

Perhaps *more than any other Old Testament figure, the life of Joseph typifies the life of Christ*. What I mean by that ... is that certain aspects of Joseph’s life ... and of his character ... *bear a striking resemblance* to the life of Christ. This is very intentional on God’s part. God the Holy Spirit – as the primary author of Scripture – intended for us to see aspects of the coming Christ in many of the persons, names, places, actions, and events of the Old Testament. Among the patriarchs, the priests, the prophets, the kings, and the judges – whose stories are told in the pages of the Old Testament – many of them were intended to foreshadow Christ in some way. The Spirit purposely wanted to teach us through these *Christ-types* what kind of Savior Christ would be when He set foot upon this earth. These “*types*” from the Old Testament that were made to resemble Christ were to give the faithful a glimpse into what the Messiah would be like when He appeared ... *so that He could be identified and embraced by faith* ... when He finally came to live among His people.

Here is an example of a **Christ-type**. We typically think of Moses as a lawgiver and judge. But in very many respects Moses is a Christ-type. *Never is Moses more like Christ than when he intercedes for the people* after they sin grievously against God in the wilderness of Sinai. God had wanted to destroy them in that moment. But Moses begged God ... instead ... to take his life ... if this would allow God to spare his people from punishment. Here, *Moses’ willingness to offer himself up to God in place of his people* immediately calls to mind the same sacrificial mindset that was in Christ Jesus our Lord. This is what *Christ-types* do in the Old Testament. *They bring focused attention to some aspect of the person and work of our Redeemer*. And among those, none stands out as a type of Christ more than Joseph ... the son of Jacob. The same Jacob who was father to the twelve tribes of Israel.

What makes Joseph such an appealing Christ-figure? It’s uniquely Joseph’s innocence ... and to be more specific ... *Joseph’s innocence in the face of unjust suffering* ... that makes him such an appealing Christ-figure! In this respect Joseph is certainly unique among all of the other great personalities of the Bible. In every other case the sinful weaknesses and the moral failings of both patriarchs and prophets alike ... ***really stand out*** ... in glaring fashion for all to see. *To prevent the faithful from falling into some form of hero worship* ... the Spirit purposely chose to reveal the personal flaws and failures of these great men and women of faith. God the Holy Spirit did this to keep our biblical heroes from seeming so “larger-than-life” that we couldn’t identify with them. What we see instead is their humble reliance upon God ... *along with a powerful reminder that their successes and their victories were not their own*. For God alone by His grace is the One who gave them all of their victories and successes!

Joseph however is a unique case. We know that Joseph was sinful since Joseph was a son of Adam. ***And yet Joseph's sins aren't ever mentioned or discussed in this biblical narrative.*** Again ... this is very unlike the Holy Spirit who isn't afraid to "air the dirty laundry" of all the rest of the patriarchs. Now someone will counter by saying that Joseph's sins do get mentioned. They infer from the text that Joseph must've flaunted his "most-highly-favored-son status" in order to have provoked such a jealous rage response from his brothers. If you go with this interpretation, then Joseph can be blamed for bringing all of his suffering down upon himself. Yet if this had been the case, wouldn't Joseph have later confessed his sins? Wouldn't Joseph later have told the reader about how he had at first intended evil by making his brothers jealous, yet how God had brought about good from it? Instead Joseph lays the blame upon his brothers ... even as he is forgiving them, when he tells them, "You intended it for evil, but God intended it for good!" However ***nowhere is Joseph ever called out for having done anything wrong.***

The Apostle Peter speaking with full divine authority from the Holy Spirit writes, "For what credit is it if ... when you sin and are beaten for it ... you endure? But if you do good and suffer for it ... this is a gracious thing in the sight of God" [1 Pet. 2:20] If Joseph's story is nothing more than the story of an insufferable braggart who gets what he deserves from his brothers for all of his bragging, then his story is so familiar – what with all the other braggarts in this world -- that it's not worth writing about. But you can infer just as easily from the biblical text that ***Joseph very innocently and matter-of-factly conveyed to his brothers only what God had communicated to him in his dream*** ... that Joseph's brothers would bow to him and serve him. They bear the responsibility. Joseph's brothers -- according to the commandment – had the responsibility of loving and supporting their little brother. They should have been happy that the Lord had chosen him ... not jealous. ***We miss an important Christological connection if we fail to see that Joseph was unjustly robbed of his exalted place and position within his family.***

Joseph's own innocent sufferings which precede his rise to glory cannot help but remind us of the innocent bitter sufferings and death of Jesus Christ our Lord ... and the glories that would follow His own suffering. The Spirit wanted the reader of the book of Genesis to make these Christological connections between the path of suffering that Joseph's life took ahead of his rise to glory ... and the path of suffering that would take Christ to the cross before His rising to glory. The pattern for Joseph's life certainly lines up with what our Lord taught, when He said, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, AND WHOEVER HUMBLER HIMSELF WILL BE EXALTED" [Matt. 23:12]. As Joseph's life unfolds we see how God clearly humbles Joseph through the events of his life. That being said, God wasn't punishing Joseph when his brothers betrayed him and sold him into slavery. God had not forsaken Joseph when he spent those long years in prison. Nor had God abandoned Joseph when Potiphar's wife made up her allegations of sexual misconduct against Joseph. However it was only by his first suffering these great indignities ... that God strategically put Joseph in the perfect position for God to exalt Joseph to the highest place in Pharaoh's Egypt. By raising Joseph to such a high place of power

and wealth during such a time of famine, God used Joseph to feed and protect his brothers – and become a Savior figure or a Christ-type to them. Indeed the Lord used Joseph to preserve the twelve tribes of Israel ... **and especially the messianic line from the tribe of Judah** ... so that the Christ could one day be born into the world to save the world. What a glorious thing God did through Joseph! And what a glorious way Joseph's life turned out! **And yet the path of suffering that God used to lead Joseph to that moment felt anything but glorious!** Keep this in mind the next time you are suffering. For none of us knows what glorious ending God has written for our lives ... when we live our lives by faith in Christ!

What makes Joseph such an appealing Christ-figure? The narrative of Joseph's life follows a pattern that is no longer unique to Joseph. As his story begins, Joseph is in an exalted position within his wealthy patriarchal family. But then Joseph is betrayed, and the bottom falls out of his world. Joseph suffers great loss. Joseph is betrayed by his own brothers and humiliated by being sold as a slave to men in a foreign country, whose language he does not speak. Yet by giving Joseph the supernatural ability to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph skyrockets to great power and prominence in Egypt. And so **we get to know Joseph as a man who experiences both deep humiliation and great exaltation in his life.** This cyclical life pattern of going from humiliation to exaltation plays out so dramatically in Joseph's life that it feels akin to a death and a resurrection in his life. And so this too is where Joseph comes to remind us of Christ. Joseph's sufferings which come before his rise to glory ... reminds us of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow His sufferings!

The Spirit intended the faithful when reading the book of Genesis to see not only the similarities between Joseph and Christ, but also between the life of Christ and the life of every Christian. For the Apostle Paul informs us that **any Christian who attempts to live a godly Christ-like life in this life will suffer.** As our life conforms more and more to the crucified path of our Lord's life we will face the same familiar pattern ... of suffering now before the unseen glory that is to follow. When you begin to suffer the jealousy and hatred of this world for following your brother Christ, your flesh will quickly stage a protest telling you that ... **you don't deserve this!** **And that you don't need this!** This is an important moment to remember what the Bible says about Christ Jesus our Lord, that, "Although He was a Son, even He learned obedience through what He suffered. And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" [Heb. 5:8-9]. This is a crucial point for your new spirit in Christ to communicate to your own adamic flesh. And the point is this. **If even the Son of God learned obedience from His suffering ... then why should you or I view our suffering as unfair or undeserved?** Though I would never wish suffering on myself on anyone else ... our God in Christ is so great ... indeed He is so gracious ... that God actually intends good to come out of our suffering. Knowing that God is for us in Christ ... we also know that God works all things together for our eternal good. So that God redeems suffering and turns it into something good ... or at least good for our faith.

Joseph's confession to his brothers, "You intended it for evil, but God intended it for good!" has become something of a life-verse for me. So many times God has turned my life around by first humbling me, then later by exalting me. In fact, this is the rhythm of my inner spiritual existence ... the cycle which we call repentance and faith. As I turn to God and confess that I am a poor miserable sinner ... **I am greatly humbled before God.** And then as I receive the Gospel of God's free forgiveness in Christ so that Christ absolves and unburdens me of my sins ... **I am exalted by trusting in Jesus. This is what our gracious God can do ... and wants to do in our lives!** And so I've made it a spiritual habit to apply this verse to life ... by always asking ... how can God turn this evil ... this sadness ... this tragedy into something good? How will the God of all grace turn this into something that brings others to Christ ... something that builds faith ... something heals hearts with the love of Christ?

Now that we are all practicing social distancing and are safely self-quarantined within our homes ... I've had some time to think. Actually, a lot of time to think. If you follow social media there's a lot of gloom and doom right now. So I've been asking myself. How might God redeem this moment in human history ... by actually working something good in the life of God's people from this horrible pandemic? And of course like every pastor I've also been concerned for how God's people will continue to worship through these challenging and surreal times. How about this? What if during this time in which Christians are unable to come together for corporate worship in our sanctuaries ... **that we Christians relearn the lost art of family worship in the home?** Wouldn't it be such a blessing, if we all set up a family altar in our family rooms ... broke out Bibles and hymnals ... and got into the godly habit of worshipping in our homes? Who knows? Perhaps only God knows that a time is coming when Christians in our country will be forced to worship in our homes ... **and God knows we are ill-prepared.** Perhaps this pandemic gives Christ's people the time-out that we all need from all of the crazy busyness of American life to fortify ourselves upon God's most holy Word. *Amen to that.* And blessings upon your worship in the home. For although we are apart right now, we are still one in the Lord. Amen.

