing of His lofty character and destiny even when but twelve years of age. It forces itself into His precocious questions and confession: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" And afterwards, even in the face of His enemies, and in spite of their hatred and persecutions, He witnessed invariably to His own divine character and glory until, at last, it cost Him His life. So also to the believer, God unveils, both by His Word and Spirit, the vision of his high calling. Sometimes the veil is lifted higher, and the soul is permitted to know enough of the divine plan to prepare it for service, to fortify it against trials and sufferings, and inspire it for sacrifices and triumphs in the cause of Christ. So the great Apostle pressed on with the invincible cry, "I must see Rome;" "I am sure that I shall come to you in the fulness of the blessing of Christ;" "I know that in nothing I shall be ashamed;" "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom --" "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." So also he says to Timothy: "According to the prophecies which went before on thee, that by them thou mightest war a good warfare." It was for the joy set before Him that our Master endured the cross and despised the shame, and we, too, shall overcome as we steadily hold in view our high calling and our immortal crown.

SECTION III -- Joseph's Sufferings.

The sufferings of Joseph are preeminently typical of the sorrows laid upon his great Anti-type, our Lord Jesus Christ.

(1.) He was hated and envied of his brethren, because of his testimony concerning himself and his claims to his father's special love; so Christ was hated by his brethren, persecuted, rejected, and at last condemned and crucified, chiefly on account of His claim to be the Son of God and, His unfaltering witness to His Messiahship and glory.

(2.) Joseph was sold to his enemies for twenty pieces of silver; and so the Lord Jesus was betrayed and delivered into the hands of the Gentiles by the council of His own nation, and judged and condemned, in spite of the attempts of Pilate to release Him.

(3.) Joseph was separated for many long and lonely years from his fond father, and was really given up for dead; and so Jesus left His Father's bosom, and even bore the very hiding of His Father's face and the anguish of His wrath and judgment on account of sin, and at last died under the dark cloud of divine judgment.

(4.) Joseph was exposed to the most powerful temptations from the world, the flesh and the devil, but resisted with inflexible fidelity to the will of God and the voice of His conscience; so Satan assailed the Son of God with all the allurements and solicitations of evil, but found nothing in Him. Of Joseph we have no

recorded blemish or willful sin, but of Jesus we know that he was "holy, harmless," undefiled and separate from sinners, "and was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin."

(5.) Joseph was accounted guilty of the sin of others, and really suffered innocently, because of another's wrongdoing; so Jesus "was made sin for us who knew no sin," and bore "the iniquity of us all." He was crucified under the judgment of human and ecclesiastical law as a criminal, and was so accounted by His own contemporaries and judges. This is the keenest of all humiliations, to be assumed guilty of that which we utterly abhor. The shadow of sin upon the soul is darker even than its penalty.

(6.) Joseph humbled himself to a lot of the deepest degradation and the most menial drudgery and toil, and did it willingly and with all his heart, accepting his situation with beautiful submission and patience; so Jesus became not only "the Man of sorrows," but a man of toil, laboring at His workbench, with sweat of brow and weariness of frame like the poorest of men; and, to the end of his life, knowing all the hardships of poverty and want, weariness and homelessness. "The Son of Man hath not where to lay His head," was His uncomplaining cry, "I am among you as he that serveth," was his chosen place.

(7.) Joseph became the companion of criminals in Pharaoh's prison; and so our blessed Savior "was numbered with the transgressors," crucified between two thieves and accounted a malefactor.

(8.) Joseph was the victim of wicked men, and, in all his suffering, he knew that they were held responsible for their voluntary wickedness; yet he recognized in all his sad experience that it was the will of God using and overruling the passions of men to fulfill His higher ends of benevolence and wisdom. In speaking afterwards of his suffering, Joseph adds no word of reflection or regret; he sees the hand of God in every step, and above every sinful hand. He says, "God sent Me before you, it was not you that did it but God: Ye meant it for evil, but God sent it for good to preserve much people alive." So the Lord Jesus Christ ever recognized His sufferings and death as the plan of His Father's wisdom and love, and the chosen path of human redemption, and yet at the same time involving a no less degree of guilt on the part of those who wickedly ministered to His destruction. And so Peter declares in the beginning of Acts: "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and, with wicked hands, have crucified and slain." And so the Lord declares himself to His earthly judge, "Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above," and yet with strange solemnity he adds, in the very spirit of the truth we have just stated, "Therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin."

(9.) The sufferings of Joseph were not lost, but were the means in God's marvelous providence of saving his house and the whole world from death; and so the type is transcendantly fulfilled in the glory and eternal issues of Christ's cross and shame, in the salvation of myriads of the redeemed from eternal death. It was this that enabled him on the threshold of that cross to cry, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." "The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified." "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

Turning now to the application of all this to our own lives, we find in Joseph's sufferings a beautiful example of the spirit a Christian should exemplify under trial and affliction.

(1.) Like Joseph, our sufferings may often come from our own brethren. Many of the bitterest cups of our lives are put to our lips by the hands of those we love. When men attempt to polish a diamond, they either use another diamond or diamond dust, and so God has to purify us by the hard attrition of our dearest friends, and often our fellow Christians. Shall we not, like Joseph, see His hand above their's, and take our

lesson and hold our victory.

(2.) Like Joseph, we must also expect to be tried, misunderstood, hated, persecuted and wronged by the world. We should not expect less than our Master, "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." The secret of victory lies in the spirit of integrity and an unflinching confidence in God as one that is mightier than the world, and that will "bring forth our righteousness as the light, and our judgment as the noonday." "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls unto Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."

(3.) Like Joseph's, our sufferings will often come to us through the grossest injustice on the part of men, involving loss, and even shameful reproach. The verdicts of public opinion and human authority are not always equitable, and many of God's dearest children have lived long under the ban of the severest injustice. This seems at first to human nature very hard to bear, and yet the apostle has said it is better to suffer for well doing than for ill doing. "If when you do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable unto God. For hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps. Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again: when he suffered he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously."

(4.) Like Joseph's, our sufferings may be aggravated and prolonged by the neglect and ingratitude of others, and even those whom we have most kindly befriended. The fellow prisoner whose release Joseph predicted, forgot him the moment he returned to his place and escaped his own misery, and left Joseph languishing in his neglected prison for years, when one word would have set him free. So our hearts will often ache at the inhumanity of men and the ingratitude of friends. Oftentimes we shall find our best services unappreciated and unrequited, and shall even be cruelly stung by those we have benefitted or even saved. How much suffering there is even among God's children which one word would avert, or the smallest sacrifice would prevent. But we must learn to endure and to wait, to render every ministry unto God, rather than to men, and accept our recompense not from human gratitude, but from our Master's righteous hand. How exquisite the answer of the great Christian soldier who, when parched with thirst after a bloody battle, was handed a cup of water by his attendant, and as he was about to hold it to his famished lips, he saw the hungry eyes of a wounded enemy looking at the water. Hastening to his side he handed him the cup, but the man instead of taking it made a sudden feint, and then by a quick movement tried to strike his noble benefactor with a death wound in return for his love. The brave officer sprang back and saved his life, but his attendant, with fierce indignation raised his sword and was about to bury it in the body of the miscreant. But the good man held him back, took his sword from his hand, disarmed the wounded enemy, and then handing the cup of water to his attendant, quietly added: "Give it to him all the same." So let us love and bless.

(5.) The hardest ingredient in suffering is often time. A short, sharp pang is easily borne, but when a sorrow drags its weary weight through long monotonous years, and day after day returns with the same dull routine of hopeless agony, the heart loses its spring, and without the grace of God is sure to sink into the very sullenness of despair. Joseph's was a long trial, and God often has to burn His lessons into the depths of our being by the fires of protracted pain. "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver," but He knows how long, and like a true goldsmith He stops the fires the moment He sees His image in the glowing metal. "Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing!" "The God of all grace who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Jesus Christ, after that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you; to Him be glory forever and ever, amen."

(6.) Like Joseph, let us meet our sufferings in a spirit of courageous cheerfulness and make the best of them. Joseph might have given up and said, "There is no use trying; everything is against me," as many a young man is tempted in adversity to do. But Joseph went into Potiphar's kitchen, not to repine and fret, but to be bright and useful and do his very best; and he so succeeded that before long he had the highest place in the household. And then, when the scene was changed from the kitchen to the prison, Joseph again, instead of giving up in sullen despair, and feeling that there was no use trying, resolved to make the best of this position, and so succeeded that ere long he was chief of the prisoners. Wherever he found himself he did his best, and having succeeded in a pantry and a prison he was ready for a palace and a throne. The man who cannot succeed in a trying position is not fit for an easier one. This lesson of Joseph's life takes hold, as no other in the Scriptures, of the practical questions that meet every man, and especially every young man, in the battle of life.

(7.) Like Joseph, we shall find it indispensable in the time of trouble to retain our integrity as a jewel above all price, and keep the conscience so pure that by well doing we shall be able to silence the ignorance of foolish men and give the devil no place for his assaults upon our faith. Joseph's heart would surely have been crushed, if, in the dark hour he had been compelled to say like his brothers afterwards, "I have been verily guilty, therefore this distress has come upon me." If we have been guilty in anything let it be quickly rectified, and it shall be forgiven, and then, with a pure conscience and a true heart, we can stand against all the storms of trial.

(8.) The support of Joseph in his trial was the confidence and consciousness of the Divine presence and the constant assurance which sprang from his early faith that God's hand was overruling all his life. There can be no doubt that in these dark hours his early dreams ever shone like a pole star of hope upon the midnight sky, and "for the joy set before him, He endured the cross and despised the shame." We must hold fast to our faith and hope, or we cannot overcome the billows of sorrow. We must ever recognize the hand of infinite love in all our trials, and never for any instant listen to the devil's whisper, "The Lord has brought us hither that he might destroy us." This was the cowardly cry of a wicked king, but faith's answer ever is "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble: therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed and the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea." "The Lord God is with me, therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed." We may not see now the outcome of the beautiful plan which God is hiding in the shadow of His hand; it yet may be long concealed; but faith may be sure that He is sitting on the throne calmly awaiting the hour when with adoring rapture we shall say, "All things have worked together for good."

(9.) Like Joseph, let us be more careful to learn all the lessons in the school of sorrow, than we are anxious for the hour of deliverance. There is a "need be" for every lesson, and when we are ready, our deliverance will surely come, and we shall find that we could not have stood in our place of higher service without the very things that were taught us in the ordeal. God is educating us for the future, for higher service and nobler blessings; and if we have the qualities that fit us for a throne, all earth and hell cannot keep us from it when God's time has come. We cannot see it now, but shall surely find in God's "afterwards" the benefits and the necessity of the discipline which His patient love has held us to so strictly, and yet so wisely, in the experience of life.

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