

Sunday School Lesson September 13, 2020

Good morning, I hope you are well and feel blessed.

Lesson for September 13, 2020, "God Rewards Obedience"

Background Scripture from Genesis 41:14-57.

With the title of the lesson "God Rewards Obedience", I feel our thoughts should turn to what Jesus, said in Luke 11:28, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." Prior to looking at the text lesson, I offer this insight from an article by, Rev. Dr. Charles Stanley, in his Life Principles Bible. The Lord's simple requests often serve as stepping stones to life's most wonderful blessings.

Consider three reasons why obedience is critical to the successful Christian's life:

1. Obeying God in small matters is an essential step in receiving God's greatest blessings. Often, God's greatest blessings come as a result of our willingness to do something that appears very insignificant. Ask yourself, "Has God been challenging me to do something seemingly unimportant that I have not yet made an effort to accomplish? Is there anything I have rationalized by saying, 'It's too difficult,' 'I don't want to' or 'I have to pray about it first'?"

2. Our Obedience always benefits others. God often rewards others, in particular, those closest to us, as a result of our obedience. For example, when a parent obeys the Lord, the entire family reaps the reward of God's blessings. Likewise, a child's obedience will bless his or her parents. This does not mean that those who choose to disobey the Lord will escape his discipline because of someone else's godly walk. His call to obedience always demands our response. When we live obedient lives, those who know and love us will sense the peace and joy he has given us. Instead of conflict, there will be contentment, and that is just one part of experiencing God's goodness.

3. When we obey God, we will never be disappointed. He can also take our emptiness, whether related to finances, relationships or career, and change it into something splendid. Perhaps you have hesitated to obey God because you fear the consequences of your decision. But the Lord's command is for you to fear him above all else. The same sovereign, omnipotent God who

keeps your heart beating and the planets orbiting is more than able to handle the results of your obedience. When he tells you to do something and you know without a doubt it is his will, then you need to obey based solely on who is doing the talking.

When you choose to obey the Lord, he will bless you. This is because obedience always leads to blessing. I have always told people who say they do not understand why God is asking them to do a certain thing, that if they will obey him, he will reward them with a sense of peace and joy that compares to nothing this world has to offer. Therefore, set a goal to obey the Lord and watch him work in your life.

From lesson text background: As painful as Joseph's tenure as a slave proved to be, it nevertheless stripped him of more than just his beautiful robe of status, it stripped him of his arrogant attitude and fashioned him into a godly man who dared to risk all for his Hebrew faith. He was left with the choice to assimilate into the Egyptian culture or do the righteous thing according to the faith he had learned as a Hebrew young man. He quickly rose from his belittled behavior as a slave to become a leader over Potiphar's house. Potiphar was a well-respected leader in the Egyptian hierarchy. He was a captain in Pharaoh's guard. The choice by Potiphar in choosing Joseph to run his household indicated Potiphar recognized the leadership gifts and graces present in Joseph. These productive gifts of Joseph had been present all his life, yet his pride hid them away, thus, all his brothers could see was his arrogant, self-centered behavior. Joseph rose from an ordinary slave purchased for 20 shekels to the master of a major official in Egypt.

Though a valued Hebrew slave, nevertheless, Joseph was still expendable. Potiphar's wife did not understand the knowledge and depth of Joseph's faith in his Hebrew God. Joseph was willing to risk severe punishment if accused, and yet he refused to back away from his truthful account. This behavior reveals a real growth of moral substance in Joseph's life over his years in slavery. Joseph's strong faith is truly quite amazing when many would have blamed God for their painful circumstances. We need to remember that Joseph was a young adult, unmarried man with the same biological drives and feelings of any young man his age. Yet, he resisted the temptation of Potiphar's wife. The penalty for adultery was severe, especially when involving a slave. Men engaged in adultery were whipped, some emasculated, and some even put to death. We are not given the rationale for his receiving time in prison over the harsher punishment. Personal integrity is noticeable and a witness. Whatever the motivations, Joseph chose his risky faith in God over the mighty powers of Egypt. The depth and strength of Joseph's faith in his God at the risk of severe punishment, even

death, could have proved powerful witnesses.

It is interesting that a robe once plays a major role in the calamity inflicted upon Joseph. His brothers had stripped away his beautiful robe of status when selling him as a slave. Potiphar's wife ripped Joseph's robe away and used it as false evidence of Joseph's fabricated rape. It is also interesting that dreams became the instruments Joseph used to display his arrogance to his brothers. It is dreams that will open the door to his future freedom. The painful experiences in life, even unjust experiences, can still become redemptive in the will of God. Hope is the belief that God is present with us in every moment of life, good and bad, painful and joyful. God does not waste a single moment in shaping us into the men and women he desires we become. The arrogance and first robe, and the false accusation of the second robe opened the door for Joseph to save the people of Egypt from harsh drought and later provided a means for the Hebrew community to escape through God's mighty act of the Exodus.

The entire book of Genesis is about God establishing his covenant people and setting up the miraculous events related to the Exodus. The story of Joseph explains how the people of Israel (Jacob) migrated south into Egypt and settled there. Over the years they eventually became slaves to Egypt. By the time of the Exodus the tribe had greatly multiplied. This large group of slaves became those redeemed by the love and power of God through the parting of the water providing escape for the Hebrews in the Exodus. All events in Genesis, from Joseph's slavery to the parted sea, fit together into a cohesive whole of God's refusal to abandon his covenant people and reveal his commitment to save them from bondage.

Psychologists tell us that dreams are a vehicle through which our joys, fears and longings can be enacted in the subconscious without fear of moral penalty. There is another form of dream that is a spiritual gift. They are not given to everyone and the emphasis is almost always upon the working of God in human affairs. These dreams usually consist of warning for the overall good of God's people, and they are given to individuals as spiritual gifts for the enacting of God's purposes.

The spiritual dreams with which God had blessed Joseph revealed not only the coming devastation of God, but also severed the familial relationships between Joseph and his brothers and later even caused his father concern. The dreams occurred while Joseph was in prison in Egypt on a false charge. Joseph, in his humanity, had every reason to say nothing, and in angry retribution simply let the painful events unfold. Revealing dreams had merited Joseph little but prison time. Joseph still remained quiet when the second dream was revealed. It was the second prisoner that felt a moral

debt to Joseph for his ability to interpret dreams and either for his own sake, or Joseph's, or both, he informed Pharaoh of a prisoner he met named Joseph that could reveal its meaning. This revelation by the prisoner was risky. Telling the truth is often risky and after the first prisoner was executed the second prisoner had no assurance things would work out well for him. Still, he told the truth about Joseph.

Do you recall a specific time when telling the truth was risky to your position, lifestyle etc.? Do you remember reading in the news when individuals risked their lives for speaking the truth, and especially for speaking of their faith?

The dreams of the prisoners were identical in content. Slavery and prison had greatly humbled him, and Joseph made certain it was known that God was the author of the dream. Even giving glory to his God was risky. As a matter of fact, there are moments when loyalty to the truth can be dangerous. The Old and New Testaments consist of many who lost their lives or were imprisoned for their belief in the God of Israel, and later in Jesus as Lord.

We can hear the newly developed humility in Joseph in verse 41:28. "It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do." Instead of taking credit for his own wisdom and insight, thus promoting his own interests, Joseph continued to point to God's work and speaking through him. Joseph would not have made such a statement in his youth while speaking to his brothers. This text also revealed that God never gave up on Joseph, nor revoked his spiritual gift.

Pharaoh was amazed that the dreams of a Hebrew prisoner came true. Even Pharaohs and kings recognized the value of those especially gifted. Though he was willing to recognize that Joseph and his God interpreted the dream to save Egypt, he was not willing to give his praise and honor to the Hebrew God of Joseph. The Egyptians believed in many gods, and Pharaoh was not certain which god was responsible for the fulfillment of the dream. He was uncertain which of their gods endowed Joseph with his spiritual ability, thus he believed Joseph himself was to receive credit for the dream coming true. Unwilling to recognize Joseph's Hebrew God, Pharaoh changed Joseph's name to an Egyptian name as an honor to Joseph. This would ensure none of his people would give Joseph's God honor for the fulfillment of the dream, nor ascribe him power. Pharaoh was determined to keep the Egyptian deities foremost in the minds in the praise of the Egyptian people. Pharaoh was willing to acknowledge that a deity had given Joseph the ability and wisdom he possessed and elevated him once again to a position of discernment and

wisdom for the pharaoh himself. He elevated Joseph to a position of the second greatest power in Egypt.

We read here that the will of God had been working all along. The spiritual gifts bestowed upon Joseph were not just to display power in Egypt, but to elevate Joseph to a position of power and authority in the land from which the Exodus would occur years later. All events were falling into place under the sovereign hand of God to make possible the most important historical, redemptive event in Old Testament history. Joseph, Pharaoh, and all the authorities of Egypt were working under the grace and will of almighty Hebrew God whether aware or not. Many times, we mistakenly understand our own contributions to the mighty redemptive working of God, when in reality God has used the big and small events, the natural and supernatural, the common and uncommon events to place us in positions for his use.

Joseph's willingness to marry non-Hebrew wives says less about marrying outside the clan. He knows a famine is coming. Whereas others would avoid adding to their household, Joseph increases his. He believes in the provisional care of God promised in the dreams. His marriage to Asenath, daughter of Potiphar, priest of On, most likely says less about his disregard for Egyptian pagan gods that it does that he believes his God is greater. In marriage, the wife was expected to adopt the god of the husband. Thus, Asenath would then accept Joseph's Hebrew God. This fact had far more power than Joseph marrying a pagan priest's daughter. Their children would also be raised in the God of Joseph.

In this text we are introduced to the two half tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. These two half tribes played a major role in dividing up the Promised Land. Though Joseph was given an Egyptian name by Pharaoh, he gives Ephraim and Manasseh Hebrew names. Jacob made Ephraim and Manasseh two equal sons. There were 12 sons of Jacob, and the accepting of these two made them equal brothers with equal shares of inheritance. They were to be treated as equals. Though Joseph had been sold into slavery, his sons born in Egypt would in no wise pay further penalty for the painful years Joseph had experienced.

This lesson is comprised of many lessons. One of the major lessons is that the sovereign will cannot be thwarted by the selfishness and jealousy of human sin. It reveals just how far jealousy will go in inflicting pain, even upon the ones we love. Jealousy can make us stand in places and do things we would never otherwise do. Joseph's arrogance cannot be omitted from the sins of this narrative. His sense of self-importance birthed and nurtured the seething jealousy and anger of his brothers. Joseph's anger had pushed them far enough to sell their own brother into slavery. His arrogance had

pushed them over the line of their ability to tolerate the proud sin of their brother. Jacob's poor parenting cannot be exempt from the family disarray and ill will inflicted upon the family. He made no attempt to hide his favoritism toward Joseph. We are not given the effect of the mothers, but the jealousy and eventually hatred had to break their heart, yet they could do little to stop it.

From the section, Stepping into the World, part of Joseph's experience is all too familiar to us. Infighting among relatives is common, particularly at the death of an important family member. Bickering, plotting, maneuvering, unhealthy competition, envy-such behaviors plague us as they did Joseph and his family. Joseph's story spells of the disaster that attends such counter-productive behavior. Considering this story serves as a warning to us and, hopefully, will lead us to critically review our attitude in such situations. The story of Joseph provides us encouragement. Nearly killed by his siblings, sold into slavery, and wrongly imprisoned, Joseph had every reason to consider himself forsaken by God. But, God showed Joseph steadfast love and brought the favor of the chief jailer to him. Joseph maintained his own values and was eventually delivered by God. Joseph can be a role model for us as we strive to fight the wrongs all around us. As he did not quit neither should we. There is one other way that this story may help us deal with our world. Joseph conveyed a grand project to Pharaoh to deal with a crisis that was on the horizon: the possibility of a great seven-year long famine. Joseph's wise word to him was to plan ahead, get ready, and not hide from what was to come. We face similar challenges today. For whatever reason, our climate is changing, and its life-changing effects loom ahead of us. Just like Joseph, we need God's encouragement as we face the difficulties climate change may bring, remembering that it is not our world. It is God's world, and God cares about it.

Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen. God watch over us and take care of us.

Next week's lesson September 20, 2020, "Love Versus Guilt" Background Scripture from Genesis chapter 42.

Sources for this lesson: The Bible, Rev. Dr. Charles Stanley, Article from his Life Principles Bible, International Sunday School Lesson and Commentary, Lessons from Bible in Life, South Georgia Advocate Sunday School Lesson, and The Present Word Adult Bible Lessons.