

He Was a Great, Good and Godly Man – a Eulogy for Joseph
Pastor Sam Richards
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Joseph, statesman. As I sought to find a fitting way to pay tribute to one of the very best and earliest statesmen who ever lived, I was helped by a eulogy offered by Alexander Maclaren for the William Gladstone (b. December 29, 1809; d. May 19, 1898). I found Maclaren's funeral sermon while studying Exodus 18. We actually find two other statesmen in Exodus 18: Moses and his father-in-law, Jethro.

Jethro was head of the Midianites, a desert sheik and a descendent of Abraham through Keturah, Abraham's second wife who bore him Midian. He was the head of his clan, a priest of the Most High God, and a leader of great wisdom and eminence. Moses was, in effect a desert sheik, too; but he was the national leader of the Hebrew nation. These are canvasses, of varying size no doubt; but the same technique applies, the same mediums are used regardless. Joseph, Gladstone, Moses and Jethro, all great statesmen and Gladstone is the only Christian in the lot of them. But what unites and distinguishes them all was their **fear of God**. When Joseph said, **Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?** he was alluding indirectly to what he had stated explicitly earlier on.

In Gen. 42:18 **On the third day Joseph said this to them** (his ten brothers being held in custody), **"Do this and you will live, for I fear God."** There can be little doubt that Joseph proposed this out of consultation with God, out of conversation with God which summarizes the fear of the Lord I have in view.

Joseph's **fear of God** was implicit in his rebuff of the advances of Potiphar's wife: **How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?** What did Joseph have going for him, on this tiniest of canvases? He had the promises to Abraham of the land, a remnant, a priesthood . . . of honor and favor!

Now, as it happens, Maclaren chose Exodus 18:21 as his text for Gladstone's eulogy. This verse is the nub of Jethro's wise counsel, a demonstration of statesmanship, as it sets forth the four criteria for godly leadership, for anywhere, anytime, which he believed were manifest in the character of Gladstone—and Joseph, Moses and Jethro for that matter. Here they are:

1. Men of *strength and conviction*—who meditate on the great principles which guide them, who know the mind of God and are faithful to what they know.

2. Men *who fear God*, who habitually serve God because they have attained self-mastery—they are lords of themselves and thus suitable to govern others. Fear of the Lord is their deepest, most firmly held conviction. God is their anchor. "The fear of the Lord is guide, leader, impulse, polestar, regulator, corrector and inspirer of all that he is and all that he does." (Maclaren)

3. Men of truth. Meaning, *seekers and purveyors* of truth, the very truth. Joseph's brothers were veteran and inveterate liars—their characters were deficient

and they couldn't be trusted to do anything but mischief. They were hurtful men. Joseph works at discerning if this has changed before entrusting himself to them again!

We hear rather a lot of "speaking truth to power" these days, not so much since high tech has decided to censure speech within their domain(!)—whoever appointed them to be the arbiters of truth is beyond me, great riches is not a qualification in itself. But the first requirement of "speaking the truth to power" is first hand knowledge of the truth. This is a freedom necessarily anchored to access(!), access to the Word of God, to God Himself. As such, we are talking about truth on a transcendent level, non-partisan truth, not to be confused with the fabrication of "spin," undertaken to control the narrative and direct "news" coverage.

This includes the truth of dawning convictions. "I charge you before God and His blessed angels that you follow me no further than you have seen me follow Christ. If God reveal anything to you by any other instrument of His, be as ready to receive it as you were to receive any truth from my ministry, for I am verily persuaded the Lord hath more truth and light yet to break forth from His Holy Word." ***God's Word is the source and authority!*** (from "Farewell Address" of the Pilgrim Pastor John Robinson, 1620. The humbling hymn "We Limit Not the Truth of God" by George Rawson is based on this address¹). Joseph's brothers were veteran and inveterate

¹ We limit not the truth of God
 To our poor reach of mind,
 By notions of our day and sect,
Crude, partial and confined.
 Now let a new and better hope
 Within our hearts be stirred:
 The Lord hath yet more light and truth
 To break forth from His Word.

² Who dares to bind by his dull sense
 The oracles of heaven,
 For all the nations, tongues and climes
And all the ages given!
 The universe how much unknown!
 That ocean unexplored!
 The Lord hath yet more light and truth
 To break forth from His Word.

³ Darkling our great forefathers went
 The first steps of the way;
 'Twas but the dawning yet to grow
 Into the perfect day;
 And grow it shall, our glorious Sun
 More fervid rays afford:
 The Lord hath yet more light and truth
 To break forth from His Word.

⁴ The valleys past, ascending still,

liars—their characters were deficient and they couldn't be trusted to do anything but mischief. They were hurtful men. Joseph works at discerning if this has changed before entrusting himself to them again!

My opinion is that this cooperation between “spin doctors” and “news anchors” has the effect of reducing all information to “opinion” and of conflating “opinion” with “belief”—they are not, or should not be held to be synonyms, using the latter, belief, to legitimate and enhance mere opinion. While there are many opinions, there is only one truth. At least where there is transparency, *there is only one truth*. The *fabrication, or “spin,”* I speak of is manipulative in nature; it serves some ulterior purpose: denial, blame-shifting, distraction, diversion, hiding and lying. The resultant *evaporation of truth-telling (“press releases and governmental propaganda”)* that has occasioned my distrust and disenchantment with news media and news outlets. However, if the source is divine, the Word of God (and his ordinances, statutes and covenants revealed), there is no such difficulty—the oracles of God differ *greatly* from manufactured points of view!

There is one remaining criterion for the statesman and it has to do with moral dimension, the practice of personal righteousness.

4. *Haters of covetousness* (or of unjust gain, pilfering, fraud, stealing, influence peddling or bribery²) who refuse to advance themselves at the expense of those the lead. With “clean hands” and “above reproach.” Great men are just men and just men do justly.

And if **justice is to roll down like mighty waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream** . . . which is to say, if government is to further the purposes of God (to insure justice and promote righteousness!), then, at every level of government just such men need to be appointed. Once placed, they are, primarily, to teach others the Word and ways of God, and to settle every dispute by referring

Our souls would higher climb,
And look down from supernal heights,
On all the bygone times;
Upward we press, the air is clear,
And the sphere-music heard!
The Lord hath yet more light and truth
To break forth from His Word.

5 O Father, Son and Spirit, send
Us increase from above;
Enlarge, expand all Christian hearts
To comprehend Thy love;
And make us all go on to know
With nobler powers conferred:
The Lord hath yet more light and truth
To break forth from His Word.

² I believe that it was immorality and corruption that took down the communist regimes in Eastern Europe and I believe that other such regimes are liable to fall, too. But even Western governments are held to the same standard of divine justice and righteous expectation. Access for favor is way too common! Corruption will be answered for.

the litigants, the disputants to God and to compliance with His wisdom, submission to His will and purpose—the standards. *Injustice reigns whenever there is a famine of God's Word!* It's not the rich, or powerful but the righteous who prevail.

It is vital to live downstream from God, near the source and continually connected to Him. Righteousness means doing rightly and doing rightly depends on knowing the knowable truth. Gladstone walked in the light because he was in-dwelt by the Light of the World, even the Father and the Son, who abode within his heart. That is Christian living downstream! That living downstream from God was the genius of Jethro's counsel on how to insure that everyone receives **an oracle from God**. Where everyone seeks the will of God, disputes will dissolve—in the solvent of truth(!) which acts as a purifying agent and every heart is satisfied. The darkness flees where the light is shone. So, the first stage of doing justice is knowing it—hence the instructional piece is crucial. Government exists to insure that godly instruction is ongoing and so people have access to truth—that does not mean to regulate the education!

These requirements:

- Deep, true convictions
- Fear of the Lord
- Seekers of the Truth
- Haters of Corruption, greed, treachery, filth and bribery

certainly cull the herd of would-be leaders and politicians. *Does anyone doubt that we would be best served by leaders who are known to be thus qualified?* (And if name recognition, self-promotion, vanity and advertising aren't getting the job done, shouldn't we try the tried and true—and put forward those who are well-qualified?) “The self-seeking schemer, the one-eyed partisan, the cynic who disbelieves in God or in any ideals at all, the charlatan who promotes virtue he does not possess, or want,” the smooth-tongued, promising the moon propagandist—all politicians who evade *accountability* claiming “privilege of office³,” refusing to answer for their disgraceful behaviors (as well as covering up for each other!).

To disregard Jethro's standards, friends, is to degrade public life. Many are convinced today that public life desperately wants (needs) strong, reverent, truthful and just leaders.

Now my chief contention is that Joseph was just such a man as Gladstone, a stellar statesman; and it was his godly character, refined through suffering injustice and wickedness that made him such! Character is the main issue, not a side dish!

Shame on all liars, false witnesses and haters—the proud, self-righteous and disdainful who elevate themselves by holding others in contempt!

³ These “fakers” vainly imagine that they can flaunt God and still claim the standing as “best citizens.” That's impossible. Such pretense will never stand in the day of judgment where reality trumps “press releases, spin and image management.

Now let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. And let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers (delegate and administrate!) over the land and take one-fifth (of the superabundant harvests—all seven of them!) of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plentiful years. And let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. *That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine* (Amazing idea, save first and spend what you've saved, and no more, later!) that are going to occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine. (Gen.41:43-36) This proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. (Do we understand this to be his governmental staff?) “Can we find a man like this, ‘in whom is the Spirit of God?’” This is, as I pointed out before, an astonishing piece of discernment in its own right. He knew a statesman when he saw one! Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are. You will be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command.” This according to function and behavior—not status, or rights(!)—so as to implement God’s rescue mission.

It behooves the rest of us, given the critical state we are in, to act prudently, with foresight . . . so as not to please ourselves (one possible lesson from this COVID experience) . . . recognizing that culture itself can go dark, pathological even with self-indulgent and reckless people putting themselves and others at risk. The crisis is real because wickedness and depravity are not private, individual crimes; they are damning sins. Racial slurring, inflammatory accusations, hatred, vindictiveness, holding the country hostage to the “Resistance” has been awful, given the inertia of evil and I am not alone in disliking the bad taste of public discourse— isn’t it interesting that there is none of that viciousness in Joseph’s government?!

Joseph went out *immediately* and got busy, implementing the plan that God inspired and Pharaoh approved. He was ever diligent and hard-working and thorough: he served Pharaoh *and an imperiled world* very well. By that I mean to suggest that he was not self-serving. He was God-serving as well as Pharaoh serving. That’s statesmanship! Remember Joseph’s sober assessment:

And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life (Gen. 45: 5). . . **And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth** (there were as yet five more years of famine to transpire) **and to keep alive for you many survivors . . . there will be neither plowing or harvest.** (v. 6) **So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh** (an intriguing figure for Joseph to use(!) given the “father issues” with which this story is fraught) **and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.** (v. 8)

We notice here that God is given all the credit, demonstrating Joseph’s personal humility *as well as his proclivity to truth-telling*. Joseph was a profoundly God-centered personality—our second criterion for statesmanship—so was Gladstone.

Maclaren says of Gladstone: “he would never have left the dint of an impressive and lofty personality upon a whole nation and a world,” if beneath his towering intellect and voracious curiosity, “there had not been character and beneath that character Christianity.” Allowances aside for Joseph’s pre-Christian existence, how could the impact of Joseph’s life be better phrased?

Joseph actually put a dint in world history! Yes, and not just on the people of God that would emerge from Goshen as Israel centuries later! World history would have been seriously altered if God had not placed his man in a place of leadership, statesmanship, at just the right time and just the right place. God did so through hurt, suffering the pain of rejection/abandonment and grief. Utter devastation is not the most unlikely path for God to put us on *to eventual success*—His own Son walked the same pathways.

Egypt was uniquely placed as the potential breadbasket of the ancient middle east—a function that her topography, water supply and geography would insure her success.

Egypt was to famine, what Golgotha is to our salvation . . . the first was a famine of bread, the second a famine of the Word of God. Yes, seven years for the first and four hundred for the second. Both resulted in salvation, one temporal and the other eternal.

Joseph was a remarkable child, who lived an exceptional life and became a remarkable man because he was the Lord’s servant. He was a great and a good man, even if we can’t say that he was a Christian. And this by reason of his strength and conviction, his fear of God, his commitment to the truth and his lack of covetousness—his hands were “clean,” he defrauded no man, stole nothing, envied no one anything. He was great and good and just—nobly righteous, a bona fide Prince of a man. The forgiveness he extended to those who intended to harm him, his kindness to those who hated himself enough to want him dead . . .

Deep convictions
Fear of the Lord
Seeker of Truth
Hater of evil

Yes, those are indeed marks of greatness and goodness in leadership in home, community, workplace or government. And yet I picture that Joseph humbly saying, “I was just doing my job. I attended to what God created and sent me to do, day by day, even one step at a time, I resolved **to do justice, love mercy and to walk humbly before his God** (Micah 6:8) in my family, over the household of Pharaoh and in the nation at large. We need great, good and godly leaders and God would have us have them.

Amen.