

+ Genesis 39:6b-12, 16-23 + Is It Really Worth It? +

+ Fifth Sunday after Pentecost: Confirmation of Sean Cooley & Amanda Sleeth + 27 June 2010 +

“Do you intend to continue steadfast in the true and faithful teaching of God’s Word and to endure all things, even death, rather than fall away from it?” In a few minutes, Sean and Amanda will come forward to answer that question as they publicly confess their faith before the Lord and this congregation. It’s a day to celebrate and rejoice, but is it really worth it?

Is Christ and his Word really worth such a serious vow that you would rather die than be unfaithful to either of them? Was it really worth going through three years of instruction in the basic teachings of God’s Word when you could’ve done other things on your Friday nights? Is it really worth publicly stating that you are in full agreement with a congregation and church body that many in our world consider too conservative? Is it really worth it to conform your life to God’s Word and keep growing in your Christian faith?

Yes, it could’ve been easier to blow off your instruction in God’s Word. It could be easier to not associate with a church that actually considers Holy Scripture to be the effective and inspired Word of God. It could be easier to forget about your public confession of faith after today and think you don’t need your Bible and Catechism anymore. It could be easier to just let them gather dust. It could be easier to do all that, but easy is not how our God describes the Christian life. In the end, though, it’s all worth it.

Let me tell you about a young man named Joseph. Joseph grew up as one of twelve sons in a wealthy, God-fearing, often dysfunctional family. Of the twelve sons, Joseph was his father’s favorite. Jacob showed him special favor and the Lord even allowed Joseph to see dreams of a time when his whole family would bow before him. Joseph’s sinful nature got the best of him though. He made his brothers so angry that they wanted him dead.

One day they got that opportunity as they grazed the family flocks in another region. Jacob sent Joseph to check on them, so when they saw him coming, they actually plotted to kill him. Thankfully, that didn’t happen, but they did eventually sell Joseph to some traveling slave traders passing through the region. Joseph was hauled off to Egypt, where he was bought by an Egyptian official named Potiphar. Things seemed pretty bad, but **“the LORD was with Joseph and he prospered... When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household...”** The Lord of free and faithful grace was on Joseph’s side and blessed his service. He soon became Potiphar’s personal attendant and the manager of the entire household. All the time the Lord blessed Joseph and those he served.

Life was good again. Joseph had the respect of his boss and authority in the household. He had a comfortable life. Above all, he had the Lord of free and faithful grace on his side. Somewhere along the way Jacob taught his son about the Lord and his promises given to their forefathers. He had taught Joseph about trusting in the Lord of grace, who had blessed and cared for his great-grandfather Abraham, his grandfather Isaac, and his father Jacob. Above all, he taught Joseph about the Messiah—the Savior whom the Lord would eventually send from their family to deliver all people from the curse of sin and death. By grace, that Messiah would bring forgiveness and life and salvation. The Lord was richly blessing Joseph, but soon he would prepare Joseph for greater blessing—in a very painful way.

Joseph was good-looking and the ladies noticed, especially Mrs. Potiphar. She noticed this up-and-coming slave in her husband’s service. Her interest soon became unhealthy lust for Joseph. One day she propositioned him. **“Come to bed with me!”** There it was—temptation so easy and appealing right there in front of him. He had so much. Now he could have it all, **“but he refused.”** In no uncertain terms, Joseph told her, **“Everything [my master] owns he has entrusted to my care...My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?”**

Not only did he not want to dishonor his master, not only did he clearly understand the boundaries of marriage, but above all, he loved his Lord too much to give in to temptation and do such a wicked thing against God. Following the true God mattered more than anything else in the world. By faith, Joseph had an awe-filled respect for God’s holy will and he loved his Lord, who had chosen his family to be the cradle for the Savior.

...But was it worth it? It could’ve been so easy for Joseph. Potiphar didn’t have to know, but remaining steadfast in the faith is never easy. Mrs. Potiphar tried to wear Joseph down day after day, but **“he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.”** He didn’t even want to be in the same room with her and her temptation, but things only got worse.

“One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. She caught him by his cloak and said, ‘Come to bed with me!’ But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house....She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story:

'That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to humiliate me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.' When his master heard the story his wife told him...he burned with anger. Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined." Was it really worth it? Was it really worth remaining faithful under temptation? Was it really worth running away once more? Was it really worth getting tossed in prison for remaining faithful to God and trusting that God knows what he's doing? It could've been so much easier to give in with much less pain and tragedy, but it was worth it.

The Lord of grace had greater plans for his faithful servant and continued to bless Joseph. Joseph should've been put to death for Mrs. Potiphar's claim, but instead was put in a minimum security prison. He was even put in charge of all the prisoners by the warden. In spite of the tragedy, the pain, the difficulty for remaining faithful in the face of temptation, ***"the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness..."*** literally, "faithful, never-failing, loving-kindness." Eventually, the Lord used Joseph's position in the prison to make him the second most powerful man in Egypt, which eventually saved his family and above all, preserved the line of the Savior. It was all worth it.

So what does that have to do with you? You're about to publicly confess your Christian faith before God and his people that you would rather die than give in to temptation or give up your Christian faith. You will promise to conform your life to the teaching of God's Word and keep growing in the grace of God that comes through the Word and Sacraments. Is it really worth it? Yes.

God doesn't promise that your life as a Christian will be easy, but God does promise his grace and every blessing. Jesus does promise a crown of life bought with his own blood for the one who remains faithful even to the point of death. Of course, it's worth it. Why did Joseph remain faithful? Not because he had a faith that could move mountains. Not because he was such a great guy in God's eyes. Not even because he came from a churchgoing, God-fearing family. Joseph remained faithful, because he knew God's grace. Joseph remained faithful, because he knew his God would be faithful to his promises, especially that promise of a Savior. There's good reason why Joseph is included among those described as ***"being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."*** (Hebrews 11:1) Joseph was looking forward to his Savior, who would fulfill every promise, even to the point of death. Joseph was sure of God's plan and you can be too.

Long before you entered Confirmation class, the Holy Spirit planted that same trust in your Savior in your heart. Your parents brought you to the font to place you in your Savior's waiting arms through Holy Baptism. They told you about Jesus as little children. In Sunday School, you learned even more. Then came Confirmation class where you received a solid foundation in the basics of the Christian faith. You studied the Ten Commandments, where you learned that by nature you deserve God's eternal wrath and punishment in hell, but you also learned how Jesus kept that Law perfectly for you. You studied the Apostles' Creed, where you learned how the triune God works for your good—to care for you, to save you, and to set you apart as his holy child. You learned about the tools of the Holy Spirit—the Gospel in Word and Sacraments—as you studied Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. You marveled at the grace of God in how he gives you forgiveness, new life, and salvation. You learned how Christ has commanded his Church to forgive sins in his stead, even yours. You learned about the gift of prayer given to believers like you to talk with your dear Father in heaven. In all of this, you learned that God keeps his promises, not only to care for and bless you, but also to save you even when you suffer for your Christian faith.

...But Jesus doesn't promise it's going to be easy. He just promises that it's going to be worth it. It wasn't easy for him to leave his heavenly throne and become a baby like you once were. It wasn't easy for him to grow up like you and live a perfect life in every thought, word, and action. It wasn't easy being betrayed and arrested and mocked and beaten and flogged and crucified. It wasn't easy taking on your sins on his shoulders only to die for those sins and be buried in a borrowed tomb. It wasn't easy conquering death and the grave. It wasn't easy guiding all of history so you would be born and hear the Gospel and come to faith in Jesus even though he knew you would disobey his holy will. It wasn't easy, but it was all worth it to save you, to bring you here today, and to bring you home to heaven someday.

It was all worth it. For that reason it's worth it to remain steadfast in this Christian faith with God's help to the end. It's worth it to stand firm in the face of temptation with God's help and flee it with all your might. It's worth it to trust that your Lord knows what he's doing when you face hardship or tragedy, when your faith is challenged by your teachers or your friends or your co-workers, when others try to tear you down or ridicule you because you don't want to disobey your faithful God. Dear friends, it's worth it, because Jesus bore the cross for you first. May the God of grace, then, keep you faithful to him and to his Word until the end. Amen.