

Benevolent Rule

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At the present moment no one "can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor. 12: 3). The dying thief needed an eye illumined by the Spirit of God to discern, in the thorn-crowned Man on the centre cross, the Lord of glory. The princes of this world did not recognize the Lord of Glory, but the thief did and he said, "Lord; remember me when Thou camest into Thy kingdom." Jesus is no longer on the cross, but He is still rejected of the world, and it is only by the Holy Ghost that His lordship is recognized and confessed.

When we speak of lordship, what is it that we mean? The meaning of the term can be briefly summarized in four words. It means in the first place *absolute dominion*, and in the second place *benevolent rule*. He who exercises lordship wields absolute authority, and his will is law to those beneath him; but at the same time he exercises that authority with benevolence for the good of those beneath his sway, otherwise he is not so much a lord as a tyrant. We speak of lordship as it is according to God, and as it will be realized in the Lord Jesus Christ, and as it was typically set forth in the history of Joseph.

When the skill and power of Joseph's hands had carried him to the top, and within them lay the destinies of his brethren, and of all Egypt, then there came out the tender compassions of his heart, which expressed themselves in his tears. In Genesis 39 to 41 Joseph's *hands* are prominent. Genesis 42 to 50. Joseph's *tears*. In these latter chapters it is recorded that Joseph wept no less than eight times, viz.: Gen. 42: 24; Gen. 43: 30; Gen. 45: 2, 14, 15; Gen. 46: 29; Gen. 50: 1, 17.

It is not a little remarkable that there is no mention of Joseph weeping in his earlier years. We could have well understood it characterizing those days, when we remember the seas of sorrow and affliction through which he passed, and which well might have wrung tears from his eyes. His hard-hearted brethren even had to confess "we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear" (Gen. 42: 21). They saw *the anguish of his soul*, but as far as the record goes they never saw his tears.

How reminiscent is this of that other expression in Isaiah 53, "*the travail of His soul*" — the soul of Jehovah's perfect Servant, who, though the Man of Sorrows on earth, and acquainted with grief, is yet to be "exalted and extolled, and be very high." In the days of His sojourn and suffering on earth He wept, but *never for Himself*. When going forth to crucifixion others bewailed and lamented Him, but He said, "Weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves."

Joseph wept in the days of his glory and power, in the day when he was dealing in sternness with his brethren. Yet it was a skilful sternness he exercised toward them, its object being that they might be convicted of their sin, and humbled, and brought to self-judgment and repentance. This inward heart work was an absolute necessity. To have laden them with the corn of Egypt, leaving their hearts untouched, would have been a calamity. Their stomachs would have been satisfied, but their hearts left unreached and unaltered. This was not Joseph's way. Absolute dominion was now his, but this power he would use not for their destruction but for their good both spiritually and physically.

The first time Joseph wept was when he perceived the first awakenings of conscience in the way of self-judgment in his brethren. They spoke among themselves, never recognizing Joseph in Egypt's splendid governor, nor suspecting that he understood their speech. "We are verily GUILTY concerning

our brother" he heard them say. Joseph "turned himself about from them and wept." They were tears of love and thankfulness, for he saw that his dealings were beginning to take effect, and raise in their minds questions as to the past that were bound to be raised ere his brethren could be happy in his presence.

A second time did Joseph weep when Benjamin his own full brother appeared. The tears sprang out of a sense of relationship. Of that relationship Benjamin was as yet all unconscious, but Joseph knew and was moved beyond words. "His bowels," we read, "did yearn upon his brother: and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there." Still as yet the work of conviction and repentance in his brethren had not reached sufficient depth for that relationship to be declared, so "he washed his face, and went out, and refrained himself." Thus he exercised patience in his dealings with them.

We are living in the hour which is characterized by "the patience of the Christ" (2 Thess. 3: 5, N. Tr.). He is exalted on high, and as the Lord over all He is rich unto *all* that call upon Him, whether Jew or Gentile. His brethren after the flesh, the Jews, are, however, still in unbelief and unconscious of His glory. Surely His bowels do yearn upon them, and some little reflection of that yearning we find in the Apostle Paul in Rom. 9: 1-5; yet the time has not come for the expression of His love and the acknowledgment of the relationship that exists. There must be a deep work of conviction and self-judgment first.

The next three occasions of Joseph's weeping are all found in Genesis 45. In the latter part of Genesis 44 we have Judah's touching speech on behalf of Benjamin. It revealed a great change in the disposition of the brethren. The old hatred against Joseph was gone, and in its place was a genuine care for Benjamin; the former indifference to the feelings of Jacob their father had been changed into the utmost solicitude on his behalf; instead of the spirit that would callously sacrifice Joseph, behold Judah prepared to sacrifice himself! The chastening of God had already had a profound effect, and the hour had arrived when at last Joseph's love could burst its barriers and declare itself.

"Then Joseph could not refrain himself . . . and he wept aloud . . . and he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept . . . moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them." Here we have the full and unhindered expression of Joseph's love, and in response thereto the repentance of his brethren reached its proper depth; "His brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence." Thus it will be in the coming time. The preliminary dealings of God with the children of Israel will produce a certain measure of conviction in their hearts, but it is when, according to Zechariah 12: 10, "they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced" that "they shall mourn . . . as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness . . . as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." Then "the spirit of grace and of supplications" shall be poured upon them. Yet, even so, what will be their feelings compared with those of the One whom they have pierced?

In Genesis 45 we do not read much of the tears of the brethren of Joseph. "Benjamin wept upon his neck," we read in verse 14, but that is all. As a matter of fact, Benjamin had of all of them the least reason to weep, for he was hardly implicated in their great sin. No, the great point is not the repentance of the brethren, but the magnanimous love of Joseph. He was saviour, for as he says, "God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to *save* your lives by a great deliverance." He was also lord, for he added, "and He hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and *lord* of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt."

Joseph was lord. His dominion was absolute in that great domain. His dreams were verified. The other sheaves made obeisance to his sheaf; sun, moon, and eleven stars made obeisance to him. His

brethren had said! "Let us . . . cast him into some pit . . . and we will see what will become of his dreams." Well, they had now seen!

But now that such power was in his hands, what use did he make of it? His word to his father, and brethren, and all their households was, "Come unto me: and I will give you the good of the land of Egypt, and ye shall eat the fat of the land" (Gen. 45: 18). As exalted he was the minister of their blessing.

"Come unto me . . . and I will give you rest" were the words of the Lord Jesus, and as the context shows that rest is in the knowledge of the Father, of His love and purposes. It is available for our hearts today. Presently He will bring rest to a weary earth after the execution of the inevitable judgments of God. He will fill the earth with rest and contentment when the knowledge of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. Then He will minister to His people the good of the millennial earth, just as He now ministers to His saints of the good of heaven.

Our title to the heavenly things made known in the gospel is sure and without a flaw. It rests upon His atoning blood. We need, however, not only a flawless title, but to enter upon the good of the wealthy portion that is ours. It is to be ours in present enjoyment, by faith and the work of the Spirit of God.

After Genesis 45 we read three times of Joseph weeping. Once when meeting his aged father Jacob, once at his father's death, and lastly after his father's death, when his brethren revealed the fact that even yet they had not grasped the fulness of his grace and kindness toward them. It became manifest that all the time they had accepted his favour with a "perhaps" in their minds.

Said they, "Joseph will *peradventure* hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him." Hence the message which they sent, as if to influence Joseph's unwilling mind by the memory of their father's wishes on their behalf. There was on the surface the appearance of humility in their attitude, yet it was really but unbelief — unbelief not in the absoluteness of Joseph's dominion, but rather in the benevolence of his rule, as though his kindness had been but a mask worn to please the aged father. This cut Joseph to the quick, and "Joseph wept when they spake unto him."

Yet his attitude towards them did not change in the presence of this display of unbelief. His answer was, "Fear ye not; I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them." The benevolence of his rule was a reality whether they fully relied upon it, or whether they did not. The littleness of their faith in no way altered the largeness of his heart.

Hudson Taylor, in addressing a large audience, once quoted the well-known lines of Miss Havergal:-

"They, who trust Him wholly
Find Him wholly true."

Having repeated them, he paused a moment, and then quietly added, "Yes, and there is one thing more wonderful than that even — they, who do NOT trust Him wholly, find Him wholly true." Many of us are like Joseph's brethren and do not altogether and wholly repose in His love and faithfulness, yet is He just as wholly true to us as He is to those rarer souls who trust Him with quite unshaken confidence.

Divine love is like a spring which bubbles up in some heat-bound plain because its source is in distant mountains with their eternal snows. In the fiercest drought it is unchanged, gushing forth the same as ever. Of such a spring we may say what Tennyson made the language of his brook:-

"For men may come, and men may go

But I go on for ever."

The love of God which has been expressed in Christ flows forth upon us, yet its source is not in us but in God Himself.

How great the soul-liberty which lies in the knowledge of this fact!