

37. Personal integrity after Sunday service

11/27/2005

It is so easy, even seems so practical, to compartmentalize our lives, keeping our faith in one "sacred" area and the other aspects of our lives in their appropriate "secular" places. This is especially true when it comes to business.

We're told, "Business is business". They say, "We've got to do whatever it takes to make a profit, please the boss, advance to the next rung on the ladder. If you have to step on a few heads, just consider it as a collateral damage or survival code. Christianity is all right on Sundays, but the Monday-through-Friday world is a rough one, and it has rules of its own that need to be respected if we want to succeed." Oh really?

I know a Christian who is rather well-known in Tucson. He has a Christian business. To him, when it comes to getting money from others, it is a business. He will take as much as he can. But when it comes to paying his employees, it is a ministry. He will do anything to pay them as little as I can. Do you think that I am making up a story? No.

One of the most frequent excuses the non-believers use is that there are too many hypocrites in the church. We as Christians allowed them to have that kind of excuse. Shame on us!

Is God not sovereign over all worlds, including the business world? Since when did business take priority over characters? And when did success become more important than the relationship with God?

Joseph, as we'll see in our study, had not compartmentalized his life into many independent, disconnected and ultimately fragmented pieces. No, he lived an integrated life of faith doing everything he did in every area of life before the face of God. And we can do that too.

A. HERE COMES THE BEVERLY HEBREWS

Genesis 46:1-6 So Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. 2 Then God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night, and said, "Jacob, Jacob!" And he said, "Here I am." 3 So He said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. 4 I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes." 5 Then Jacob arose from Beersheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob, their little ones, and their wives, in the carts which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. 6 So they took their livestock and their goods, which they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and went to Egypt, Jacob and all his descendants with him.

No doubt Jacob feels a heavy responsibility about transplanting his family from their familiar roots in Canaan to the foreign soil of Egypt. His little tribe is about to cross over into a fast-paced, polytheistic society that could swallow them whole.

It's encouraging to read, then, that just before Jacob leaves the borders of his own land, he stops to seek God's assurance on whether to proceed.

Many of us have a tendency to make major decisions without seeking God's will. We need to learn this from Jacob as he sought the Lord's will before he moved to Egypt. Nothing will go right if Christian does not stay in God's will. Inside of God's will there is no failure, but outside of His will there is no success.

The life of Jacob can be divided into three geographical locations: Jacob's life in Haran typifies the man of God who is living in the flesh. Jacob's life in the land of Canaan typifies the man of God who is fighting in his own strength. Jacob's life in Egypt typifies the man of God who is walking by faith.

This, I believe, is true also for a great many of us today. There was that time in our lives when we came in contact with the Gospel, the Word of God, and we turned to Him. Then there was that period of struggle when we thought we could live our lives in our own strength. Perhaps that lasted for years. Then there came the time when we did grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and began to walk by faith.

Some of you remember a TV sitcom from 1960's, "The Beverly Hillbillies" who became a millionaire by striking oil field in his property. They packed up everything they own in their little cabin and moved to Beverly Hills, CA. Jacob and his family, the ancient Beverly Hillbillies, or should I say the Beverly Hebrews were arriving at the Metropolitan Egypt.

B. A HEBREW NATION IN EGYPT

Genesis 46:26-27 All the persons who went with Jacob to Egypt, who came from his body, besides Jacob's sons' wives, were sixty-six persons in all. 27 And the sons of Joseph who were born to him in Egypt were two persons. All the persons of the house of Jacob who went to Egypt were seventy.

Israel is only seventy strong when they enter Egypt – just a tiny nation that will one day return to Canaan about two million strong.

Genesis 46:28-34 Then he sent Judah before him to Joseph, to point out before him the way to Goshen. And they came to the land of Goshen. 29 So Joseph made ready his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; and he presented himself to him, and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while. 30 And Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face, because you are still alive." 31 Then Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and say to him, 'My brothers and those of my father's house, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me. 32 And the men are shepherds, for their occupation has been to feed livestock; and they have brought their flocks, their herds, and all that they have.' 33 So it shall be, when Pharaoh calls you and says, 'What is your occupation?' 34 that you shall say, 'Your servants' occupation has been with livestock from our youth even till now, both we and also our fathers,' that you may dwell in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians."

Finally reunited. A father with his son, a brother with his brothers, and wives and children and grandchildren all together at last. It must have been a wonderful family reunion without any fight and argument.

In the Bible, Egypt represents the ungodly world. As the Egyptians despised shepherds, the godless world despises the Good Shepherd. Jesus declared that He is the

Good Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep. He is the Great Shepherd of His sheep who watches over them today. He is the Chief Shepherd who is yet to appear. He calls Himself the Shepherd. And Jesus Christ is an abomination to the world. He is not received today. The world despises Him and has nothing to do with Him. It is no wonder why the world also despises us, the followers of Jesus Christ.

C. JOSEPH THE PRIME MINISTER

We find Joseph displays an exceptional administrative skills during the time of famine that he'd learned from the Lord. Here are a few points we must learn from Joseph:

1) Wise Objectivity

Joseph sees things realistically. He doesn't minimize the differences between his father's culture and Pharaoh's in v31-34 in chapter 46. On the contrary, his objective appraisal enables him to safely navigate his family's path into the safe harbor of Goshen.

2) Submitting to Authority with Accountability

Genesis 47:1-12 Then Joseph went and told Pharaoh, and said, "My father and my brothers, their flocks and their herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan; and indeed they are in the land of Goshen." 2 And he took five men from among his brothers and presented them to Pharaoh. 3 Then Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, both we and also our fathers." 4 And they said to Pharaoh, "We have come to dwell in the land, because your servants have no pasture for their flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now therefore, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen." 5 Then Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, saying, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. 6 The land of Egypt is before you. Have your father and brothers dwell in the best of the land; let them dwell in the land of Goshen. And if you know any competent men among them, then make them chief herdsmen over my livestock." 7 Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob and set him before Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. 8 Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How old are you?" 9 And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage." 10 So Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh. 11 And Joseph situated his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. 12 Then Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with bread, according to the number in their families.

Through all of this, Joseph reflects a beautiful blend of humility and integrity. He is a skillful leader who works cooperatively with his superior. Nowhere does Joseph give the slightest hint that he resists being accountable to Pharaoh. In fact, Joseph wants Pharaoh to know what is going on. Everything is done completely aboveboard so there will be no surprises, no after-the-fact revelations, that will cause Pharaoh to doubt Joseph's loyalty.

Notice that he was 130 years old when he came down to the land of Egypt, and he will be 147 years old when he dies. That means that he will spend 17 years in the land of Egypt. I imagine that he was right on the verge of death – one foot in the grave and the other foot on a banana peel – when he came down to Egypt. But the

joy of finding Joseph alive and of being with him in Egypt prolonged his life 17 years.

3) Personal Integrity

Genesis 47:13-15 Now there was no bread in all the land; for the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. 14 And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, for the grain which they bought; and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. 15 So when the money failed in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, "Give us bread, for why should we die in your presence? For the money has failed."

The people are caught in a vise-like grip of starvation and desperation. Joseph has the power to tighten that grip or loosen it, since he carries the key to the granaries. It would be so easy for him to take advantage of the people. Yet he chooses to use his position to work for the welfare of others, demonstrating another great characteristic of an ethical leader.

Joseph brings all the money into Pharaoh's house. He doesn't falsify any records, embezzle, or pocket a little extra for himself. He turns it all in. That's a man of absolute integrity.

Joseph also does everything he can to uphold the people's dignity. Just because somebody is working for you, that doesn't mean that that person is any less than you. If you treat that person with integrity and dignity, you will have his loyalty for long time.

In v16-22, we find Joseph gradually takes over the entire economy of Egypt as the people bought food with their money one year, their livestock for the following year. At the last year of famine, Joseph gets to purchase the entire land of Egypt for Pharaoh from the people.

4) Accepting a challenge with innovative creativity

Genesis 47:23 Then Joseph said to the people, "Indeed I have bought you and your land this day for Pharaoh. Look, here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land. 24 And it shall come to pass in the harvest that you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh. Four-fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and for your food, for those of your households and as food for your little ones." 25 So they said, "You have saved our lives; let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's servants." 26 And Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt to this day, that Pharaoh should have one-fifth, except for the land of the priests only, which did not become Pharaoh's.

Every challenge at work, and especially in leadership, is a call for innovative thinking. In Joseph's case, he strategically moves them to cities for their survival.

Again the people were allowed to work, thus preserving their personal dignity and national unity. Next, Joseph sets up a 20% tax system for Pharaoh and allows the people to keep the rest for their survival. The people respond with gratitude. Many people in America today would be happy with only a 20% tax.

D. THE TRUTH ABOUT BUSINESS

At least three areas of work directly affect our Christian witness:

1) The way we work reveals our character.

It's not what we wear or how we act for a few hours on Sundays that demonstrates our credibility as Christians. It's the way we behave day in, day out, forty hours a week on the job. What character traits do you display at work? Are you diligent or lazy? Truthful or dishonest? Do you gossip and sow discord, or are you loyal and enthusiastic? Would your coworkers say you're patient and cooperative or impatient and hard-to-work-with? Do you work in a way that bears witness to the reality of Christ?

2) Work is a demanding arena of pressure.

In some jobs, a demanding boss or a relentless deadline builds the pressure. In others, the pressures comes from cutthroat interoffice jealousies, competition or too much work and not enough people. In these pressure-cooker situations, what we truly believe, not just what we say we believe, is paraded in front of everyone.

3) Work is an exacting test of our efficiency.

Work helps us see how organized and decisive we are, how thorough, how willing to be accountable, how perceptive in spotting and correcting potential problems and how resourceful in correcting them. It challenges us to seek God's strength and make the most of the gifts He has given us.

In the past several lessons we have focused on Joseph's relationship with his family. We have seen his divine perspective and many godly qualities. So how about applying what we have learned from Joseph into our workplace?

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Every believer must be a commitment to Christ and His standard for living.

Biblical principles, unlike business strategies, are not something to compromise. Doing so only leads to a spiritually bankrupted life.

2) We must seek to maintain the purest motives behind our dealings with people.

We must keep constant watch over our hearts and ask ourselves these questions:

"Why am I saying or doing this?"

"Who am I serving – my boss, myself, or God?"

You answer that yourself.

3) A part of our walk with Christ is our work.

So let's do it in a worthy manner, and beautifully, to honor Him.

Ephesians 4:1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,