

Feb. 11, 2011

Praise Him with the timbrel and dance. (Psalm 105:4)

volume 2 • no. 5

“ In the heavenly Lamb thrice happy I am, And my heart it doth dance at the sound of His name.” Spurgeon

Why Do the Nations Rage?

As we look upon a world becoming more unglued, let us not be taken by surprise, whatever the immediate outcome. That the world is set against God is the clear teaching of the Bible. Furthermore, the New Testament prophets tell of a time when restraint of evil shall be relaxed for season. Then shall come the glorious end. Psalm 2 is a vivid glimpse into reality. May the saints find great solace in it. May unbelievers be warned, and “Kiss the Son.”

Psalm 2 (NKJV)

- 1 Why do the nations rage,
And the people plot a vain thing?
- 2 The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*,
- 3 “Let us break Their bonds in pieces
And cast away Their cords from us.”
- 4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;
The LORD shall hold them in derision.
- 5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath,
And distress them in His deep displeasure:
- 6 “Yet I have set My King
On My holy hill of Zion.”
- 7 “I will declare the decree:
The LORD has said to Me,
‘You *are* My Son,
Today I have begotten You.
- 8 Ask of Me, and I will give *You*
The nations *for* Your inheritance,
And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession.
- 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron;
You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.”
- 10 Now therefore, be wise, O kings;
Be instructed, you judges of the earth.
- 11 Serve the LORD with fear,
And rejoice with trembling.
- 12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,
And you perish *in* the way,
When His wrath is kindled but a little.
Blessed *are* all those who put their trust in Him.

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Through the Bible in 2011: Part 5

Joseph- A Believer in a Pagan World

Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more. ...Then they said to one another, “Look, this dreamer is coming! Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit... Then Midianite traders passed by; so the brothers pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt... And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, ... bought him from the Ishmaelites... The LORD was with Joseph... So Joseph found favor in [Potiphar’s] sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house

Then Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison... But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners who were in the prison. (from Genesis 36 & 39).

Joseph has always been one of my favorite Bible characters. He is certainly one of the many Old Testament shadow-pictures of Christ. He was the seed of Abraham; he was despised and rejected by his brothers; he went down into the grave and came forth; He suffered much before being exalted to reign; and he was the savior of his people. But it is as a great example to New Covenant believers that, to me, he shines most effectively. Though he had not the New Covenant ‘*Indwelling*’, he was granted extraordinary grace to live by faith and be greatly used of God. Particularly, he stands with Daniel, in the Old Testament, as prime examples of believers living in a pagan world.

His bio is probably already familiar to most of our readers. Joseph, the great-grandson of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob (Israel) is hated by his brothers (the other eleven children of Israel) for being Jacob’s favorite (as demonstrated by the famous ‘*coat of many colors*’). In addition, he is given, by way of dreams, amazing promises from God about his own exaltation over his family. Many have criticized Joseph for flaunting these dreams. Perhaps, in his youthful exuberance, Joseph wasn’t as tactful as he could have been, but the Bible doesn’t say so. The living God had spoken to him! He is excited to talk about it. These revelations become the anchor of Joseph’s soul; and, ironically, that which his brothers most hated about him eventually became their salvation.

And so, the first thing we will consider about Joseph is that ***the guiding star of his life were the promises of God.*** From these promises (by the grace of God) Joseph derives a faith that cannot be shaken in spite of horrible trials and contrary circumstances. He considered things *unseen* as having more weight than the things which were seen (2Cor 4:17-18). For so much of his life, events seemed to be going in *exactly* the opposite direction of the promises of God. Yet he lives and acts in the light of those promises. Like Daniel after him, he behaves himself wisely, and gains the respect of his pagan superiors - first Potiphar, then the prison keeper, and eventually, Pharaoh. Are we like Joseph? Does *our* faith stand up to the Biblical definition: *...the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen* (Heb 11:1)? Do we live more in light of the promises of God than by the circumstances of the world?

At this point it is important to see that a great part of Joseph's perseverance in faithfulness rested upon ***the truth of God's absolute sovereignty in the unfolding events of his life.*** He trusted that God was *in* all of these adverse circumstances, and though he certainly had his moments of questioning, and perhaps doubt, yet he always returned the certainty that God would orchestrate all these things into the fulfilling of His promises. Though his brothers, by their own choice, did him a terrible wrong, yet Joseph, in the end, declares, *"As for you, you meant it to me for evil, but God meant it for good"* (Gen 50:20). Oh my friends! Have you yet grasped that God's will for you is what unfolds before you day by day. Every good *and* the bad event of each waking hour presents to us the challenge and the opportunity to live it for Him - glorifying Him in it. As we endeavor to do this, He is directing our paths toward the promised end, and nothing shall stay His hand.

Now, with this understanding, we do well to consider that ***Joseph's demeanor and actions were a living witness to the goodness and mercy of God, and the superiority of His ways.*** Again, the parallels with Daniel are remarkable, and reaffirm the message of Joseph's life. Sold as a slave into an ungodly pagan society, he could easily have had a *'holy chip'* on his shoulder, criticizing and condemning nearly everything in sight, 'in the name of the Lord'. Instead, he does excellently in all that he does *as unto the Lord* (Col 3:23). He serves to bless

his superiors and benefit those around him, even when he suffers for it (1Pet 18:20). As he rises to the top in Egypt, he uses his authority and wisdom to bless and save a pagan people. If we will but do likewise, we will find that we have many more opportunities to tell of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, than if we go around like a self-appointed *"Deputy Holy Spirits"* always criticizing and condemning. The world is wicked - that's a given. And we are promised that it will get worse before it gets better. How much time and effort should we waste declaring the obvious, and cursing the darkness? Did our soul's Lover not tell us, *"Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven"* (Matt 5:16)? It is good news that we are sent to bear. *Jesus came not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved* (John 3:17).

Finally, let us observe that ***the most fruitful means of Joseph's service was found in the gift that God bestowed upon him.*** His ability to interpret dreams eventually opened doors for him, through which he was given more responsibility, and greater opportunities to do much good and glorify God. Every one us in Christ has been given spiritual gifts with which we are to serve Him (1Cor 12:7; 1Pet 4:11). It is in the exercise of these gifts that we will find great joy, and we will more greatly discern the reality of the indwelling Spirit. We will also find that our past experiences, 'natural' abilities and talents, and our present circumstances all mesh together with our gifts in Christ. *He has created us in Christ Jesus unto good works, which He has before ordained that we should walk in them* (Eph 2:10).

As we have briefly considered Joseph's life, may our Lord grant us to fully benefit from those who have gone before, who have provided us with such rich examples of *the faithful living in a pagan world.* Much of what we are called to be is counter-intuitive from the world's perspective. But we are not of this world (John 17:16). In the end, it is the world that is upside down, not the Kingdom of Christ; and we know which kingdom shall endure.

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