

GOD IS NOT MOCKED

Joseph: Man Of Faith...Image Of Christ

by Ron Ritchie

Last week I flew to Boise, where I was meeting Dave Roper in order to do a men's retreat with him in McCall, Idaho. On the plane I got acquainted with a woman of about thirty-five who sat next to me. While we were talking I found out that she came from a Catholic background, and I shared with her that I did, too. I asked her if she was still interested in spiritual things, and she said, "No, not at this time."

I said, "You know, it's kind of wonderful, though, the background you have---at least it helps you distinguish right from wrong morally." She agreed with me. She was very humble, gentle, and pleasant.

As she passed me a coke from the flight attendant, I noticed a ring on her finger, and I asked her if it were an engagement ring. She said, "Well, it's kind of like, well actually it's...uh...well, actually I'm living with a man and we're not married yet...When I was a senior in high school I lived with a man who was twelve years older than I. Then I was married for eight years and got divorced. And now I've been living with a very nice man for the last five years. We're not quite sure when to marry, and I think it's probably me...."

I sat there thinking, "I'm not a priest, you don't have to confess *all* your sins!" But I couldn't help noticing that in her heart she wanted to tell somebody something about her life because she knew it wasn't right. She wanted a place where she could confess her sins and have a sense of forgiveness by and reconciliation with the God she had known as a child.

Most of us have a hunger to tell somebody that we went wrong and to find out how we can get right. Who can wash away the guilt and pain and the sorrow we've caused? Who can make us whole again? Who can restore our peace and joy? Sin is devastating. It takes away the joy of life. It robs us of hours of sleep deep in the night as we lie awake thinking over and over again, "If only I had done this...If only I had said that...If they would just call me...." We want to be cleansed, all relationships to be right, all sins to be forgiven.

The Scriptures inform us that "...all of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Some of us are currently doing so. Some of us are in a state of denial, in which we think that our sins will never be exposed and we will never have to give an account to God or to those we have hurt in our natural family or our spiritual family. But as we turn to the life of Joseph, we will discover that God has his ways of holding all of us accountable for our sins, for...

Time does not erase sin

Genesis 42:1-9a

When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you just keep looking at each other?" He continued, "I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die."

Then ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him. So Israel's sons were among those who went to buy grain, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also.

Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the one who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. As soon

as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. "Where do you come from?" he asked.

"From the land of Canaan," they replied, "to buy food."

Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. Then he remembered his dreams about them....

Joseph (1910-1800 BC) was loved by God and his father Jacob (for he was born of Rachel in Jacob's old age). However, he gave a bad report to his father about his brothers' activities. His father also gave him a coat of many colors. And he had two dreams from God in which he saw the family all bow down to him. These things lit a fire of hatred in the hearts of his half-brothers. When Joseph was seventeen they made plans to kill him, but just then some Ishmaelite traders came by their camp; and they sold Joseph as a slave to them for twenty shekels of silver (see Genesis 37). Joseph was carried in chains to Egypt by those traders and resold to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard.

While in Potiphar's house Joseph was unjustly accused of rape by his master's wife and placed in the king's dungeon. But the whole time, "the LORD was with Joseph." At the age of twenty-eight, while he was still in the king's dungeon, he met the king's cupbearer and baker, who had offended their master. One night they each had a dream that troubled them. Joseph was able by the power of God to interpret their dreams, and in the end what he said came true to the letter: The cupbearer was restored to his position of honor, and the baker was killed.

When Joseph was thirty and still in prison, Pharaoh had two dreams that depressed him, and failing to find any interpretation from his wise men, he was informed by the absentminded cupbearer that Joseph was the man he needed. The Lord gave Joseph spiritual insight to see that Pharaoh's dreams were a foreshadow of seven years of abundance and seven years of famine for Egypt and the surrounding nations. Then Joseph the prisoner spoke out with the voice of a prophet and showed Pharaoh how he should administer the land for the next fourteen years so his people would survive the famine.

Pharaoh saw which Pharaoh saw as "a divine spirit" in Joseph (see 41:38) and made him second in command over all the land and over all the preparations needed to survive the famine. Joseph was free at last! And God was going to continue to keep his promise to Abraham that out of his "seed" he would offer salvation and blessings to the nations. Joseph was of that spiritual seed, a man of faith and an image of Christ.

As the story opens in chapter 42, the seven fat cows of Pharaoh's dream were now being eaten up by the seven bony cows. The famine had not only begun, but it was affecting the land of Israel. The year was 1863 BC, and Joseph was thirty-seven years old, serving King Amenemes I-IV or Senwosret 1-111 in the Strong Middle Kingdom (1990-1775 BC). Jacob and his family also felt the pain of the famine, and in time the old patriarch gave instructions to his ten sons that it was time to stop "looking at each other" and get up and go to Egypt to buy some grain for the family. Jacob was still feeling the loss of his beloved son Joseph, so he kept his last son Benjamin at home with him. This would be the first of three trips to Egypt that the brothers would take, each more emotional than the last.

One day while Joseph was administering the distribution of grain to those who were able to buy it, Egyptians as well as foreigners, who should appear in line bowing before him but his ten brothers! He recognized them immediately, but they didn't recognize him. So Joseph acted like a stranger toward them, and I'm sure his heart was pounding. After all, the last time he had seen them some twenty years earlier, their faces had been filled with hatred and jealousy as they tore his beautiful coat off of him and threw him into a dry cistern, then within hours lifted him out and sold him to the Ishmaelite slave traders. He could still remember them watching and mocking him as those slave traders put his neck in irons and his legs in chains (see Psalm 105:16-22). He could still hear the ring of the twenty shekels of silver dropping into his brothers' hands. He could still feel the fear in his own heart as he was pulled away from his brothers by the impassive slave traders, and the overwhelming sense of absolute helplessness and hopelessness that followed. He who had been so greatly loved by his father, then so greatly hated by his brothers, had been led into the slave market of Cairo, Egypt. How dark the night of his heart had become!

But now more than twenty years later, those half-brothers were unknowingly bowing before him, who was second only to Pharaoh in all Egypt. Now the tables were turned. In his position was authority, in his presence was honor and glory, and in his hands was the power of life and death. And he remembered the two dreams that God had given him as a young boy: "We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it" (Genesis 37:7). This dream was about to be fulfilled. But Joseph's second dream would not be filled until the end times (see Revelation 12): "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me" (37:9).

What a moment for Joseph. He needed to be careful, for he had no idea whether his brothers' hearts of hatred toward him had changed. So he began the conversation on a harsh note in order to test them.

Suddenly it was judgment time. As Joseph sat in his position of power and authority before his brothers and the world of his day, so Jesus is now and will be seen as the ruler of the world in the days to come. Some nine hundred years after Joseph's time King David would write about the coming Messiah (Psalm 110:1-2):

"The LORD says to my Lord:
'Sit at My right hand,
Until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.'
The LORD will stretch forth Thy strong scepter from Zion, saying,
'Rule in the midst of Thine enemies.'"

Jesus himself told the Pharisees he was the fulfillment of this prophecy (see Matthew 22:44f). After Jesus' death and resurrection, Peter told the Jews that Jesus was the fulfillment of this prophecy (see Acts 2:34-35). Then the writer to the Hebrews would nail the same truth home (see Hebrews 1:8-9). This prophecy will be totally fulfilled when Jesus comes again and sets up his kingdom on earth in Jerusalem, and all the nations will come to him and bow before him. "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep [the righteous] from the goats [the unrighteous]...And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matthew 25:31-32, 46).

All must give an account for their lives to God now or one day, in one of seven judgments. One is the judgment at the cross. "...All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). But God sent his Son into the world to die for all our sins. The one who believes in Christ as their Lord and Savior has been brought to court, sentenced to death, and executed in the person of their Substitute, Jesus (see Galatians 3:13).

Second, there is the judgment we impose on ourselves of confessing our sins to God in order to be cleansed (1John 1:9).

Third, God moves in among his spiritual children who refuse to confess their sins and gives them divine correction and chastisement (see 1 Corinthians 11:30-32).

Fourth, the judgment seat of Christ will have to do with a believer's works and services and will include rewards or loss of rewards (see 2 Corinthians 5:10).

Then for the world, there will be first the judgment of the nations. This will occur, as we saw above, at the second coming of Jesus, when he sets up his kingdom on earth; then he will deal with the nations based on the way they treated Israel.

This will be followed by the judgment of Israel before they are restored in the millennial kingdom (see Matthew 25:1-13).

And finally there will be the white throne judgment, in which all the unbelievers from all the generations will have to appear before God, and if their name is not found in "the book of life," they will be cast into the lake of

fire, which is called "the second death" (see Revelation 20:11-15). As the old Southern Baptist preacher Robert Lee used to say, there will be "pay day someday."

Time doesn't erase sin, for only Jesus can erase sin and give a believer a new heart filled with righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Wearing a mask doesn't erase sin

Genesis 42:9b-17

...And [Joseph] said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected."

"No, my lord," they answered. "Your servants have come to buy food. We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies."

"No!" he said to them. "You have come to see where our land is unprotected."

But they replied, "Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more."

Joseph said to them, "It is just as I told you: You are spies! And this is how you will be tested: As surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of your number to get your brother; the rest of you will be kept in prison, so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth. If you are not, then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!" And he put them all in custody for three days.

As Joseph remembered his dreams about his brothers, he realized that the first dream would not be completely fulfilled unless all the sons including young Benjamin and his father Jacob came before him in Egypt. So Joseph devised a plan to get the whole family together. Egypt in those days feared the stronger nations of the Hittites and Assyria, and it would only be natural for the Egyptian army to always be on the alert for spies who were looking for the weaknesses of this nation. So he accused the ten brothers of spying on Egypt.

They had a strange reply, reflecting their responsibility for the apparent death of Joseph twenty years earlier: "Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more." This sounds like a story that they had probably told to many in the days after the untimely "death" of their younger brother. And then they put on their masks of innocence and honesty and said, "Sir, we are honest men; spies don't travel in groups, especially not in groups made up of all brothers."

But Joseph said, "If you ever want to leave the land of Egypt, you need to select from among yourselves one who will go home and bring this younger brother Benjamin back here to prove you are not lying." He knew that if they had gotten rid of him, they might have done the same to Benjamin, since he was his full-blooded brother and the other favorite son of their father Jacob. Then he placed them in prison for three days to think about their position and to let them taste the life he had had to experience for several years.

Wearing a mask may enable us to fool everyone else, but not Jesus. At the Last Supper he said to all the disciples, "Truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me." The disciples were at a loss to know who it was. Peter asked him, and Jesus said, "That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him." And then he gave it to Judas. "And after the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Jesus therefore said to him, 'What you do, do quickly.'" (John 13:21-27; see also 28-29.)

All must give an account to God, if not today then one day. Neither time nor wearing mask will erase sin, for...

God is not mocked

Genesis 42:18-24

On the third day, Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God: If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households. But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die." This they proceeded to do.

They said to one another, "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us."

Reuben replied, "Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood." They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter.

He turned away from them and began to weep, but then turned back and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes.

Joseph entered the prison and gave a witness to his brothers that he was a worshipper of the one and only true God, *Yahweh*. (It must have been a surprise to find a top-ranking Egyptian believing in *Elohiym* the Supreme God.) He realized that if he kept nine of the brothers in prison while one went back to Canaan and then returned to Egypt with Benjamin, much time would be lost and some of his family might starve to death in the process. So he offered to send all but one brother back to Canaan with grain, with the threat of death hanging over the head of that one, should they not come back.

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Here these brothers were some twenty years after they had sold Joseph into slavery, and all ten with one voice of grief cried out with the full knowledge that finally God had caught up with them for their sin against their brother so long ago. The sin was repressed but not forgotten by all of them, and not forgiven. "Surely, we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us."

Now we get new insight into that horrible day back in Canaan when Joseph, the much beloved and favorite son of Jacob, was sold into slavery. It was not just a simple heartless transaction. They surely must have seen his face over again hundreds of times in their minds as they lay on their beds, and heard his voice crying out in bewilderment and panic: "Don't kill me! Don't sell me! What have I done to deserve death? Please, for God's sake, for our father's sake, don't do this!" But in spite of his pleading, they went ahead and sold him. They mistakenly thought that they had gotten away with their crime against their brother Joseph.

But now they saw their sin. Joseph was trying to get them not only to see their sin but to repent, which would be followed by a joyful reconciliation. "For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life" (Galatians 6:8).

Reuben, the first-born of Jacob and Leah, self-righteously said, "Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood." For they thought they had killed him indirectly by selling him to the Ishmaelites. God had spoken to Noah a universal spiritual principle (Genesis 9:5):

"Whoever sheds man's blood,
By man his blood shall be shed,
For in the image of God
He made man."

The brothers were openly reviewing their sin against Joseph, thinking that he didn't understand their Hebrew language (and it may be true that he had forgotten much of it, but as they spoke in front of him he understood

every word through his interpreter). At that moment Joseph had to turn away from them, for he saw that they really did believe in God and understood the full consequences of their sin, that now it was time for them to be held accountable before God. He wept because he saw that these hard-hearted half-brothers were beginning to repent of their twenty-year-old sin against him. And they also were coming to the point of realizing that they could not escape the judgment of the ever-present *Yahweh*. Reconciliation was ultimately possible! Joseph then turned back to them and told them that he would keep Simeon in jail while they went back to get Benjamin. I am sure that he had Simeon bound in exactly the same way he himself had been bound before their eyes twenty years earlier, and led him away.

Joseph was again like our Lord Jesus, invisible but always present. And as he wept over his brothers and their sin, so Jesus would one day weep over Jerusalem: "If you had known, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation." (Luke 19:41-44.)

All must give an account to God, if not today then one day. Neither time nor wearing a mask will erase sin, for God is not mocked. But if we are willing to confess our sins, he is rich in mercy toward us (see Ephesians 2:4).

A token of mercy

Genesis 42:25-38

Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to put each man's silver back in his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. After this was done for them, they loaded their grain on their donkeys and left.

At the place where they stopped for the night one of them opened his sack to get feed for his donkey, and he saw his silver in the mouth of his sack. "My silver has been returned," he said to his brothers. "Here it is in my sack."

Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, "What is this that God has done to us?"

When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them. They said, "The man who is lord over the land spoke harshly to us and treated us as though we were spying on the land. But we said to him, 'We are honest men; we are not spies. We were twelve brothers, sons of one father. One is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in Canaan.'

"Then the man who is lord over the land said to us, 'This is how I will know whether you are honest men: Leave one of your brothers here with me, and take food for your starving households and go. But bring your youngest brother to me so I will know that you are not spies but honest men. Then I will give your brother back to you, and you can trade in the land.'"

As they were emptying their sacks, there in each man's sack was his pouch of silver! When they and their father saw the money pouches, they were frightened. Their father Jacob said to them, "You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me!"

Then Reuben said to his father, "You may put both of my sons to death if I do not bring him back to you. Entrust him to my care, and I will bring him back."

But Jacob said, "My son will not go down there with you; his brother is dead and he is the

only one left. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow."

Leaving Simeon in jail, Joseph had their bags filled with grain, then had the silver they had used to pay for the grain hidden within the bags, and sent them home. In the course of the trip one of the men opened his grain to feed his donkey and found the silver. He showed it to the other brothers, and "their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, 'What is this God has done to us?'" They were saying in effect, "This whole trip is of God---now we have to give an account for the way we treated Joseph! First we are accused of being spies, then we have to leave our brother in jail as security and somehow come back with Benjamin, and now we find our silver in our bags and we will be accused of being thieves...Somehow God is behind all these events and we are being set up for the judgment we really deserve." Joseph's placing their silver back in the bags is part of the answer to their question, "What is this God has done to us?" They had meant all they did to Joseph for evil, but God meant it for good (see 50:20).

Once they returned home, they all told their story to their father Jacob, especially the fact that this Egyptian official thought they were spies, so they had had to leave their brother Simeon in prison as security that they would come back with Benjamin and thus prove they were not spies. But the brothers were trapped by their past. They couldn't tell their father the whole story of what they had done with Joseph some twenty years earlier, nor the death threat on their lives.

They had told Joseph, the governor of Egypt, "Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more." They now said to their father that they had told the governor, "We were twelve brothers, sons of one father. One is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in Canaan." The memory of what they had done to their brother Joseph was beginning to rub on their consciences.

Then they emptied their sacks of grain, and each man found his silver returned. Then Jacob and his sons became fearful and thought it was a trick. Jacob said, "And now you want me to give you my son Benjamin, having already lost Joseph to death and Simeon as a ransom in Egypt? You have deprived me of my children! Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me! I am helpless, between a rock and a hard place. We need the grain or we will all die, but as it is I am losing my sons slowly one by one." Jacob was also losing the greater picture and the promise of the Abrahamic covenant that had been repeated to him in the dream from God when he was on the way to his uncle Laban's home in Syria as a youth.

Reuben, the spokesman, said, " Father, let me take Benjamin with us, and if I don't return with him you can kill my own two sons. Entrust him to my care." But we know Jacob could not trust Reuben, for years earlier Reuben had violated his father's bed by having sexual intercourse with his concubine Bilhah (see Genesis 35:22; 49:3-4). Jacob responded, "No! My last son Benjamin will not go to Egypt with you, for if I should lose him like I lost Joseph, I would go to my grave with deep sorrow." Meanwhile, this decision left Simeon rotting in an Egyptian jail. These brothers were being tested to see if they would abandon Simeon as they had abandoned Joseph when he was seventeen.

But behind all this tension at home was Joseph back in Egypt with a heart of mercy toward his brothers, in the Spirit of the Christ who was to come. For Christ told his disciples, "...Love your enemies, and do good...and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6:35-36.)

All of us have sinned against God and each other sometime in the past, and some of us are doing so currently. Some of us are in a state of denial, in which we think that our sins will never be exposed and we will never have to give an account to God or to those we have hurt. But neither time nor wearing a mask will erase sin, for God is not mocked. Some of us have been convicted by the Holy Spirit and have repented of our sins against God and others, and we have found that as we are willing to confess our sins, he is rich in mercy toward us. Joseph reflected the image of Christ our Lord, who is more than willing to forgive us if we will but confess our sins to him and then be willing to go to those we have sinned against and ask for their forgiveness. Then we can all enter into the joy of reconciliation with our Lord Jesus and our brothers and sisters.

My new friend from the plane trip is priceless in the sight of God, but at this moment she is still accountable to Him for her sins. On the other hand, for those of us who have confessed Jesus as our Lord (Romans 10:9-10) our sins are forgiven. A door is now open to go before Him to confess our sins daily (1John 1:9). As a result of our confession, our Lord fills our hearts with wholesomeness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit without the fear of judgment, guilt, or condemnation (Roman 8:1).

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