

Faith – The Pathway To True Greatness

We live in an era in which there seems to be a dearth of true greatness.

Where are the modern-day Winston Churchills of this world?

Where are the modern-day John Wesleys?

Instead we have, by and large, the pitiful sight of small people scrambling for power and attention.

Isaiah 3:4-5 [Amplified Bible] *“I will make boys their princes, and with childishness shall they rule over them, with outrage instead of justice. And the people shall be oppressed every one by another, and everyone by his neighbour. The child shall behave himself proudly and with insolence against the old man, and the lowborn against the honourable person of rank.”*

A hard but very revealing prophecy against a godless Israel, which reflects the generation in which we live.

Faith is partly designed to make us great

This greatness may **not** be acknowledged by society but is in the eyes of our Creator God.

Achieving faith is the path that leads to achieving this greatness in the eyes of God.

Hebrews 2:9-10 [NIV] *“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. **In bringing many sons to glory**, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.”*

We are being prepared by God to be glorified.

Isaiah 42:8 [NIV] *“I am the LORD; that is my name! I will **not** give my glory to another or my praise to idols.”*

God does **not** share His Sovereign Glory with any other but He does want to exalt us as His created children.

1 Peter 5:6 [NIV] *“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.”*

God exalts us on this condition of our humbling ourselves before Him, and the exaltation will only come when we have been fully prepared to accept it in an acceptable attitude.

Our being humble or humbled by God is the first step towards that acceptable attitude of mind.

Why is this study important?

- 1 This study will show us how we can attain true greatness.
- 2 This study will show us that true greatness comes to us by following God, listening to Him and obeying Him.
- 3 This study will show that true greatness is graciousness.

4 This study will show we do **not** achieve true greatness by trying to be great, but “*by walking in the light*”.

We can see this pathway to true greatness in the life of Joseph as a prime example of greatness recorded in God’s Word.

Joseph’s life was far from great at its beginning.

Genesis 37:3 [NIV] “*Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him.*”

Joseph was treated like a first-born by Israel and spoiled.

Joseph’s brothers were made jealous by his self-opinionated attitude, flaunting his gift of Dream Interpretation.

In fact Joseph did everything wrong insofar as creating good relationships with his brothers.

God had earmarked Joseph for greatness but he had to be sorted out by God before he could be used by God in any great way.

Don’t we all fit into such a situation, needing dramatic changes to be made before we are fit vehicles for God to use?

Overnight Joseph’s life changed from “*riches to rags*”, the centre of attention to a slave.

Genesis 39:2 [NIV] “*The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.*”

In spite of all signs and conditions saying the opposite, God was still with Joseph.

After a while as a slave in Egypt, Joseph’s potential was recognised by his Egyptian master and he was given the job of steward of the household.

God then allowed Joseph to be tried in three ways.

a) Sexual temptation

Genesis 39:7-9 [NIV] “*and after a while his master’s wife took notice of Joseph and said, “Come to bed with me!” But he refused. “With me in charge,” he told her, “my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No-one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?”*”

Joseph’s fear of God brought him through this test with “*flying colours*”.

b) Punished for doing the right thing

Genesis 39:16-20 [NIV] “*She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story: “That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.” When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, “This is how your slave treated me,” he burned with anger. Joseph’s master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined.*”

As so often in this society we are punished by it for obedience to God.

Joseph had much to feel bitter about.

- 1) His brothers' treatment of him.
- 2) Being punished as result of false accusations.
- 3) For God allowing all this to happen.

c) Having to confront his bitterness and overcoming it

1 Peter 3:14 [NIV] *“But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.”*

God cannot bless us unless we eradicate all bitterness from our lives.

Ephesians 4:30-31 [NIV] *“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. **Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.**”*

Bitterness is number one on the list of attitudes that prevent the Holy Spirit from being active in our lives.

1 Peter 3:17 [NIV] *“It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”*

The greater the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the greater the suffering in our lives. And often the greater the suffering in our lives, devoid of bitterness, the greater the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Genesis 40:14-15 [NIV] *“But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. For I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon.”*

Genesis 41:1 [NIV] *“When two full years had passed...”*

Joseph tried to shorten his trial of suffering.

But it didn't work, there is no use in trying to “*twist God’s Arm*”, such an attitude often delays God’s Plan for our lives.

Joseph had to get rid of all bitterness before God could use him.

Prison humbled Joseph and he became a completely different person by being humbled.

1 Corinthians 13:5 [NIV] *“It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, **it keeps no record of wrongs.**”*

Joseph learnt how to love as God loves, the proof of this was in the way he was gracious towards his brothers.

Greatness is graciousness

Proofs that Joseph had totally forgiven his brothers and had eradicated bitterness from his life.

1 Joseph let nobody know what hurt his brothers had done to him

Genesis 45:1 [NIV] *“Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, “Make everyone leave my presence!” So there was no-one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers.”*

Joseph didn't want anyone to know what his brothers had done, so that his brothers would have credibility and respect in the eyes of the Egyptians.

Proverbs 10:12 [King James] *“Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.”*

This is what we are commanded to do.

Ephesians 4:32 [NIV] *“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”*

This is the way God deals with us.

2 Joseph did not want his brothers to fear he would take revenge on them

Genesis 45:3-4 [NIV] *“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!”*

Joseph sought to dispel their fear, he wanted to comfort them.

Psalm 103:8-10 [NIV] *“The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbour his anger for ever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.”*

God doesn't seek revenge, but repentance and reconciliation.

3 Joseph did NOT want his brothers to hold on to their guilt

Genesis 45:5 [NIV] *“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.”*

Joseph wanted them to know he had really forgiven them and desired to bond with them as loving brothers.

Isaiah 43:25 [NIV] *“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”*

God's desire is to cover the past with the sacrificial blood of His Son and face the future together without the dividing wall of guilt between us.

4 Joseph allowed his brothers to “save face”

Genesis 45:8 [NIV] *“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.”*

Joseph wanted them to see the hand of God in what they had done.

God can use even our past sins now confessed and forgiven, sins for good.

1 Corinthians 13:5-7 [Amplified Bible] *“Love does not insist on its own rights ... it takes no account of the evil done to it, it pays no attention to a suffered wrong ... love is ever ready to believe the best of every person, its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances...”*

5 Joseph protected his brothers from having to admit their sin to even their own family

Genesis 45:9-13 [NIV] *“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 honour accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly.”*

The way they were to explain what had happened **excluded their having to confess their sin to their father** which would have caused pain and distrust in their relationship.

6 Joseph’s total forgiveness of his brothers’ sins was for life

Genesis 50:15-21 [NIV] *“When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?” So they sent word to Joseph, saying, “Your father left these instructions before he died: ‘This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.” When their message came to him, Joseph wept. His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. “We are your slaves,” they said. But Joseph said to them, “**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. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.”*

There was no bitter thought in Joseph’s mind nor any desire for revenge.

What was the secret of Joseph’s greatness, his compassion and mercy?

Genesis 50:25 [NIV] *“And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place.”*

Joseph’s heart was **not** in Egypt but in the Promised Land and that is where he wanted his bones to be buried to await his resurrection.

Hebrews 11:22 [NIV] *“By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.”*

It was through Joseph’s faith in God’s promises that he had his sight and desires focused on the future that God had promised him through the promises made to Abraham.

Galatians 3:6-7 [NIV] *“Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.”*

We too when we in faith believe the promises God has made can be spiritual children of Abraham.

We too through such faith in God can follow the same path to greatness in the eyes of God.