

LIFE IS IN THE SON

Joseph: Man Of Faith...Image Of Christ

by Ron Ritchie

All of us know about physical famines, because of either worldwide news service or personal experience. We have heard about them all our lives, and more recently we have seen the horrible effects they have had on the land and the people in such countries as Sudan and Ethiopia. The Jews understood that when they fell into sin against God, he would at times symbolically allow a physical famine to come upon their land as a picture that he was withdrawing his life and provision until they confessed their sin and came back into fellowship with him. God told the prophet Amos in the eighth century BC,

"Behold, days are coming...
When I will send a famine on the land,
Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water,
But rather for hearing the words of the LORD.

And people will stagger from sea to sea,
And from the north even to the east;
They will go to and fro to seek the word of the LORD,
But they will not find it."
(Amos 8:11-12.)

These are not only distant words from ancient days, but they define this very moment in many of our lives and the lives of others within our community and nation and world. As men and women water down and finally forsake the word of God, they will find themselves suffering more and more a famine of soul and spirit.

Later when Israel was in another spiritual famine, the Lord told his people through his prophet Micah (742-876 BC) that when they asked out of repentant hearts,

"With what shall I come before the LORD
And bow myself before the God on high?
Shall I come to him with burnt offerings...
...calves?
...thousands of rams...
...ten thousand rivers of oil?
...my firstborn...
...for the sin of my soul?"

the prophet was to answer,

"He has told you, O man, what is good;
And what does the LORD require of you
But to do justice and to love kindness,
And to walk humbly with your God?"
(Micah 6:6-8.)

Those of us who have placed our faith in Jesus Christ have become the recipients of eternal life and are called to reach out to those who are still suffering spiritual, emotional, and physical famine and offer them the bread and water of life: Jesus Christ, the son of the living God. On the night before Jesus was crucified for the sin of

the world, he said to his Father, "And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3). Life is only in the Son of God, and we will see this symbolized in the life of Joseph, for in the midst of a severe physical famine Joseph would provide grain for the hungry to save many lives.

As you recall, Joseph had interpreted Pharaoh's two dreams of impending famine. And because Pharaoh saw that Joseph was filled with the spirit of *Yahweh* (see Genesis 41:38), he freed him from jail and promoted him to the positions of both the second in command over all Egypt and the secretary of agriculture in order to prepare the nation to survive the coming famine (see Genesis 41). When the famine arrived it affected not only the Egyptians but the surrounding nations including Canaan, where Joseph's father Jacob and his family lived. This famine prompted Jacob to send all his sons except his beloved young Benjamin down to Egypt to buy grain.

Once the brothers arrived in Egypt, they came face-to-face with Joseph for the first time in twenty years. They didn't recognize him, but Joseph recognized them, and at the same time he realized that Benjamin was missing. So he made a plan to bring all his brothers to Egypt: He accused them of spying, imprisoned Simeon as security, and sent the other nine home to bring back Benjamin. To a man the brothers all understood that this terrible turn of events was designed by the hand of God, who holds all men accountable. "Surely we are being punished because of our brother [whom they thought had been killed years ago]. 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" (42:21). They arrived back at home and told their father about all that had happened to them, including the bad news that Simeon was in jail and would stay there until they came back with Benjamin. Jacob was heartbroken and refused to let that happen, so Simeon remained in prison in Egypt.

In chapter 43, eventually Jacob let Benjamin go to Egypt with his brothers, for they were running out of grain because of this severe famine which was in its second year (see 45:6). Finally after some twenty-two years Joseph met Benjamin, his only full-blooded brother, again. Simeon was released from jail, and Joseph invited them to his home for a meal, at one point breaking down in tears.

In chapter 44 all Joseph's brothers were sent back to Canaan with their bags full of grain, but a holy cup was placed in Benjamin's pack, as well as the silver he had used to purchase grain. After they had traveled just a little way out of town, they were stopped and searched, and the silver cup was found in Benjamin's sack. They were all brought back to Egypt, and they again had to face Joseph, whom they still did not know was their brother. Joseph then pronounced judgment: "Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace" (44:17). At this time Judah, from whom David and then the Messiah would eventually be born (see Genesis 49:8-10), became the spokesman for the brothers. He pleaded with Joseph, reminding him that they had done all that he had asked, even bringing Benjamin with them at the risk of causing the death of their father. "I told my father that I would be fully responsible for Benjamin," he said. "Now if I go back home without Benjamin it will kill my father." Then Judah offered to exchange his own life for Benjamin's.

Life for the people of Egypt and the surrounding nations, including Jacob and his family, was in the hands of Jacob's son Joseph. So because of the work of our sovereign God behind the scenes of history...

The son saved the remnant

Genesis 45:1-15

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

"So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. Now hurry back to my father and say to him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay. You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me---you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.'

"You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly." Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

Joseph was thirty-nine years old in the second year of the famine. Whenever he looked back on the years when he had lived in the warmth of his mother's and father's love, it was only to see how that had been destroyed by the cold hatred of his ten half-brothers who had sold him without mercy to some Midianite slave traders. It had deeply affected him---all those years without his family, and not a word from his father, stepmothers (his own mother having died), or brothers. I'm sure he was tempted to get revenge on his half-brothers. But God was not only at work in the hearts of his brothers; he was at work through them in Joseph's own heart, so that all could experience complete repentance and forgiveness together.

So now as all Joseph's eleven brothers including his only blood brother, Benjamin, stood before him for the first time in twenty-two years, Joseph had everyone leave the room but his brothers. Then he broke down and wept loudly before them, so that even his servants and Pharaoh's servants heard him. All those years of pain, loneliness, fear, injustice, and frustration spilled out in the form of tears before these eleven men who didn't have a clue as to what was happening to him. Finally when he could get some control of himself, he cried out, "*I am Joseph!* I am one of you, although you thought I was dead. I am alive and standing in front of all eleven of you."

Joseph was an image of Jesus in this situation. The two disciples who had seen the risen Lord Jesus on the road to Emmaus returned to Jerusalem to the upper room to tell the Eleven of the amazing event, when "He Himself stood in their midst. But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. And He said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have'" (Luke 24:36-39).

You can well imagine the fear that must have flooded the hearts of Joseph's ten brothers when they heard and then began to grasp the truth behind the words "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!" They surely must have thought, "God is finally about to repay us for our hatred of our brother, and for the lies that we told our father and continued to tell him about his beloved son! Now our little brother is the one to whom we must kneel as in the dreams he told us so long ago. Now is the day of justice---the day we have deeply feared since that horrible day when as one we delivered our brother over to the worst form of death: slavery." As they had handed Joseph over to death, now he had the power to hand all of them over to death.

But Joseph asked them, "Is my dear father still alive?" Then he extended mercy and grace to his brothers with the following words: "...Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here...I know how you are feeling and have felt in the past at times---like me, distressed and angry, although for

different reasons. But time is a wonderful teacher about God, history, dreams, and covenants." He began to review what God had done, for at last he himself could see the hand of the sovereign Lord behind every event leading up the present moment.

"God sent me ahead of you. God knows who I am, he is the one who created me, and he is the one who has gifted me for leadership. Remember, when I was seventeen I told you about two dreams in which you all came and bowed down before me. Well, I certainly didn't know what God was doing then, and neither did our father or any of you. But God knew way back then that this day would come, and since his ways are not our ways and his thoughts are not our thoughts, we simply need to place our faith in him day by day. It has been difficult for me, as I am sure it has been for you all these years, but God was working out a wonderful plan of redemption for all of us. I would not have planned it this way, but in the end it is all working out for his honor and glory and for our blessing [see Psalm 105:17].

"God sent me ahead of you to preserve a remnant. God allowed it to happen in such a way that I would have the time, in a variety of difficult situations, to develop my gift of leadership, with the purpose in mind of saving the lives of the people of Egypt and the surrounding nations and preserving a remnant of Jewish people, because of the covenant he made with our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." (Later after Jacob dies, Joseph will tell his brothers, who feared him and who would throw themselves down in front of him as slaves (in fulfillment of the dream he had had as a youth), "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." [Genesis 50:19-20.]

Joseph continued, "God made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household, and ruler of all Egypt. Now go back home and bring my father here. Tell my father all the good news in his old age: (1) God has sent me here. (2) God has made me lord of all Egypt. (3) Come down to me; don't delay. (4) You shall live in Goshen, near me---you, your children, your grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. (5) I will provide for you over the next five years of famine. (6) Benjamin can see that it is really me."

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brothers to dwell together in unity."
(Psalm 133:1.)

Joseph then threw his arms around Benjamin and wept again for the fourth time. And then he kissed all his brothers and wept again.

Joseph represented life to the remnant God wanted to save. In this he was an image of Christ. Life is in the Son, and Jesus told his disciples as well as the crowds who were following him and who were experiencing a famine of their souls and spirits, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst...For this is the will of My Father, that every one who beholds the Son, and believes in Him, may have eternal life..." (John 6:35, 40).

As most of you know, we have several men's breakfasts each week in this community and right here in this building. Last week at the Road Crew breakfast, I had the privilege of meeting a new man who had been coming for two or three weeks. As we were breaking up to go to work, I again spoke with him outside. I found out he was the husband of a woman he deeply loved, and the father of three young girls. In the course of our conversation I began to realize that he was suffering from the consequences of a spiritual famine. We continued our conversation in my office, and I soon discovered that this man was hungering to know God and to understand his word, but that he had never established a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. When I invited him to ask Jesus to become his Lord and Savior, it was as if the heavens opened up and the rain of life, Jesus himself, poured into his heart and soul. His spiritual famine ended last Wednesday at 8:20 am. He showed up at the men's retreat this weekend, and I had the privilege of getting him a new Bible so he could grow in his new relationship with Jesus. This story is just beginning!

Life is in the son because...

The son was alive!

Genesis 45:16-28

When the news reached Pharaoh's palace that Joseph's brothers had come, Pharaoh and all his officials were pleased. Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Tell your brothers, 'Do this: Load your animals and return to the land of Canaan, and bring your father and your families back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you can enjoy the fat of the land.'

"You are also directed to tell them, 'Do this: Take some carts from Egypt for your children and your wives, and get your father and come. Never mind about your belongings, because the best of all Egypt will be yours.'"

So the sons of Israel did this. Joseph gave them carts, as Pharaoh had commanded, and he also gave them provisions for their journey. To each of them he gave new clothing, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five sets of clothes. And this is what he sent to his father: ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and other provisions for his journey. Then he sent his brothers away, and as they were leaving he said to them, "Don't quarrel on the way!"

So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. They told him, "Joseph is still alive! In fact, he is ruler of all Egypt." Jacob was stunned; he did not believe them. But when they told him everything Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. And Israel said, "I'm convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die."

Pharaoh was thrilled at the news of Joseph's reunion with his brothers. He and Joseph had a meeting, and he told Joseph to tell his brothers to take some carts from Egypt and go back to Canaan, get his father and all their family, and bring them all back to Egypt; and he would give them the best of the land. When it rains it pours: Joseph obeyed his master and gave his brothers carts and provisions for the two-hundred-mile journey back to Hebron. He sent word with them inviting Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons in all (see Acts 7:14). They were to use the carts to bring their family members back to Egypt, with the great news that they need not over-pack, for the best of everything would be waiting for them once they returned. It was an amazing turn of events for the guilt-ridden and fearful brothers. Then Joseph (he who had been sold for twenty shekels) singled out Benjamin and gave him three hundred shekels of silver and five sets of clothes. He provided clothing for his aged and beloved father, and ten donkeys, bread, and other provisions for his journey to Egypt. They loaded up and started to move out of town toward home, Joseph's last word ringing in their ears: "Don't quarrel on the way!"

What a homecoming this must have been. Here was the aged father hoping against hope that his beloved Benjamin would return without harm and that the brothers would have the food they all needed. Finally on the horizon other members of the family saw the caravan coming, and everyone started walking out to meet them. They hugged and kissed, and there was great joy in the brothers' hearts and eyes. The first one they really wanted to see was Jacob their father. And the news was all good: "Father, Father, Joseph is still alive! And not only alive, but he is ruler of all of Egypt!" (We must assume that finally the brothers confessed to their father their horrible sins of jealousy and hatred that had led them to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites, as well as their lifestyle of lying about his death over the previous twenty-two years.) Jacob was stunned, and at first he did not believe them. But after a time, seeing the evidence of the carts filled with goods, he not only believed but was willing to leave Canaan and journey to Egypt to see Joseph before he died.

Joseph was an image of Christ in two ways here. First, Jesus had said to his disciples on the night he was betrayed, "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going.' Thomas said to Him, 'Lord we do not know where You are going; how do we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the

Father, but through Me" (John 14:1-6).

Second, three days after our Lord's death on the cross for our sins and his burial in a borrowed tomb, some women went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body with incense. There they met two angels who said to them, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again" (Luke 24:5-7).

Because the son was alive, the remnant was preserved and...

A nation was about to be born

Genesis 46:1-7

So Israel set out with all that was his, and when he reached Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.

And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said, "Jacob! Jacob!"

"Here I am," he replied.

"I am God, the God of your father," he said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes."

Then Jacob left Beersheba, and Israel's sons took their father Jacob and their children and their wives in the carts that Pharaoh had sent to transport him. They also took with them their livestock and the possessions they had acquired in Canaan, and Jacob and all his offspring went to Egypt. He took with him to Egypt his sons and grandsons and his daughters and granddaughters---all his offspring.

This was the third time God had appeared to Jacob or Israel (remember, Jacob's name had been changed to Israel by God) in a dream. Because of God's direction, Jacob gathered all his family, seventy-five people, and went down to Egypt. They would stay for four hundred years before God provided the great deliverer Moses to take them out this land and into the land promised to Abraham. "Jacob lived as an alien in the land of Ham...." (Psalm 105:23). "Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died" (Acts 7:15).

As Joseph was God's instrument to build the nation of Israel, so Jesus was God's instrument to build his church. Jesus gathered his disciples together and asked them who the people thought he was. They said some thought he was John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. "And Simon Peter answered and said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it" (Matthew 16:13-20).

Those of us who have placed our faith in Jesus Christ have become the recipients of eternal life and are called upon to reach out to those who are still suffering spiritual, emotional, and physical famine and offer them the Bread and Water of life. His name is Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

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