

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

March 3, 2013
No. 3661

Joseph in Prison
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear fellow saints in the church of Jesus Christ,

Have you ever felt as though you were a victim?

I do not mean that you had a “poor me” complex and you were looking for sympathy from others, but that you were genuinely a victim. You were abused or misused in some way, maybe by a boss, a spouse, a parent, or a bully on the playground. Somebody whom you should have been able to respect and trust has mistreated you. Or maybe you were treated unfairly for doing something that was right. Because of your love for God, there was an activity or conversation that you refused to be a part of, and as a result you were mistreated, demoted, mocked, maybe even persecuted. How did you respond? How should we respond?

Joseph is one who was a genuine victim. Mistreated and hated by his brothers, sold by them and carried away to be a teenage slave in a foreign land, and there lied about and imprisoned because he refused Potiphar’s wife, Joseph is a victim. How does he respond?

In Genesis 40, as we continue in our study of the life of Joseph, we see an amazing response to such treatment. In prison, Joseph does not complain, he does not have a “poor-me” complex, but, continuing to live before the face of God, Joseph is faithful in the tasks God gives to him, he has a compassionate eye for the troubles of others, and he is amazingly patient with the Lord. Joseph is not embittered by his mistreatment, nor does he allow this to become an obstacle to his fellowship with God, but instead he waits for God to vindicate his cause.

At the end of chapter 39, after Joseph is unjustly imprisoned, the keeper of the prison notices Joseph’s godliness and trustworthiness and entrusts him with the care of all the prisoners. In prison, Joseph is not forgotten of God, but the Lord is with him.

Genesis 40 verses 1-3 tells us that after Joseph had been in prison for some time (and it could have been years), the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt were thrown into prison with Joseph because they had offended their lord, the king of Egypt. Who were these men, and why were they in prison?

The butler and baker were two very important positions in the court of an ancient king. Not only did these men prepare and serve to the king his food, the butler his drinks, and the baker his meals, but these men were usually also close confidants of the king, men who were with the king day in and day out, men whom he would consult and who would advise him. Their position required that they be trustworthy men. They were not mere slaves, but they held a high profile position in the court.

Now, something had happened that made Pharaoh suspicious of and angry with these two men. Maybe it was as simple as Pharaoh having an upset stomach from some food he ate, or maybe there was an actual assassination plot against the king in which one of these men participated. It does seem from what follows in the chapter that the baker was indeed guilty. Initially he keeps his dream to himself, and then, as it turns out, he is executed.

In verses 3 and 4 we learn that the captain of the guard charged Joseph with their care and that Joseph served them, the idea being that these men were locked up tight in their cells, but

Joseph had freedom to move around and to get for them the things they needed for their daily life in the prison. Interestingly, the captain of the guard is Potiphar, and this tells us that Potiphar again trusted Joseph. Maybe he found out the truth of his wife's lie, or maybe he simply went on trusting Joseph, seeing that the Lord was with him.

In one night, both the butler and the baker have a dream. Dreams, in ancient Egyptian culture, were considered very important, and there were people whose lives were devoted to the interpretation of dreams. What is significant about the dreams of the butler and baker is their similarity to each other, that they came as a pair, and that they were so memorable. These were not like ordinary dreams, which are soon forgotten, but they were vivid, and when the butler and baker told them to each other, it was obvious to them that these dreams were a revelation from God. In the story of Joseph, this is the main way that God reveals Himself—in pairs of dreams, first to Joseph, then here to butler and baker, and then next to Pharaoh.

The importance of these two dreams is not so much their content and what they predict. What happens to the butler and baker is not all that important in this history. What is important, though, is that God sends these dreams as the connection between Joseph and the palace of Pharaoh, which will lead in the end to Joseph meeting his brothers. That makes these dreams important. God is working in this history, making connections that will bring Joseph to the position of ruler in Egypt, when he will again meet his brothers, and his entire family will move to Egypt.

Do you see here God's sovereign and loving hand of providence? In two dreams, experienced by two unbelieving Egyptians, in a prison, far from Canaan, God is working.

And this is the secret to Joseph's response to his unjust imprisonment. Joseph does not know where these dreams are leading, but he must see God's hand here, and that is an encouragement to him to wait on God.

What we see here is a portrait of Joseph, a study of his character. There are six things in Joseph's behavior that show something of his character.

The first is that Joseph rejoices in his trials. In James 1:2, we are exhorted to "count it all joy" when we fall into divers temptations. James is saying that when different trials come our way, we should learn to see them as God-sent, for our good, and so be thankful and even glad that we receive them.

That is what we see in Joseph. In Genesis 40:6, the morning after the two dreams, we read that Joseph came in to the butler and baker, and looked at them, and noticed that they were sad. It does not say that Joseph was sad, but that he noticed that his inmates were sad. If anyone ought to have a sad face here, it was Joseph. The butler and baker were in prison on a whim of Pharaoh, and surely they would not be here for long, but Joseph does not know if he will ever see the light of day again. And yet, he does not say, "You think you have it bad, listen to my situation." Rather because he has learned to count it all joy, he is able to see their sorrow and have compassion on them.

That is the second thing here, that Joseph in his trials has compassion for others and is willing to help them. Far from pouting and crying "poor me," Joseph looks at his fellow inmates and says, Why are you sad? And then, when they say, We both had dreams and there is no one to interpret them, Joseph shows his willingness to help. If Joseph would have said, "Ah, dreams? I do not want anything to do with them. Last time dreams got me into big trouble," we would understand that. But, instead, he offers to help them to understand their dreams.

Here we have an important biblical and Christian response to our own trials, namely this, that we look from our trials out to others, and sympathize and help others in need. Paul, in II Corinthians 1:3-4, explaining why he has trials, says this, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." He recognizes that one of God's purposes in his trials is that he may be able to sympathize with and comfort and help others in their difficult experiences.

The third thing we see in Joseph here is that he takes every opportunity to speak of his faith in God. When the butler and baker say, "there is no one to interpret our dreams," Joseph's reply is not, "Well, I can do it," but this, "Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you." Even though he recognizes that God has given him the gift of interpreting dreams, Joseph attributes this to God. Do not interpretations belong to God? In the Egyptian culture, that was a dangerous statement. So many claimed that they had this ability. Even the butler and baker are thinking of men, of people who can interpret dreams, when they say, "there is no one to interpret our dreams." But Joseph says, "Don't look to man, look to God." If your dreams are from God then only he can tell you what they mean.

Now, we live in a day of self-proclaimed and celebrity teachers and preachers, men and women who claim special powers and who are looking for fame and recognition. You listen to them, and the message is about themselves, about their accomplishments and education, and very little is said about God. We have here a test of a true prophet of God. Who gets the recognition, man or God? Last week I read this, and I think it is very true and valuable: *The pastor's great reward for his preaching is not in hearing, "What a great sermon!" but "What a great God!"*

Joseph uses his situation and gifts as an opportunity to witness concerning his God.

Then fourth, we see from this passage how real, how authentic, how down to earth Joseph is. We see this in Joseph's response to the dream of the butler. After telling the butler that his dream of three branches, and himself squeezing juice from a grape into a cup means that in three days he will be restored to his place as chief butler in Pharaoh's palace, Joseph says this to the butler, Genesis 40:14-15, "But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house: For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon." I think that is one of my favorite parts in the whole story of Joseph.

When we read in the story of Joseph of his godliness and patience we are inclined to think, it is just too unreal, Joseph is just too good, and I cannot identify with him, nor would I ever be able to go through what he did. He must have been above feelings, some kind of super Christian. But this tells us that he felt the pain and injustice of his experiences; he still remembered the injustice of being sold as a slave. He still felt the pain of being innocently incarcerated. He did not like the dungeon where he was, and he wanted to be free again. He felt the pain of separation from his family. Joseph was a real man. But feeling pain and suffering, and complaining about it, are two different things. Joseph feels it, but he does not complain against God. He does not let bitterness overtake his soul. He does not stew over the injustices others have committed against him. He does not respond to hatred with hatred.

In the New Testament, Jesus says, “Love your enemies, bless them that persecute you, do good to them that despitefully use you.” Paul says, in Romans 12:21: “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good,” and Ephesians 4:31-32: “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”

This is what we see in Joseph. He does not allow himself to be overcome or consumed by the evils committed against him. Instead, he responds with kindness and is ready to forgive.

The only way to do that is to know that God in Christ has forgiven you, and that God is sovereignly controlling and working through everything in your life. Faith, faith in the God of the Bible, faith in Christ—this is the victory that overcomes the world. And as believers we need to pray for wisdom to respond like Joseph, not only to trials, but to being victimized. We need to pray for a rich experience of forgiveness, that we might understand the greatness of God’s forgiving love towards us, so that we may be gracious towards and live peaceably with all men. Knowing Christ, and believing on Him, we become like Him. Joseph felt the pain, but he did not complain.

Then fifth, we see Joseph’s honesty and love in explaining the second dream. The baker holds back his dream until he hears that the butler’s dream has a favorable interpretation. As I indicated earlier, that was probably because he was guilty. But now, hearing the good outcome that awaits the butler, he tells his dream: three baskets of bread on his head, and the birds coming and eating from the baskets. What does it mean? Here, you see Joseph’s integrity and love. He knows that it means the baker will be executed, and rather than softening it, or holding back the interpretation, he says to the baker, “within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee, and shall hang thee on a tree; and the birds shall eat thy flesh from off thee.”

Sometimes, to bring God’s word honestly to another can be risky. Certainly it was here, but because he lives before God, Joseph has the courage to do it. Pray that God will give such men to preach the gospel in our generation. Men who will tell the truth, even when it hurts, because this is true love.

Think about that, this was the kindest thing Joseph could do for the baker. Hiding the truth from him would have done him no good. But now, with Joseph as his spiritual counselor, this man has three days to prepare for death. We do not know what happened in those three days or whether this man was converted, but we can be sure that in those three days Joseph continued to speak to him of his God, of heaven and hell, and even of the way of salvation. Who knows how God could use that? The truth that Joseph spoke hurt, but it was the best thing the baker could hear at this point in his life.

Sixth, we see here Joseph’s patience with the Lord. Three days later, it happens just as Joseph had said. Pharaoh has a great feast to celebrate his birthday, and the butler is restored to his position and the baker is executed. There we have a proof of Joseph being a true prophet of God. His word is authenticated by the outcome. Now, you would think, it was time for Joseph to be vindicated. Now there was a ray of hope. Surely the butler would remember Joseph’s kindness. But he does not. We have to read the last verse of chapter 40 with the first verse of chapter 41, to catch the full impact of this. “Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him. And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed.”

Two full years. That is a long time to be sitting in a dungeon, when you thought you had found the way out. If the butler had told Pharaoh the whole story, if he had told about Joseph,

and the interpreting of the dreams, and that they came true just as Joseph had said, surely Pharaoh would be interested in meeting and using this man with the gift of interpreting dreams. Joseph must have waited and waited for a message from the palace, but nothing came. A day turned into a week, and a week into a month, and months into a year, and then two years. Maybe to you, two years does not sound very long. But it is a terribly long time when one is going through a severe trial and he does not see a light at the end of the tunnel.

One of the things that Joseph experienced in prison was loneliness. He had said to the butler that he was “stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews.” In those words Joseph expresses what he is missing. What he misses is the people of God, and the place that God has chosen. He is missing fellowship with God’s people. He is missing worship with the church of God. His experience is like that of David, in Psalm 42, when in exile he remembers how he used to go with God’s people to worship, but now cannot. And David’s soul is cast down and his spirit disquieted. He is depressed and racked with anxiety. David’s answer is, “Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him.” That is what Joseph does too, in prison. He patiently waits on God, hoping in Him.

Sometimes the way of trial can be long and lonely. It can result in depression and anxiety. But in it, God’s children can be sure that His love will never fail, that His purposes though hidden are good, and that there is a day of hope and deliverance. “I shall yet praise him, who is the help of my countenance, and my God.”

Let us pray.

Father, thanks again for Thy Word, so rich and so encouraging. Thanks, Lord, for Thy promises that never fail, and for the confidence we can have in Thee, even when life is as dark as a dungeon. Give us a spirit that does not become bitter, but rather help us to look out to others, and to Thee. To hope in God. We ask it for Jesus’ sake, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

March 10, 2013
No. 3662

Joseph Remembered and Exalted
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

We continue our study of the life of Joseph today in Genesis chapter 41, where Joseph rises from prison to palace, from prisoner to prime minister, from the pit to the pinnacle.

Have you ever been promoted? What was the reason for the promotion? To whom did you give credit? So much of life in our society, and especially in the workplace, is geared around the idea of “getting ahead,” of being a somebody, and of making a contribution. But should it be? Are we perhaps putting ourselves forward too much, and not stopping to give God the credit for our advancements? Are we looking for self-advancement, rather than for God’s glory?

As we begin studying this chapter, it is important for us to have the proper perspective, the proper focus. This is not the story of Joseph being exalted, but rather a story in which God is exalted.

Too many commentators, when they come to this chapter, tell us to look at what God did in Joseph’s life, and then say, and God can do something similar for you. They say, it may be that you are in a situation similar to that in which Joseph found himself, forgotten in prison, but he was in waiting there, being prepared by God, for the day of his exaltation. And the lesson is supposed to be that, if you just wait and be faithful like Joseph, your time, your day in the sun, will come.

Now, those are very nice ideas, and it may well be that a day of greater service and prominence awaits you, but if that is what you make of this story—well, it is very man centered. And what if a day of exaltation never comes, for you? This story is not first about Joseph, and it is not about you and me. Rather, it is a story about the working of the providence of the sovereign God, and the lesson we learn from Joseph is that God should always receive the glory, whether we are humiliated or exalted. Joseph did not need this exaltation to the palace in order to see God’s blessing in his life, and to respond with praise to God. No, in prison, the Lord was with Joseph, and there, seemingly forgotten, Joseph still lived before the face of God. And because he did that, when he was promoted to the highest position in Egypt, it never went to his head, he never abused his power, he never used his gifts and position in a self-serving way, but he always gave God the glory.

Let us contrast that to Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel, chapter 4, verse 30. As he wanders through his hanging gardens, he boasts, “Is not this the great Babylon, that I have built, for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” And, the kingdom was taken from him, and he lived like an animal, until he gave God the glory.

Let me ask, again, the question with which I began. Have you ever been promoted? What was the reason? Was it because you deserved it, or you achieved it? And to whom did you give the credit for it? Did you give God the glory?

In Genesis 41, God is very much on the foreground. He is present and working in this story. It is God who sends Pharaoh his dreams that result in Joseph being called from prison. God gives Joseph to understand and interpret the dreams and then give wise advice to Pharaoh. God is the one who will send the famines. And it is God who raises Joseph from prison to prime minister in Egypt. And throughout, this is what, or I should say whom, Joseph acknowledges. He gives God the glory.

In the first 8 verses we learn that Pharaoh has two dreams that trouble his spirit. He is disturbed by them. We have pointed out, before, that in the story of Joseph God is not present by miracles or in other marvelous and spectacular ways. Instead, He is quietly working in the background. A dream is a very ordinary experience. We all have dreams; the people who study this say that we all dream, every night. So, dreams are quite ordinary. These were not the first dreams Pharaoh had. But these are memorable dreams, and they come in a pair. This is the third time in Joseph's life that a pair of dreams is given. First to Joseph, then to the butler and baker, and now to Pharaoh. In verse 32, Joseph says that God gave these two similar dreams to Pharaoh as proof that the dreams were from God. And Pharaoh must have had a sense of that, for he was troubled by his dreams. Here, Pharaoh, who in ancient Egypt was considered a god, is forced in his conscience to acknowledge that he is merely a creature, that there is a God in heaven, over all, to whom he must answer. The sovereign God intrudes on Pharaoh's peace. He disturbs Pharaoh's conscience. Pharaoh is troubled. The great king of Egypt shakes like a leaf. He is like a scared child who cannot sleep.

That is the way God works on the conscience of men still today. Do not think that the ungodly world, in its murder or the unborn, in its permissiveness of homosexuality, in its greed and immorality, is not troubled in conscience. No, God leaves them enough of a testimony of his greatness in the creation, and through the witness of believers, to leave them without excuse. Romans 1 tells us that the conscience of man is accusing or excusing his sin. Pharaoh is troubled.

And so he assembles the wise men of Egypt. These were learned people in a civilized culture. Not druids and wizards, but professors and doctors. And they cannot tell him what his dreams mean. It may be that they did not want to, because the news was bad, or, more likely, God blinded their minds so that they could not understand the dreams, even though to us the meaning may be so plain.

Now amid all the pandemonium of the morning, Pharaoh sharing his dreams, and wise men coming and going, Pharaoh must drink, and so the butler comes, and hearing of Pharaoh's mysterious dreams, his memory is jolted. Coming to the king he says, in verses 9-13, "I do remember my faults this day; Pharaoh was wrath with his servants, and put both me and the chief butler in prison. And, there, we both dreamed a dream in one night, and a fellow prisoner, a young Hebrew slave, told us the meaning of our dreams. They were fulfilled just as he had interpreted them. We did not know what our dreams meant, and he told us, and he was right on in his interpretation."

Let us pause here and note God's timing. Two years had passed, and now, finally, Joseph is mentioned to Pharaoh. But, had it been earlier, would Pharaoh even have paid attention to the mention of a mistreated Hebrew slave? But now, God works, to connect the experiences of the butler and Pharaoh, and Joseph is now the answer to Pharaoh's predicament.

That morning in prison was, I am sure, just like any other for Joseph. It was a monotonous existence, day after day, the same, forgotten in prison. But suddenly there is a flurry of activity. Pharaoh sends for Joseph, and in minutes he is taken from the dungeon, groomed, dressed, hurried past guards and down pristine hallways into the Oval Office of Egypt to stand before the Pharaoh and help him in a way that no one else in Egypt can. This is Joseph's hour to shine, to put himself forward, to ask a favor of the king, to explain the injustices committed against him. This is his get out of jail free card.

But, that is not the way Joseph sees it. I am sure there was excitement for Joseph in all these events, but in the excitement he does not forget his *Lord*, who has been with him now for 14 years of slavery and imprisonment. And instead of seeing this as his moment for freedom or advancement, Joseph views it as another opportunity to give God the glory.

Pharaoh says to Joseph, “I have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it; and I have heard say of thee, that thou canst understand a dream to interpret it.” Joseph’s reply is bold and humble. He says, “It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.” What in the English here is five words, “It is not in me” is one forceful word in the Hebrew: *NOTI*. When you are gifted, that is humility. To point to God, not to yourself. Joseph was gripped and governed by the principle of I Corinthians 4:7: “For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?” Oh that we would remember that for ourselves and give God the glory.

Notice too how bold Joseph is. Standing before Pharaoh, who claimed he was god, Joseph repeatedly refers to Jehovah as God. God shall give Pharaoh an answer (v. 16). God hath showed Pharaoh what he is about to do (v. 25). What God is about to do he sheweth unto Pharaoh (v. 28). The thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass (v. 32). How much does God enter into our conversation, especially when we are talking to unbelievers? Joseph is bold to proclaim that God sent the dreams to Pharaoh, and God was declaring through them His sovereignty over Pharaoh.

Joseph is bold before Pharaoh, but at the same time he is not deliberately offensive. Instead, he is deeply respectful, very carefully referring to Pharaoh in the third person, recognizing his position as ruler and leader. And then consider how flippantly we refer to rulers and leaders today. Joseph does not make fun of Pharaoh’s fears, he does not sit down and draw a comic of Pharaoh and his confused wise men, but respectfully he stands before Pharaoh.

And he listens. Joseph does not talk about himself, nor is he simply quiet, but he is interested in and sympathetic towards Pharaoh. From verses 17-24, he listens to Pharaoh. Joseph is going to give counsel, but being a good counselor starts with being a good listener.

Pharaoh shares his dreams with Joseph. Two dreams. In one, he stood on the riverbank and there were seven fat-fleshed, well-favored, that is, plump and attractive, cows that came up out of the river and grazed in a meadow. In the other, there were seven ears of corn that came up on one stalk, full and good. After the seven fat cows came seven mangy, ill favored, skinny, ugly cows. And after the seven good ears, seven that were withered and thin and diseased. Now this is obviously an agricultural scene. Cows and grain. Any farmer knows the difference between good looking cattle and corn, and thin cows and a poor crop. Pharaoh could tell the difference. He tells Joseph that the cows were thinner and uglier than any he had ever seen in Egypt. Cows were important to Egypt—in contrast to sheep, they were considered a sacred animal. And grain crops were a large part of their economy. Later Egypt became the breadbasket of the Roman empire, and grain ships went from Egypt all over the Mediterranean. The cattle and grain represent the agricultural life-blood of Egypt.

And, Pharaoh tells Joseph, the skinny cows and the withered ears, ate up the fat cows and the good ears, and they remained skinny cows and withered ears. You know that what happens in dreams is often outside of the realm of reality, but, obviously, to Pharaoh, this meant something and it troubled him. More troubling was the fact that none of his magicians could tell him what they meant.

Joseph gives Pharaoh the meaning. In five simple points, he tells Pharaoh:

- 1) The dreams are one in their meaning.
- 2) The two sets of seven fat cows and good ears refer to seven prosperous years in Egypt.
- 3) The two sets of thin cows and withered ears refer to seven years of famine that will follow the seven years of prosperity, a famine so severe that the years of prosperity will be forgotten and unimaginable.
- 4) The fact that there were two dreams is a confirmation from God that this will certainly take place.
- 5) God is going to do this very soon.

What is surprising here is not the meaning of the dreams. The meaning is quite obvious and parallels exactly the dreams. What is surprising, however, is the forthrightness of Joseph in attributing these dreams and their outcome to God, and then giving Pharaoh unsolicited advice that he receives quite well. Joseph is saying to Pharaoh, God has decreed and planned that this is what will happen in Egypt, and, Pharaoh, you need to recognize it and take action. This information from God should not be ignored.

And Joseph comes up with a plan. You might call it a bold four-point business plan.

- 1) Pharaoh should appoint a wise leader over the land to head up a famine preparedness and relief agency.
- 2) Pharaoh should appoint officers all through the land to collect during the seven years of prosperity.
- 3) Joseph proposes a 20% tax on all the people during the years of prosperity, not a dollar and cents tax, but 20% of all the food they produce must be taken and stored.
- 4) Joseph proposes building large store houses in each of the cities, to store up the grain and food, in preparation for the years of famine.

This was a very bold plan. Was Joseph suggesting that Pharaoh appoint him as leader? Probably not, that would be rather presumptuous. But suggesting a 20% tax increase was very bold. Those kinds of tax increases do not make for popular leaders, but Joseph has the foresight and courage to suggest it. And he calls for action. In every aspect of his plan, based on his knowledge of what God was about to do, he calls Egypt to action. Knowing God's purpose and that God has a purpose does not produce passive resignation. Rather, Joseph sees that we must actively use the means and opportunities God provides. God's plan for the future summons us to action in the present.

Central to Joseph's bold plan was sound leadership, finding a man who could wisely administer the collection and then distribution of the food. And the Joseph who said, *NOT I*, was the man Pharaoh selected. God is at work here. For 100 years, unbelievers taunted Noah and told him that there is no sign of a flood, it will never rain. Pharaoh's response could have been the same, but it was not. With no sign of a famine, with bumper crops for seven years straight, who would have thought that there would be a famine. But Joseph believed it, and Pharaoh and his servants agreed, and so Joseph was selected to be this leader. With Potiphar and the prison guard, Pharaoh recognized that the Spirit of God was with Joseph in his interpretation and suggestion. Who would dare to stand against God? "Forasmuch as God hath showed thee all

this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art. Thou shalt be over my house, and according to thy word shall all my people be ruled; only in the throne will I be greater than thou.”

That morning Joseph had sat in the dark dungeon. Now he was ruler in Egypt, and the future of Egypt was entrusted to him.

In conclusion, let us recap three features in Joseph’s character here, all of which show that he has a big view of God, as the sovereign over all things.

First, notice his humility with regard to himself. In all the years that Joseph spends in Egypt’s Oval Office, it never got to him. He knew who he was and he knew who God was. He knew that there was no power in him, but of God, and he knew that the future lay in God’s hands, not his own. It is not in me, was his motto.

Second, notice his boldness in witness. God, God, God, all the way through, and that to Pharaoh, who claimed that he himself was god. What an unlikely man to lead alongside Pharaoh! And Joseph does not hide his faith, or wane in his commitment to the Lord in his prosperity. As the story continues, Joseph’s faith remains strong. It is very rare to have a ruler so godly. What blessed years those must have been for the Egyptians.

Then third, we see here Joseph’s confidence in God. His trust—that God is working by his providence in this history. In this chapter he confesses that with regard to fruitful and barren years. God, he says to Pharaoh, will send the prosperity and will send the famine. God will do this. The same God who brought him into slavery, the same God who exalted him in Potiphar’s house, the same God who brought him to prison, the same God who exalted him now to be ruler in Egypt, the same God who sent pairs of dreams to me, to the butler and baker, and to Pharaoh—that God will send prosperity and then famine. Joseph trusts the God of sovereign providence, and, even though he cannot yet see God’s purposes, he is confident that everything that God is doing in his life will turn to his advantage and salvation, and will be used by God, ultimately, for the salvation of His people and the glory of His own name. Joseph on the throne will mean food in Egypt, which will mean Jacob and his family will survive, which is the preservation of the promised line of the Messiah in whom is our salvation. God works, in famine, to save His people.

Do you believe that? Do you trust in the sovereign power of God? Do you know that God is working in your circumstances now, good or bad, for your salvation as one of His children? Do you respond, in a prison, or in a palace, by giving this God all glory?

Let us pray.

Father, Thou art worthy. We thank and praise Thee for Thy sovereign decree of providence, and Thy constant care and love in every aspect of our lives. Lord, give us contentment and patience in adversity, and give us humble and thankful hearts in prosperity. We ask it for Jesus’ sake, Amen.

March 17, 2013
No. 3663

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR
Joseph, the Prime Minister
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

The life of the child of God in this world is one of constant challenge and temptation. The challenges of life are not simply the result of difficult external circumstances, but the challenges come because of indwelling sin. With Paul, we say in Romans 7:22-23, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." This is the struggle of the Christian life: an inward, spiritual struggle against sin.

Sometimes, when life is hard, we forget this. We think that if God would just change our circumstances, then all the struggles of life would be over. If God would just give me a job, all my stress would be gone. If God would just give us enough money to have a family vacation, then we would be content. If God would just give me a life partner, then I would be happy. If God would just take me out of my pit of suffering, then everything would be good.

And then, what we tend to do, is to look at the lives of others, and suppose to ourselves that they have everything. We look at someone with a position of leadership and think that life at the top would be nice. We look at someone with wealth, and think that life must be so easy for them. We look at someone who has a good job, and think he must be free of anxiety. We look at our married friends who seem so happy, and think that marriage is a bed of roses.

But beloved, if you are a Christian, if you are alert to the power of sin and temptation, it does not matter what the circumstances of your life may be, life will always be a struggle. Oh, there may be times in your life when it is more difficult to be content and to be thankful, but, on the flip side, a life of ease and prosperity, when all the desires of your heart are met, presents its own challenges and temptations.

In the past weeks we have been looking at Joseph's difficult life, with its many challenges. He was hated by his family, forced into slavery, tempted to adultery, and imprisoned wrongfully. For 13 or 14 years he had a very rough life, and that presented many temptations. But God was with him, and with his eyes fixed on God, Joseph demonstrates an amazing perseverance through trial and temptation. In our last message, we looked at the story of Joseph's exaltation. When Pharaoh has two dreams, the memory of the butler is jolted, and Joseph is called from prison to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. The result is that Joseph is exalted to the high position of prime minister in Egypt.

We would make a mistake if we thought that suddenly Joseph's life became one of ease, that his sudden promotion meant all his troubles were over. I say, that would be a mistake, because now, as leader in Egypt, Joseph is facing a temptation that is stronger and more severe than any to this point in his life. The temptation is that in his exalted position with fame, prosperity, and success, Joseph will be lifted up with pride and forget his identity as one of God's children, and his need to depend on God for daily strength.

Being in a position of power and wealth is not easy. The earlier trials of Joseph's life, his mistreatment, his poverty, his imprisonment, the monotony and waiting, were trials that most of us can, at least to a certain degree, identify with. We have experienced the grace of God that

enables us to endure poverty and persecution, being despised and rejected because of our faith. But how many have risen to the top of society, and there remained completely faithful to the Lord? Oh, I am not saying that God would not give us the grace to do this, but I am saying this, that there is an extra measure of grace needed to respond to the temptations of wealth, power, fame, and responsibility.

Let us consider from Genesis 41:41-57 the changes and challenges that came to Joseph at 30 years of age, when he was still a relatively young man.

Notice first his position. Scholars of ancient civilizations tell us that at this time Egypt surpassed all other nations of the earth in wealth, education, influence, and military power. Egypt was the Babylon of its day. And Pharaoh says to Joseph, in Genesis 41:41, “See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt.” All this was suddenly accessible to Joseph—limitless wealth, advanced learning, and world power.

Along with his position was Joseph’s authority. He does not just have access to all the resources of Egypt, but he has the right to use them as he sees fit. Pharaoh takes his ring from his hand and puts it on Joseph’s hand, and he says, “without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.” The ring was a symbol of authority. It had an emblem on it that Pharaoh would sink into clay or wax as his signature on the bottom of a letter or his seal on an envelope. Now, in Pharaoh’s name, Joseph can do what he pleases in Egypt. He can direct all the citizens of this land to follow his command, and he has complete financial authority in the land.

Also, Joseph enjoys sudden fame and prominence. Already Joseph has been clean shaven, the way that an Egyptian ruler would be, and now he is clothed in fine white linen, the attire of an Egyptian king, a gold chain is put around his neck, he is placed in the second chariot of Egypt, and the people are commanded to bow the knee to him as he rides through the streets. Whenever a new leader comes into power, the newspapers are filled with reports. Joseph was suddenly a celebrity.

All these—position, power, and prominence—are temptations to self-serving pride. How will Joseph use them? Will he use his position for self-advancement? Will he use his power to get back at those who have mistreated him in the past? Will his prominence give him an inflated sense of self importance? These are the temptations he faces as prime minister. Life at the top is not so easy.

And then, notice what Pharaoh does to Joseph. Joseph comes out of prison a Hebrew slave, and Pharaoh does all he can to completely Egyptianize his new governor. This goes far beyond his shaved head and linen clothes. First, Pharaoh gives to him an Egyptian name, Zaph-nath-pa-aneah, which likely means, “The God who speaks and lives”—an obvious reference to his dreams, which Joseph had interpreted. But, nevertheless, it is an Egyptian name.

And then, Pharaoh gives to him a wife, a woman whose name is Asenath, the daughter of a man named Potipherah. This is not the same Potiphar as Joseph had once served as slave, but rather this man is the priest of On, one of the cities of Egypt. This man was obviously a prominent religious figure in Egypt. His daughter’s name, Asenath, means “One who belongs to the goddess, Nath.” When she was born, he dedicated her to this pagan deity.

We should notice here that Joseph did not ask for either of these things. He did not ask for an Egyptian name, and he did not ask for an Egyptian wife. Pharaoh imposed both of these things on Joseph. Why? Because he wanted Joseph to become completely Egyptian. Now

maybe Pharaoh wanted that for Joseph's sake, because he wanted Joseph to be accepted and respected as a foreigner who is now the governor, but regardless, this posed another immense temptation for Joseph, the temptation to succumb to what Pharaoh wanted, to lose his identity as a Hebrew, to forget his family and the promises of God, and to get caught up in the life and culture of Egypt. Maybe as a slave and prisoner, when he was a stranger in this land, he still needed his God, but did he need Him any more? That of course would be the tempting thought for Joseph. Why maintain his identity? Why not hide it and mix and move with much more ease among the Egyptian elite?

Then, further, think of all the responsibility that is put on Joseph now as ruler in Egypt, and the unique challenges of such responsibility. There will be a devastating seven-year famine, and Joseph is suddenly called on to save Egypt from the devastating effects of that famine. What interest does he have in this, and why should he be the one to carry the weight of it? With responsibility comes criticism and the possibility of failure. And there had to be opposition. Joseph went through all the land, imposing a 20% tax on the people, and collecting their payment in grains and non-perishable food. He built storehouses in each of the cities of Egypt, and stored up. There had to be skeptics. Why, in such prosperity, put away so much food? Whose idea was this anyway? And the temptation, of course, is to give in to such criticism, or to abandon your responsibilities. Why is it that we are sometimes tempted to run from responsibilities? To throw up our hands at our children and say, what is the use? To give up on our employees, or to become exasperated as leaders in the church? Often we want to think it is the children or the employees or the church members, but more often it is us. We do not like the criticism, the lack of appreciation, the difficulty of dealing with people.

Then too, notice the challenge of success. We read in verse 49 that "Joseph gathered corn as the sand of the sea, very much, until he left numbering; for it was without number." Things went very well for Joseph. According to plan. He exceeded expectations. And when the seven prosperous years ended, there was a "dearth in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread." And when the people came crying to Pharaoh for food he sent them to Joseph, and visitors came from all parts of the earth because they heard that there was bread in Egypt. This man, Joseph, deserves a medal for saving the world; or so he could have thought to himself.

These were the temptations that Joseph now faced. Pride, trust in self, success, and forgetting his God and his heritage. But, just as Joseph stands up against seduction from Potiphar's wife, so now he stands up and is strong in the face of these temptations. He remains humble, he does not lose sight of the purpose of his position, that it is not for self-glorification, but for the saving alive of many people, and he remembers who he is. He remembers his heritage, and he remains committed to the God who was with him and sustained him all through his slavery and imprisonment. Joseph's wisdom, we could say, exceeds the wisdom of Solomon, whose wealth and wives and position and power brought him down into serious sin.

What kept Joseph going was his faith in the God of his fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who had made promises concerning a Savior, and who had promised that through him, all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

We see this faith of Joseph in the naming of his two sons. Verse 50 tells us that during the seven prosperous years, before the famine came, God gave Joseph and his wife Asenath two sons, whom Joseph named Manasseh and Ephraim.

The first notable thing here is that these are Hebrew names. Even though Joseph is Egyptianized, and even though his wife is an Egyptian and a daughter of an Egyptian priest, Joseph gives to his boys these Hebrew names. That is a bold statement to aristocracy and to the people of Egypt. Joseph did not want to be assimilated into Egyptian culture. Joseph did not want to be Egyptianized. He wished to retain his identity as a Hebrew. He remembered his spiritual origins, that he belonged to the people of God, to Israel, to the people of the promise. Like Moses after him, he wished to be identified with the Hebrews, rather than enjoy the luxuries and pleasures of sin in Egypt. He saw a spiritual distinction, an antithesis, between himself and the Egyptians, between his God and the gods of the Egyptians. And at this point in history, Joseph believed in God, he had a faith in God, like none other on earth. When God looked down, the faith of Joseph stood out, like the godliness of Noah before him. It is significant that this happened right before the famine. Did anyone else really believe that the famine was coming? Joseph believed it with all his heart, because God had revealed it. His faith in God was strong.

And we see that also in the names he gives to his sons. The first, he calls Manasseh, which means “he who causes to forget.” And Joseph said, “For God hath made me to forget all my toil and all my father’s house.” By “forget” Joseph does not mean that the pain of 13 years and the memory of his family are erased from his mind. Rather, he means that he has a joy and a happiness in his life now that suppress those memories, and that even give purpose to those memories. The birth of a son brings much joy to Joseph. He is a married man, with one wife (in contrast to his father), and now he has a child. A family of his own. And he sees that God has led him through the years of pain and loneliness to bring him to this point. What a blessing and joy covenant children are. Psalm 127 calls them the heritage of the Lord, and Psalm 128 says that with them God fills our house with good.

The name of the second son is Ephraim, which means “twice fruitful.” And Joseph says, “For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.” He celebrates not only the birth of two sons, but all the bounty that God has given him in Egypt. And Egypt is not his home; he calls it still “the land of my affliction.”

How humbly grateful Joseph is here, giving his boys names that remind him of what God has done for him. “God has made..., and God has given...” Joseph has experienced the goodness and graciousness of God to him. And because of this, Joseph does not abuse his power by getting back at Potiphar’s wife, the butler, or his brothers who had hurt him in the past. No, experiencing God’s grace, he cannot hold a grudge.

Another reason that Joseph does not forget his identity or his God is that Joseph is still looking forward to something else. His exaltation in Egypt and his settled family life are not the end for him. He believes God has a greater purpose. What of his dreams? What of his seeing his brothers and his family again? What of the promise of God to give the land of Canaan to Jacob and his sons? What of the promise to Abraham concerning the exile of his descendants in a strange land? What of the promise of the seed, the Messiah? Certainly, Joseph expects that God will fulfill his own dreams and that he will see his brothers and father here in Egypt, bowing before him. And so he waits. He has to wait some more. And he does that in faith too, believing that God will accomplish his own revelation in the dreams of his youth.

The story of Joseph, we have seen, is a story of God’s providence. God is working mysteriously, with a secret hand, behind all these events, to save His people, the entire family of Jacob. This is the church, and God will never let His church or people perish. He has chosen

them in eternity, He has loved them with an unchanging eternal love, He has entrusted them to the care of His Son, He has given His Son as the sacrifice for their sins, and so, not one of them will perish. This is the purpose of God's providence, all throughout history, and still today. He works everything, every detail, to bring His saints to glory. The history of Joseph is the history of the church.

But we see in it also the hand of God's providence in the life of each of His children, individually. We have spoken, today, of the amazing godliness of Joseph amid all the temptations of Egypt? How was that possible. Certainly, it was because the Lord was with him in the palace, just as he had been with him in Potiphar's house and in the prison. But also, and we should not miss this, God has specifically worked in the difficulties and trials of Joseph's life, to prepare and equip him for his work as leader in Egypt. The preparation was not just administrative, God did not only prepare Joseph to be a good decision-maker and leader, but the preparation was primarily spiritual. Through the pain of 13 years, Joseph was prepared spiritually for the high position that came to him in Egypt. Why does not it go to his head? Why does not he abuse his power? Because he has learned along the way that the trials he faces, and the battles he fights, are spiritual. It goes deeper than circumstances. He needs God to guide him, not just in difficult times, but also in prosperity. It has been said, "Not every man can carry a full cup." God has spiritually prepared Joseph to carry a full cup.

And God has a personalized curriculum for each of His children, just as He did for Joseph. Through hard circumstances God prepares us to avoid the pitfalls of pride. Through difficulties, God teaches us perseverance, so that we do not give up under difficult responsibility. Through poverty and need, God teaches us to acknowledge Him and to be thankful when prosperity comes our way. Long periods of affliction ought not discourage us. Bad memories ought not defeat us. And prosperity ought not separate us from communion with God.

Let us pray.

Lord we love Thy Word, and we have so much more revealed to us than Joseph had. He clung to just a few snippets of revelation, a couple dreams, and some promises that he heard by word of mouth from his father. That was all he had, and yet he believed it with all his heart, and because of that he persevered through so many troubles and temptations. Lord, give us a faith like that, so that we might be patient in adversity and thankful in prosperity. For Jesus' sake we ask it, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

March 24, 2013
No. 3664

Tetelestai—It Is Finished
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

To help us this week in remembering and meditating on the cross and suffering of Jesus Christ, I have chosen John 19:30 as the text for this message, where Jesus says from the cross, “It is finished.” In Greek that is simply one word, *tetelestai*. One word that says so much. There is no one word ever uttered in the history of this world that means so much. This word takes us back to eternity, to the counsel of God. At the same time it looks ahead to the end, to the new heavens and earth, to heaven to come. Contained in this word is the whole gospel of salvation and everything related to our salvation.

This word is the apex, the climax, of history. It is the turning point, the hinge on which all of history and all of your salvation and mine turns. “It is finished.” To whom does Jesus speak this word? The answer is, to all. This most important word ever spoken is a word that everyone must hear. He speaks it against Satan and all who are opposed to him. He speaks it to God His Father. And He speaks it to us His people.

When we think of it as a word spoken to Satan, we see it as a word of conquest, a word of victory. Jesus did not actually just say this word, but He shouted it from the cross. In Luke 23:46, which records the next word of Jesus from the cross, we read that “when he had cried out with a loud voice, he said, Father into thy hands I commend my Spirit.” The cry with a loud voice was the previous word, this one, “*Tetelestai*,” or “It is finished.”

Why does He shout? Because this is a cry of victory from the battlefield of the cross.

This world that we live in is the setting of a history-long battle between the seed of the woman, Christ, and Satan, who is called in Genesis 3 the seed of the serpent. From the very beginning of the world it has been Satan’s design to undo everything that God had done. He designed to make ugly everything that God had made beautiful. He designed to bring defeat and death into the world of life that God had made. And his desire especially is this, to prevent the salvation of any one of God’s people.

And so already in heaven Satan wars against God, and he is cast out of heaven. Then Satan makes his next move against God, and comes to Adam and Eve in the garden, and through his wife and craft brings sin and death into this creation.

This battle continues all through the Old Testament. It is there in the children of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel. Enoch is persecuted. Noah is mocked. Abraham is a stranger in the earth. The Israelites are persecuted in Egypt. When they come into Canaan they are cursed and tempted.

Satan is always attempting to undo what God has done.

This battle becomes the most intense during the life and ministry of Christ and reaches its climax at the cross. Jesus says to those who oppose Him, “Ye are of your father the devil, and his works ye do.” Through the unbelieving Jews, Satan was coming at Jesus. And now when

Jesus says, "It is finished," He speaks that word as a word of conquest to the devil. The battle is won by Christ, on the cross. The devil is defeated.

Now, when at first we look at Christ on the cross, it does not appear to be a moment of victory. Instead, it seems that Satan is having his day.

What do you see? You see, Jesus hanging on the cross, weak and bleeding and dying and forsaken of all His disciples. He is alone.

Listen to what you hear the crowds crying: "Away with Him, crucify Him." The earthly judge condemning Him to death: "Take Him. Do with Him as you please." The mocking crowds cry, "Crucify Him." There is a whip tearing His skin, a hammer pounding the nails into His hands.

And meanwhile heaven is silent. Do you see or hear anything from heaven? Christ cries out in His suffering: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And God does not speak a word of approval. The angels do not come to His assistance. He seems defeated in death.

It is reported that Queen Elizabeth I of England said on her deathbed, "It is over. I have come to the end. To have only one life and to have done with it, to have lived and loved and triumphed, and now it is over. One may defy everything else, but not this."

Does not it seem that this is what Christ is saying? A cry of despair, a cry of defeat, a cry of a worn-out life? "It is finished."

But, beloved, it is not so. For look again and listen again. Listen to the words of Jesus Christ. He said to the Jewish leaders in John 10: "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."

Before the judgment seat of Pilate, Jesus said something very similar. When Pilate says, "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above." And again, when Christ is in the garden and they come to arrest Him He says, "Whom seek ye?" They reply, "Jesus of Nazareth." And then, when Jesus says, "I am he," they fall flat on their backs at the power of the word and presence of the Son of God.

There is no defeat in this word.

Why does He not answer Pilate? Why does He give His back to the smiters? Why does He not come down from the cross? Why does not call a legion of angels to His assistance?

Because He chooses not to.

This is the voluntary suffering of Jesus Christ. And His enemies here are doing His will. They did things. They said things. They jeered. They nailed Him to the cross. They fed Him vinegar on a reed. All so *that the Scriptures might be fulfilled*. God had determined what they would do to His Son. There is no defeat. There is victory in this cry of Jesus.

As He goes to the cross, Jesus says in John 12 verse 31, "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world [the devil] be cast out." All the enemies of Christ are defeated in this word. "It is finished." Satan is finished. Sin is finished. Death is finished. The curse is finished. "It is finished."

Satan's power is finished. He is bound that he may deceive the nations no more. Hebrews 2:14 puts it this way: "...that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

In the cross of Christ there is an irony. He comes to destroy death. He comes to destroy the devil who has the power of death. And He does it by Himself being subjected to death and the power of the devil so that He may overcome. He removes the sting of death, which is sin. "It is finished."

So first Christ speaks this word against Satan as a word of conquest.

Now, in the second place, we should think of this word of Jesus Christ as a word that he speaks to God. And then we see it as a word of completion.

This is a word that Jesus speaks to God in John chapter 17 already before He goes to the cross. In John 17 verse four He says: "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." And, again, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world." In Hebrews chapter 10 we see again that this is a word that Jesus speaks unto God. There we read: "Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me." He is speaking to God and saying, I have fulfilled the Scriptures of the Old Testament, the prophecies and pictures in the sacrifices. It is finished.

In a little while the veil of the temple will be rent in two. What does that mean? It means God is done with the temple. God is done with the types. They have served their purpose. They have come to their final manifestation in Jesus Christ. Everything in all the types is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He is finished with the holy practices. He is finished with the offices of the temple.

Again in Hebrews chapter 10: And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.

What does that mean? Think of what it means. Every morning and every evening those Old Testament priests made sacrifices, again and again. Every year they had the Passover feast and they killed a lamb over and over. Every year on the great day of atonement two goats were taken, one that was sent out into the wilderness, the other that was killed for the people. And every time they did this, they knew that it had to be done again because it did not finish the work. It did not pay for sin. It was impossible for the blood of the sacrifices to take away sin. But now, Christ in His death finishes that. He pays the price, and He knows that the sacrifice will not need to be repeated. "It is finished." There is success and completion in this word.

In the death of Christ also the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled. As you read the gospels, especially as they speak of the cross, they again and again say, "that the Scripture might be fulfilled." They gave vinegar to drink, they crucified Him between two criminals, they parted His raiment, they did not break His legs, He cried out "My God, My God"—why? All, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. The Old Testament is the message of the coming suffering Savior. Christ is there in His blood and sacrifice.

Jesus was very conscious of this. Just a couple verses earlier, in John 19 verse 28, we read this: "Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled...." He knew. And as He looks to God and has His eye on God, He says, "Father, I come to do thy will, to fulfill thy will for me." He has come in the flesh. He has made known through His ministry who He

is. He has organized a group of disciples who will be the foundation of the New Testament church and carry on His witness. He has gone to the cross. He suffered, in the agonies of the cross, not only the persecution of men, but the darkness and the agony of the pit of hell. He has cried out from the pit of hell in utter forsakenness. And now He says, "It is finished."

He has obeyed perfectly the will of God for Him.

But there is more here in this word as He speaks it to God. It is finished is not only a word spoken in the context of this world of human history, but as He speaks it to the Father, it is spoken in the context of eternity, as the fulfillment of the eternal counsel of God for Him. This is the eternal Son speaking to the eternal Father and saying, "Father, it...our counsel, our eternal counsel and plan...it is finished."

In Acts chapter two the apostle Peter hints at this when he says that it was by the predetermined counsel and foreknowledge of God that the wicked Jews took and killed Jesus Christ. And the same apostle calls Him the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world.

And now there is a conversation between this lamb and the God who slays Him, and he says, "It is finished." He is referring to their eternal counsel concerning the redemption of mankind. They have an eternal plan and purpose for all things in the history of this world. The Father and the Son and the Spirit saith, "Let us do this, let us make man, let us redeem fallen man...." Everything that we see in the history of this world is a result of their saying, "Let us do this."

And in all this, God triune has one purpose and goal—His own glory in the salvation of His people also eternally chosen. That plan includes everything, every fine detail of the life of this world and this universe. It included all the great things, the creation, the fall of the devil, the fall of mankind into sin, and the dark hour of man's running from God. All that was there. That was because God had this beautiful plan of salvation to redeem from fallen humanity a people to himself, to come to them and rescue them in His grace from the darkness of their sin and the curse. And God in that plan determined to send His Son as Savior to the cross. This is central to the plan of God. And Jesus is saying to the Father: "It is finished."

The cross is the centerpiece of history, not first planted on Calvary, but planted in the eternal counsel of God, planned by God before all else. Christ, who is before all things and by whom all things are and for whom all things were made (read Colossians 1:15-17), this Christ now says to the Father: "It is finished."

The work of the cross, which makes possible every detail of God's beautiful master plan for the history of this world, is finished. This is a cry of satisfaction. It is finished.

An architect draws a blueprint. A builder takes the blueprint and he builds a house according to it. And when he is done, when everything is done, the landscaping is complete, trees are in place—it all looks very good. Maybe before the owner sees it, the builder and architect walk around and say, "It is finished." They look at the blueprint, and they see that everything is in place, just as planned.

Christ says, Father, it is finished, it is done. As planned. And the Father is satisfied. In creation, He looked at what He had made, and behold, it was very good. God looks down on the cross, and He says, Very good. We know this from the resurrection. The work is finished.

And so, second, this is a word of completion that the Son speaks to the Father.

A third way for us to think of this word is that Christ speaks it to and for His people as a word of comfort.

It is finished. Jesus is telling His people, telling everyone who believes in Him, that what had to be done to secure their salvation is finished. Oh what a comfort.

Sin's payment is finished. The breaking of sin's power is finished. Satan, our great foe, is overcome, is finished. Death is destroyed, finished. All the blessings of salvation and the treasures of heaven are secured for us. It is finished. The wrath of God is turned away from me, it is finished. Every comfort, every promise, every grace, glory, and heaven are secured for me. I am purchased from the grip of the devil. The price of redemption has been paid. It is finished.

Perhaps you say, "But it does not seem to be finished. Jesus' work is not finished at the cross, is it? Does not He still have to go into the grave, be raised, ascend into heaven, send the Holy Spirit, rule from heaven, make intercession for us, and come again as Judge? And, when I look around in this world, or look at my life, or look into my heart, there is still so much work that Christ must do. Is it finished?"

But, you see, here is exactly where the comfort of this word comes in. Yes, we are still in the struggle with sin. Yes, there is still war and disease and death. Yes, we have not reached heavenly glory yet. But you see, when Christ says, It is finished, He means that all these blessings have already been secured for us, and so, in the midst of trouble, we do not have to fear and be afraid and wonder. We need not be overcome with the weight and the guilt of our sin. Christ has paid the price, Christ has broken the power of sin. Even when He goes to the grave, the grave cannot hold Him. It has no power over Him.

What a comfort for us, also when we die. We die and then we stand before the Judge. Christ dies, and He has already stood before the Judge, and He has made the payment, so that as He goes into the grave, death and the curse of death have no power over Him. It is finished. It is finished for every one who believes in Him.

Is that important to you, beloved?

Do you not see this as the central word of the most important word that is ever spoken? It is a word that tells us what the cross was all about. This is what Christ did in His death, He finished it, He paid the price of redemption.

The cross of Christ should mean more to us, more than anything else in the world. In Galatians 6:14, Paul says, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." We glory in the cross, and by it the world becomes dead, unimportant to us, because we are taken up in eternal things.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for what Christ has done for the completeness of His work, for the payment, for the victory, for the comfort. We pray, Lord, that we may live in the knowledge of the cross and that it may also bear on our lives and change us to live to Him and to live apart from, dead to, this world. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

March 31, 2013
No. 3665

Now Is Christ Risen
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

Today is Easter Sunday. On Easter Sunday true believers remember and celebrate the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The Bible tells us, in Matthew 28, that on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, Jesus' dead body came to life and arose from the grave where it had been laid to rest. This is what we celebrate today and, really, what we remember every week when on the first day of the week as the New Testament church we gather for public worship. The Christian Sabbath, on the first day of the week, is a weekly memorial of the resurrection of Jesus.

In our day, a day in which everything seems to need a scientific explanation, and a day in which the Bible is questioned, we must emphasize that the resurrection of Jesus was historical. That it actually happened. Many people today celebrate Easter Sunday, but at the same time deny that Jesus rose from the dead. It is common today to view the resurrection of Jesus Christ as symbolic or mythical. The resurrection is explained as the legacy of Jesus' living on in the memories of His followers. People, following science rather than Scripture, will say it is impossible for a human body once dead to rise again, so they will try to find some other explanation for the resurrection.

But every true believer takes Scripture at its word, believing that Christ physically and literally arose from the grave, that His body, which was dead, came back to life. We believe that the resurrection really happened. We do not believe this because it can be substantiated scientifically or with physical evidence; rather, the proof of the resurrection is found in the Word of God. By faith in God's Word, we believe the resurrection.

The Bible, throughout, teaches the resurrection of Christ. It was prophesied in the Old Testament. In Psalm 16:10, David speaks prophetically of Christ, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." When Jesus spoke to His disciples of His death, He repeatedly told them that on the third day He would rise again from the dead. After Jesus arose, He sent heavenly messengers, angels, who said, He is not here, He is risen as He said. And the disciples said to one another, He is risen indeed. Many times the risen Jesus appeared to His disciples to demonstrate to them that He was indeed risen. There were eyewitness accounts of His resurrection. And so, in the days, weeks, and months following Jesus' resurrection, it was an undisputed fact, so much so that the Jews had to fabricate a cover-up story.

There is no question that the Bible teaches that Jesus arose. Every true believer who takes the Bible at its word believes that Jesus arose.

We do that, not just because the Bible says it is true, but because the resurrection of Jesus is essential to the message of the gospel. It is an essential part of Jesus' saving work for us.

When the followers of Jesus after Pentecost began to preach the gospel, the resurrection of Jesus was an essential component of that message. Not only did Jesus come and die in the place of sinners, but He also arose the third day, is alive today ruling over all, and will come again to judge this world. In I Corinthians 15 verses 1 through 4 Paul says, "I declare unto you the gospel

which I preached unto you...by which also ye are saved...how that Christ died for our sins...that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”

On the day of Pentecost, when Peter stood up to preach, he said to his audience, who had killed Jesus, that God “raised him up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it” (Acts 2:24).

In Acts 10, Peter preached the resurrection of Jesus to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius. In Acts 13:29-30, Paul preached concerning Jesus, “they took him down from the tree and laid him in a sepulchre, but God raised him from the dead.” And again, in Acts 17:31, preaching at Athens to an audience of Gentiles who had never heard the gospel before, Paul said that God “hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained [that is, Jesus Christ], whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he raised him from the dead.”

By raising Jesus from the dead, God has told us that Jesus is alive and is coming again as judge. Or, as Romans 1:4 tells us, He declared by the resurrection from the dead that Jesus is the Son of God.

And so this was emphasized in the preaching of the early church as an essential component of the gospel message.

Why? Why is it so important to believe in the resurrection of Jesus?

In the greatest chapter in the Bible on the resurrection, I Corinthians 15, Paul tells us why the resurrection of Jesus is so essential. And here, understand, Paul is answering people who are skeptical about the resurrection of Jesus. Paul says this, in verses 16-20: For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: “And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.”

Just stop with me and notice a few things here.

Paul says, if dead people do not rise again, then Jesus did not rise. And, if Jesus did not rise, well, your faith in Jesus is a waste of time and energy. If Jesus did not rise, you are still in your sins. There was no power in His death. The grave and not Jesus had the victory. If Jesus did not rise, there is no forgiveness. There is no overcoming of the curse of death. There is no power to overcome sin. You are still in your sins. And, if Jesus did not rise, then those who have already died have perished. There is no hope for them. If Jesus did not rise, no one is delivered from hell. No one dies with hope.

If Christianity is only a religion that has to do with the here and now, with being good people in this world, with finding joy in this life only; if Christianity has no connection to another life; if it gives no hope to people beyond death, well, then Christians are the most senseless people on the planet. Then we are of all men most miserable. Why live as followers of Christ in this world, why deny yourself and suffer for Christ, if there is no resurrection?

But, *NOW, IS*, Christ, risen, from the dead!

You see, the resurrection means all these things. We are no longer in our sins. Sin has been paid. Death has been conquered. The power of sin has been broken. We have hope beyond the grave. Jesus is alive, and has overcome not only death, but hell and Satan. And so our faith in

Him is not vain, and we are not miserable and senseless, but the resurrection gives sense to our whole existence as Christians. We have hope. We have joy. We believe in a God who lives. We trust in a Savior who delivers from death. We are here in this world, on a journey, to a heavenly home.

This is what it means that Christ is risen.

This is why we believe that the third day He rose again from the dead. To be saved, we must believe in our hearts that God has raised Jesus from the dead (Rom. 10:9). Our full confession is that our Savior both died, and rose again (Rom. 4:25; 14:9).

The power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ extends far beyond His own bodily resurrection. It reaches into the twenty-first century, into the hearts and lives of believers today. There are great benefits for us today, as result of Jesus resurrection.

Let me mention three of them.

The first is that we become partakers of the righteousness that He purchased for us by His death. *In His resurrection, Jesus gives to us what He first earned for us.* By His death He earned our righteousness, paying the price for our sins. In His resurrection, He both proves that the payment for sin was sufficient, and applies that righteousness to us.

We must remember that all our righteousness is in Jesus Christ. We are not acceptable and righteous before God on account of any work or worth that comes from us. We must not dig into our own souls, or strive in our own lives, to make ourselves acceptable to God. We are accepted and acquitted only through trusting in what Christ has accomplished for us.

The resurrection tells us that God receives us. The resurrection is a declaration from God concerning Jesus, and so also concerning us who believe in Him. He “was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Rom. 4:25).

If Christ is not raised, ye are yet in your sins. But now is Christ risen from the dead.

Dear believer, do you take solace and comfort in the resurrection of Christ? When you are weighed down with the burden and the guilt of your sin, do you meditate on the reality of Christ, your sin-bearer, being raised from the dead, and overcoming what your sin deserves? What He earned, He gives to us.

The second benefit of Jesus’ resurrection that reaches to us today, is that by the power of His resurrection we are raised up to a new life. I did not say we *will be* raised up to a new life, but that we *are* raised up to a new life. Already now, in the present, today, we are raised up to a new life.

The new life that I am speaking of here is the life of the Holy Spirit that comes into us in regeneration. Through the work of the Spirit we are united with Jesus Christ our Savior, so that His work and His life becomes ours. Romans 6 says we are buried with Him, and raised with Him to newness of life. This is the new life of sanctification—a life separated to serving the Lord in godliness and obedience.

In Galatians 2:20, Paul says, I am crucified with Christ. He means that, through faith in the death of Christ, His death is my death, He pays for my curse. But faith takes me further. I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live. Yet not I. But Christ liveth in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the son of God who loved me, and gave Himself for me.

Paul says, I am alive. I am alive now, in the flesh. I am alive, through faith in Jesus Christ.

It is the privilege and joy of every believer to possess the new life of Christ in his soul. Because of this life, we are victorious as Christians. Sin is not altogether dead. No, it will not be abolished until our physical death. Meanwhile, it wages war against our souls and against the life of Christ that is in us. But, in Christ, we are more than conquerors. We have victory! And declaring our victory over sin, we then go to war.

Paul says, Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed, to sin, but alive unto God. This is what we know, we believe, we confess about ourselves, as we put our faith in Jesus Christ. This is how we evaluate ourselves, spiritually, in the present. Whereas, by nature, we were dead in trespasses and sins, now we are alive, and so Paul says, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body" (Rom. 6:12).

Again, we declare our victory in Jesus Christ's resurrection, and then we go to war with sin. Apart from the life of Christ, we are dead, and can never take on the enemy of sin. In Him, we have the victory.

The third present benefit of Jesus' resurrection is this, that we have a promise and pledge of our own blessed resurrection.

"I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25-26).

Job said these words, knowing that he would die. But, believing that his Redeemer lives, he knew that his flesh would also live someday to see God. He made this confession long before the resurrection of Christ, but he believed in a living God, and so believed that he too would live.

Jesus is not dead. He lives.

Jesus is risen as a pledge, a guarantee, and a promise that our bodies will also be raised.

This is a double promise, a promise that works both ways.

A little of our humanity, represented in the human nature of Jesus Christ, is already raised and living with the Father in heaven. Colossians 3:3 says that our "life is hid with Christ in God." The risen Christ is called "the firstfruits of them that slept" (I Cor. 15:20). A little of the earth is taken to heaven, to show that more will follow.

And at the same time, a deposit of the blessed and eternal resurrection life of Christ is left here with us. A little of heaven is put into our hearts and experienced in our lives. We have the "earnest of the Spirit" (II Cor. 5:5).

How blessed the final resurrection day will be. The living Christ will come on the clouds. He will issue a powerful, effective wake-up call to all who are in their graves. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, we shall be changed. The dead will be raised, incorruptible. And death will forever be swallowed up in victory.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the answer to man's ultimate problem, the problem of death. It removes the curse of eternal death from me. It overcomes death in my nature. It assures that my dead body will be raised to be with the Lord.

Faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ assures all this for me.

Did Jesus rise from the dead? If you do not believe it, you are still in your sins. If you do not believe it, you are in a miserable state.

But now is Christ risen from the dead.

Let us pray.

Father, we give thanks for the power of Jesus Christ that overcame death and the grave, and by which He suffered for us the agonies and torments of hell that our sins deserved. And we give thanks for the power of Jesus' resurrection that reaches into our hearts, to change us, to make us alive, to give us eyes for heaven, eyes and hearts and lips and lives of praise. Oh, living God, give us Thy life, we pray. Amen.