

Consistent Godliness

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[0 : 00] 31 and at verse 38. We can read from verse 37. This proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants.

Then Pharaoh said to his servants, Can we find a man like this in whom is the Spirit of God? Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are.

You shall be over my house and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you.

Well, how often do you find it in history that one individual has the whole world set around him in terms of its future?

And that in a sense is what you find largely in the case of Joseph at this point in his life. Because the whole world, at least the known world, the settled world of his day, was really dependent on the decision that Pharaoh was going to take as he was advised here by Joseph in regard to his dreams.

[1 : 13] In other words, you find sometimes truth is stranger than fiction. Because who could have made up the kind of events that you find in the life of Joseph brought from prison to being president, you might say, in one day, having suffered so much before that and having been tested by the immediately preceding events in the prison and proving himself then later when he came to be set over the land of Egypt.

So what was the secret of Joseph's wisdom? What was the secret of Joseph's lifestyle? What was the secret of the way that Joseph conducted himself in all the circumstances of his life?

Well, you can find that actually in verses that speak about how God was with him. And you find that more than once throughout these passages dealing with Joseph.

You find chapter 39. If you look back to chapter 39 and verse 2, the Lord was with Joseph and he became a successful man and he was in the house of his Egyptian master.

And you'll find the same thing in verse 21, the same chapter, the same emphasis there. The Lord was with Joseph. This is him being put into the prison where the king's prisoners were confined and he was there in the prison.

[2 : 40] But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison.

And then the end of the chapter there, the keeper paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge because the Lord was with him. That really essentially is the key to his life.

The Lord was with him in all these circumstances. As things change day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year in the life of Joseph, this did not change. This did not go away.

This was the thing that undergirded his life. And when Pharaoh actually heard him interpret the theme, he actually said, can we find a man like this in whom is the spirit of God?

So often you find in the Bible, don't you? People were not Christians, not even believers. And yet they often speak more than they actually know. You find that in the New Testament as well in different places, especially during the trial and the arrest and trial of Jesus, where the likes of the high priest and others spoke in terms of the future.

[3 : 54] But they actually said more than they themselves were aware of. And here we find Pharaoh actually saying, can we find a man like this in whom is the spirit of God?

Now, it doesn't mean that Pharaoh himself was a believer in Joseph's God. He would have believed in many different idols. And of course, Pharaoh himself in Egypt was regarded as among the gods.

He was a divine being as far as people of Egypt were concerned in their religion. And yet here is Pharaoh saying, here is a man. Can we find anyone like him? And the answer, of course, is no.

Oh, he's already tried his magicians, his own wise men, and they failed to help him with his predicament. And now he finds this man, this prisoner, having been brought before him.

And here he is telling him really what the future holds. It's God's presence with Joseph that makes the great difference between himself and the culture of the magicians of Egypt.

[4 : 55] And I want to see this just briefly tonight, because we have to be brief, as we said. First of all, there's an emphasis here that godliness in Joseph's life, and here godliness gives the honor to God.

God was with him. But then from Joseph's side, as you look at it, his godliness, his godly life consistently gave the honor to God. I might say that this verse and the surrounding verses really, and all of Joseph's life really, is an account of consistent godliness.

His life really, as you go through it, and we did some time ago, years ago, look at this in a Wednesday evening study. You remember that we did that. But it's such a remarkable thing that you have real difficulty finding a fault in this man.

And all the things that are revealed about him, it's very difficult to find anything there that you would find, that you would accuse him of in terms of wrongdoing. Somebody has said that if you want to try and find any fault in the life of Joseph, you're hard-pressed, unless you might say he was a bit too heavy-handed with his brothers.

That's about all you could say about this man and his consistent godliness. And that consistent godliness gives the honor to God. Go back to 39 again from verse 20.

[6 : 20] There he is in the prison. And despite the fact that he's in the prison, the Lord is with him, showed him steadfast love, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And obviously, there's only a very short summary of what went on in that prison.

But he put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. Yet he didn't lose his godliness. He didn't change from his godliness.

The matter didn't change. Otherwise, God would not have been with him in the way he was. And there he is, faithful and holy, even in what led to this.

Remember how, you know the story very well, how he actually ended up in the prison. It was because he was faithful to God, as he had been a servant of Potiphar, this officer of Pharaoh.

And Potiphar's wife had made an attempt to seduce him, to actually get him to conduct immoral sexual relations with her. And as he escaped from there, as he just fled from there, he left his garment behind.

[7 : 22] And she took that garment and made that falsely an accusation that this is what he had been trying to do. And she had called out in panic and he had to leave, but he left his garment behind him.

Sheer lies. And it does remind us that sometimes being faithful to God doesn't necessarily mean that the truth will always be to the fore at any one time.

It can be twisted by those who want to twist it into something of their own making. Well, that was what led to his imprisonment. His faithfulness to God led to him being taken and deposited in the prison with Pharaoh's other prisoners.

And yet, it's no different for Joseph inside the prison than it was outside. He's not a different person. He doesn't have a different view of life. He doesn't have a different way of approaching life.

He doesn't have a different lifestyle. He doesn't actually have in his mind any other approach, but one which wants to follow and to be true to God. Because godliness, true godliness, and I'm saying this very conscious of the fact that I'm very short of that myself.

[8 : 36] I'm sure most of us would say that. When you come across true godliness or the extensive consistent godliness, you'll find in the likes of Joseph, let's face it, there are not many of them around.

But when you come to look at this, this is a man who obviously, as a godly man, sought to gain from adversity. He sought to gain from adversity.

He didn't complain when he was thrown into prison. He didn't find fault with God. He didn't ask himself questions that sought to denigrate God or the wisdom of God or the knowledge of God or the purpose of God.

He just got on with being godly. He just got on with being faithful to his God, witnessing to those that were in the prison, showing the wonderful capacity and ability that God had given him even to deal with his fellow human beings in the way he did.

Of course, that's such a huge challenge for us to follow. So, in the midst of all the changes and the temptations and all the agitations and the aggravations that you come across in life, the many assaults that you know from sin, from the world, from the devil, here is Joseph.

[9 : 46] Here is Joseph in the prison. And he's exactly the same as he was outside. William Gurnall and his wonderful work, the Christians Armor, from Ephesians 6, has a statement there.

It goes something like this. The devil is God's master swordsman sent to teach us how to handle our weapons. What a remarkable statement.

There is Gurnall, a man who suffered himself as a Puritan, a man who suffered for faithfulness to the gospel. And yet this is what he's saying. The devil's attacks as they are under the sovereign wisdom and purpose of God.

He is God's master swordsman. He comes with his sword thrusts. We feel the sword thrusts. We feel the sharpness of them. But he's God's master swordsman with God's purpose, overriding his own purpose, the devil's own purpose.

He is God's master swordsman sent to help us, sent to enable us to know how to handle our weapons, our spiritual weapons.

[10 : 57] See, if you didn't have that sort of opposition, how would you know how to use your faith? What need would you have of your faith? Where would your hope be? How would it be exercised or strengthened?

Where would your love for God be tested as it needs to be tested in order for you to remain faithful to him, in order for that love itself to grow the more it is tested?

That's what Gurnall meant. And, of course, you find that frequently throughout the Bible, no less so than in the book of Psalms. Remember Psalm 84, a psalm that speaks about pilgrimage, going through a desert area, the Valley of Beka, which is usually understood as meaning a very dry, dusty area, a little water.

But it says these pilgrims, as they go through the Valley of Beka, they make it a well. They make it a well. They rise to the challenge of the adversity by looking to gain from the adversity.

And as they seek God and as they seek to make the maximum of these difficult conditions, they are making it a well for themselves. That's to say they more in the spiritual, meaning that they actually gain because God comes to strengthen them.

[12 : 16] God comes to assuage their thirst spiritually. God comes to assuage their thirst for themselves.

For Christ's merits brought a blessing to the crosses of the sons of God. What a wonderful statement that is with regard to the sufferings and the aggravations of God's people.

They have been washed by the blood of Christ as much as our persons have. And this really is what Joseph's life is all about. He doesn't change his tack.

He doesn't change his view of life or of his God when he faces adversity. And as he comes out of prison, the same thing follows. There's the remarkable thing. You find Joseph in the prison.

That's what he's like. You find him now out of prison. Chapter 41 here, verse 16. Here is Joseph out of prison coming to meet with Pharaoh. Joseph, Pharaoh said, I've heard that when you hear a dream, you can interpret it.

[13 : 39] Joseph answered immediately. He said, it is not in me. God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer. See how immediately he turns the matter around to focus upon God.

Whereas some of us, most of us perhaps would say, well, yeah, God, okay. I might have that ability to interpret dreams and eventually turn the thing around to say that actually it's God that's behind us.

There's no such mumbling with Joseph. He's straight to the point. He said, no, it's not about me. It's God who has actually done this. And it's God who will give the interpretation to Pharaoh a favorable answer.

And he maintains that all the way through his response to Pharaoh. Look there in verses 25, 28, 32. The dreams of Pharaoh are one. God has revealed this to Pharaoh.

Verse 28, it is as I told Pharaoh, God has shown to Pharaoh what he's about to do. Verse 32, exactly the same emphasis. The doubling of Pharaoh's dream means the thing is fixed by God and God will shortly bring it about.

[14 : 44] There he is speaking to a pagan king, the most powerful man in the world at the time. And all the way through his speaking to his conversation with Pharaoh, it's God, God, God.

God will do this. God has done this. God will do this. God has yet to do this. All the way through, it's God that's to the fore. Because godliness, this godly man out of prison and in prison has the same emphasis.

And you can actually contrast that so much with not just here, but also in the days of Moses, the magicians of Egypt, the magicians of Egypt, the magicians of Egypt, the magicians of Egypt, the magicians of Egypt, who themselves were given the dark powers that paganism sometimes has, to be able sometimes even to replicate miracles that God's people there, Moses and others, were able to do.

But what a contrast to the magicians of Egypt you find in Joseph. There's nothing dark about it. There's nothing underhand about it.

There's no magic about it. There's no magic at all about it. There's nothing there other than dependence upon God, faithfulness to God, confidence in God, being true to God.

[16 : 00] That's how we are placed in the world as Christians, to be different to the culture of the world around us. Indeed, to contradict that culture of the world around us and to show that our way of life, our philosophy in life, if you like, our outlook in life, the way that we handle the problems of life, they don't at all, are not at all in the same category of handling them as the ways of the world.

God has rescued us from thinking in a worldly fashion. And so Joseph is for us one of the great examples of the Bible of the contrast in being distinct in the world for God and showing that we live life on a very different plane to that of the world itself.

So in prison and out of prison, Joseph is the same. But yet what about promotion? Is he going to change with promotion?

Is he going to change when Pharaoh actually says to him, look, I'm going to place you in charge of the whole land of Egypt. Only the throne will be greater than you. Everybody will do as you actually advise or command them to do.

Only as regards the throne will I be greater to you. See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt. So Pharaoh then took a signet ring from his hand. He put it on Joseph's hand, clothed him as garments of fine linen, put a gold chain about his neck, made him ride in his second chariot.

[17 : 34] There he is with his limousine. You would say today that's really a big limo that Pharaoh has put into Joseph's possession. And he's given him all of these trappings of richness and trappings of greatness, trappings of authority and all the rest of it.

Is that going to change Joseph, do you think? Well, you can read down through the passage and still see that he is true to God. You see, when it came to Joseph actually being given a wife, some people have undoubtedly got a difficulty with the fact that Joseph was renamed by Pharaoh.

This is for Pharaoh's own advantage. He gave him in marriage, Azanath, the daughter of Potiphar, a priest of On. So Joseph went out over the land of Egypt. Now people find fault with him for that.

Here he is marrying to all appearances, a pagan woman. How could he actually do this, knowing that God was not in favor of his people, marrying or intermarrying with pagans?

Well, there was no option really for Joseph. If he wanted to, at that point, fulfill the will of God as he did, and God had placed him in this situation deliberately, this was the way that Joseph had to then conduct himself.

[18 : 48] In order to actually go through with the purpose that God had for him. I know that that necessarily doesn't explain everything about it, but certainly it's not something that Joseph himself would ordinarily have chosen.

Matthew Henry says, for example, that this is not an ordinary situation for this man of God. And he has to fall in with the purpose of God in this strict situation.

Anyway, we're not going into that, but it's what follows that I'm really interested in. Before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph. Asenath, the daughter of Potiphar, a priest of On, bore them to him.

Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh. For he said, God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house. The name of the second he called Ephraim.

God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction. Now, that's really interesting and significant. Here he is, and he's been given this pagan woman to marry, to have children with, settle down with in the land of Egypt.

[19 : 56] And he has these two children. He has these two sons. He's been given a pagan name himself by Pharaoh. Doesn't mean that Joseph has necessarily willingly accepted that or repudiated his own Hebrew background.

Nothing of that. He still remains Joseph the way he was. And you can tell that when he came to name his children, he called them Hebrew names. And not only Hebrew names, Hebrew names that meant something very specific as regards God, his God, Manasseh and Ephraim.

And that is so significant that promotion to honor and authority, second in command in Egypt, no change with Joseph. He's still a man of God.

He's still a Hebrew. He's still committed to God and covenant and faithfulness and obedience. That's what shows that in prison, out of prison, in promotion, Joseph remained the same person he was, the same outlook and everything else.

And, of course, that's something that God reminded the people of Israel of when they came into the promised land. Not that Joseph is mentioned specifically, but the same principle is there.

[21 : 15] And when you come to Deuteronomy 6, for example, and verses 10 to 12, you read as follows. It was God saying through Moses, And then later on in chapter 8, you find the same or similar, chapter 8, verse 11, where again the same reminder is given.

Take care, lest you forget when you are full, lest you forget the Lord your God, by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today.

And then he speaks about when you're multiplied and your flocks and your silver and so on and so on. And then he says, Beware lest you say in your heart, my power and the might of my hand has gained me this wealth.

You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers as it is this day.

And there's a principle that follows through into the Christian life in every generation. Godliness sets out to honor God in adversity, out of adversity, in promotion, looking at it in Joseph.

[22 : 57] That's exactly what you find. But of course, then you could say that godliness also gets involved with people, because Joseph's life from this point on is very much involved with people, the people who came to him for advice, the people that benefit from his leadership and so on.

In other words, to be godly is to be different. It is to be opposite to what is in the world, but it's not to be isolated from people and isolated from interaction with them.

That's the salt and light principle, again, that Jesus taught his disciples. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. It has to actually be, in order to be effective, it has to be applied.

It has to shine. And that's why Pharaoh was able to say here, can we find a man like this in whom is the spirit of God?

Now we have to leave it there this evening. You can follow through yourselves. There's very practical points to follow on from that. You mustn't think.