



Bible Study

April 1, 2015

Gen 43:26-31, 45:1-16

Isaiah 58:1-11

Proverbs 21:23-22:4

Genesis 43:26-31, 45:1-16 (NKJV) -

And when Joseph came home, they brought him the present which was in their hand into the house, and bowed down before him to the earth. Then he asked them about their well-being, and said, "Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?" And they answered, "Your servant our father is in good health; he is still alive." And they bowed their heads down and prostrated themselves. Then he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, "Is this your younger brother of whom you spoke to me?" And he said, "God be gracious to you, my son." Now his heart yearned for his brother; so Joseph made haste and sought somewhere to weep. And he went into his chamber and wept there. Then he washed his face and came out; and he restrained himself, and said, "Serve the bread."

Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Make everyone go out from me!" So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it. Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph; does my father still live?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come near to me." So they came near. Then he said: "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. "Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph: "God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children's children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for there are still five years of famine. And behold, your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my mouth that speaks to you. So you shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen; and you shall hurry and bring my father down here.'" Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that his brothers

talked with him. Now the report of it was heard in Pharaoh's house, saying, "Joseph's brothers have come." So it pleased Pharaoh and his servants well.

Proverbs 21:23-22:4 (NKJV) - Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles. A proud and haughty man—"Scoffer" is his name; he acts with arrogant pride. The desire of the lazy man kills him, for his hands refuse to labor. He covets greedily all day long, but the righteous gives and does not spare. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; how much more when he brings it with wicked intent! A false witness shall perish, but the man who hears him will speak endlessly. A wicked man hardens his face, but as for the upright, he establishes his way. There is no wisdom or understanding or counsel against the LORD. The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but deliverance is of the LORD. A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold. The rich and the poor have this in common, the LORD is the maker of them all. A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished. By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches and honor and life.

Isaiah 58:1-11 (NKJV) - "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching God. 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?' In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high. Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail."

Commentary -

Again and again in the Old Testament, we see the pattern of the life of Our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ traced out in the lives of holy men and women of earlier eras. Indeed, the Old Testament itself really only tells and retells one story, over and over again, in many forms. It is a story of glory, followed by exile, followed by restoration and vindication. This pattern becomes so clear through the lens of its fulfillment in the life of Christ that He again and again refers us back to it as if quoting directly, saying that, 'All the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms spoke concerning me' (Luke 24:44), and again, 'Was it not necessary that the Christ must suffer these things and then enter His Glory?' (Luke 24:26)

Beginning at the beginning of Genesis, our first parents are created in the image of God and

given dominion over the rest of God's Creation. Their disobedience, however, leads to their exiled from Paradise and sent out into our present world. We then see this pattern repeated at the grand level, in the over-arching history of the entire Old Testament, of Israel being brought into the land of Canaan, and being given that land of milk and honey, only to be exiled for her wickedness and sin, with the promise of the Prophets of eventual restoration. We also see it at the smaller level, in the individual lives of the Old Testament saints, such as King David, whom the Lord brought from shepherding sheep in the pasture to the royal palace as king, but who, after his sins of murder and adultery, was exiled from the throne and usurped by his own son, forced to wander until his eventual restoration to rule.

The life of Joseph is yet another example. As a young boy, he was the favorite of his father, the apple of his eye, and glorified with the gift of his coat of many colors. This favoritism, and his own arrogance in boasting to his brothers of his foreseen destiny, lead to jealousy among his brothers that very nearly cost Joseph his life. After being thrown down a well, he was sold into slavery, ending up a household slave in Egypt. There he learned humility through false accusations and imprisonment. Ultimately, he was brought back out of prison, and ascended to very near the throne of Egypt itself. Through his glorification in Egypt God was able to save the lives not only of Joseph's extended family who had previously betrayed him, but to all of Egypt as well.

We see this pattern in general, and Joseph's story in particular, fulfilled in the life of Christ, Who came down from Heaven to take on the form of a servant. Christ suffered and was falsely accused, imprisoned and executed. Unlike ourselves and our forefathers, He suffered not for His own sins, for He had none, but for ours. Ultimately, Christ was vindicated when He was raised from the dead, thereby granting life to the whole world, including those of us who have betrayed Him.

Adam and Eve, though they repented, died in their exile, after suffering through one of their sons murdering the other. A small remnant of three of the tribes of Israel returned to the land of Judah after 70 years in exile and rebuilt Jerusalem, the temple, and the surrounding villages, but that nation would never again have the glory it had under David and Solomon, being ruled over by oppressive foreign nations and a corrupt hierarchy. David himself, though restored to the throne by the end of his life, saw his family destroyed, his son Absalom dead, and ruled over a kingdom poisoned at its root that would crumble by the end of the reign of his son Solomon. It is only in Christ, that their story finds its true ending, and it is in this sense that His life fulfills the story of all of theirs. As St. Paul tells us in the Epistle to the Hebrews, 'and all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us' (11:39-40).

All of us wish to share in Christ's Resurrection, and in the Glory of His Kingdom. This story which plays out again and again, finding its fulfillment in the life of the Lord also traces out for us the pathway that leads there. It is a pathway of humility, service, and obedience. It is a pathway that involves those of us who are rich making ourselves poor, those of us who are well filled making ourselves hungry, and those of us who are well-covered to lay ourselves bare. Today's reading from Isaiah, however, points out that this is not through mere religious observance or ritual.

Fasting, for example, as we fast this Great Lent, is worthless if it is accompanied by unrighteousness. Fasting with malice toward others, with anger and bitterness in our hearts, with quarreling and judgment of others, is not fasting at all and does nothing to please God. The Lord desires mercy, not sacrifice (Hosea 6:6). On the other hand, this does not make fasting, or vigils, or services, or prayers worthless in and of themselves. Rather, it is when we love those around us, when we live at peace with all men, when we share our wealth with those in need, when we care for those abandoned and uncared for, that our fasts and vigils and services and prayers have meaning. This is true because when we cry out to God from our weakness and suffering, but nonetheless from love and a pure heart, we cry out with the voice of Christ Himself because in joining ourselves to the least of our brothers and sisters, we have joined ourselves to Him.

Questions to Ponder -

- 1) Joseph is able at the end of his life to say that what his brothers meant to him for evil, God meant for good, and so to reject taking any vengeance against them. Think of times in the past when you've felt wronged by other people. Consider what blessings may have (even inadvertently) from what you suffered; what lessons you may have learned. In light of this perspective, can you let go of grudges or the desire to 'even the scales'?
- 2) Today's reading from Proverbs describes the pitfalls of both laziness and industry. The lazy person ends up filled with envy because he desires to have things without being willing to work for them. At the same time, however, the man who works hard and acquires wealth, we are told, acquires it from the Lord in order to be able to give to those in need. Are there areas of your life in which you have fallen into covetousness, desiring, dreaming, even scheming to try to acquire things that you cannot afford or to have them without working for them? At the same time, are there things which you have worked hard for and acquired that you are now unwilling to share, or of which you won't let go?
- 3) The Prophet Isaiah tell us that going through the religious motions with an impure heart is of no value. As we now draw close to the end of Great Lent, think back over your fast. Has your heart been focused on the love of God and your neighbor, or have you focused all your energies on reading ingredient labels? Has the way you have lived your life in the past several weeks in private matched the way you have acted around your fellow parishioners, or have you been pretending around the latter? It is not too late to offer a true fast, acceptable to the Lord.

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