

Do You Know What Joseph Knew?

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In Hebrews chapter 11, the inspired writer recounts many examples of God's great titans of faith, men and women who accomplished improbable feats because they obeyed Him and believed in His promises. Men like Abraham and Moses about which much is said of their demonstrations of faith. One brief passage, verse 22, states, "By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones." This event is recorded in Genesis 50:24-26.

One might ask, why should the inspired writer mention this rather obscure death-bed event when so much is revealed about the great faith of Joseph? Thirteen chapters of Genesis are dedicated to his life, almost as much as that given to Abraham. It could have been pointed out how as a teenager he remained true to his God, even when his own brothers betrayed, abused, and sold him into slavery. It could be mentioned how he maintained his virtue by resisting the advances of Potiphar's wife and how he remained faithful even after being falsely accused and forgotten in an Egyptian prison by the butler whom he had befriended. Perhaps the most amazing of all is how he remained true to God as he ascended the pinnacle of power in the greatest nation on earth. We can only imagine the temptations that were presented in a pagan environment.

Why then is verse 22 such a great statement of faith? Let me suggest at least three reasons why this is true. It reveals what Joseph knew and believed.

Joseph knew that Egypt was not his country. This may seem paradoxical. He had lived in Egypt more than 90 years. While we know that God's providential hand was in it all, it was the country which had offered him the blessings and opportunities to rise to arguably the second most powerful person in the world of his day. It was a country which offered refuge for his family in a time of famine, and a place for them to grow into a great nation. He surely felt a sense of loyalty and gratitude toward Egypt. Yet, he knew that it was not a place where God would live among and abide with His people. He knew many years hence, Israel would leave Egypt and go to a place reserved for "a people of God's own choosing." Joseph "looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

Joseph knew that the Egyptians were not his people. That is not to say he had no feelings toward them. Some had played a part in his success. The butler finally remembered him and gave the chance for an audience with Pharaoh. Pharaoh himself recognized Joseph's good qualities and elevated him in the kingdom. Pharaoh may have himself been a type of political mentor in Joseph's career. Undoubtedly, others had befriended him and done good deeds toward him. Yet, Joseph knew they did not worship and serve the one true God that he served. They did not have the same moral values and standards he did. While he lived with and ruled them, he could never fully embrace them for the reasons mentioned. He knew there would be a time when God would gather His people together that they might worship and serve Him only.

Joseph knew God always keeps His promises. As a young man, he had heard of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These ancestors had believed these promises and they were ingrained in him. He knew of other promises God had kept, such as His destruction of the earth by the flood. He knew God will keep his promises to reward or to punish regardless of how remote it may seem to man.

The real question is...what do we know and believe? Do you know and believe as Joseph? We surely are grateful for the country in which we live, and for the blessings and opportunities it has afforded us. We feel a loyalty and patriotism toward it. In fact, it is the only place most of us have ever lived. But, in eternity there is a better place, where God is its builder and maker. It is a place where God and The Lamb is its light, where there is no darkness, no sorrow or tears, a place where God abides among His people. Don't you want to go there? We all have had friends, work mates, yet unless they worship and serve the God which we serve they can never really be our people. Many do not acknowledge the God that I serve. Also, there are those who claim to believe in Him, but seek to serve and worship Him in ways that He has not authorized. Unless I can convince and take them with me, we can't be the same people. Like Joseph, do we believe that God will keep His promises? "That He is not slack concerning His promises, some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9).

If we know and believe as Joseph, it will cause us to set our priorities right, shape our lives in the image of our Lord, and live in hope of all the promises He has made for those who love Him and keep His commandments. IF WE MISS HEAVEN, WE HAVE JUST MISSED ALL THERE IS!

I believe Joseph will be there.