

## ***“In the place of God”***

“Am I in the place of God?” That’s a great question, Joseph. And what’s the answer? Well, it’s Yes ..... and No. YES, you stand in the place of God – you are His servant for the sake of His people Israel. That’s why Joseph is often referred to as a “type of Christ” (I’ll say more on that later). And NO – while you stand in the place of God – let’s be clear – you are not God.

The whole Bible is about Jesus. The Old Testament speaks of the Christ – directing the faith of God’s people of old to the Promised Messiah, the Christ who is to come. There are many “types of Christ” in the Old Testament.

For instance, Moses is a type of Christ – a mediator between God and His people – one who speaks God’s Word to His people – one who delivers them from Egypt, and leads them to the Promised Land. In many ways, Moses reminds us of Jesus.

Samson is a type of Christ – one who sacrifices his own life to destroy the enemy. Jonah is a type of Christ as he is buried in the depths of the sea, and on the third day he once again stands upon the earth. There are many Old Testament characters that reveal the Christ to us – but they are NOT the Christ.

So, how is Joseph like Jesus? Because of the rejection of his own brothers, Joseph is cast into a pit in the earth, as good as dead. Because of the rejection of his own brothers – he is sold for a price, led away – only to toil and suffer many things. And yet, throughout all this suffering, this passion – the Lord is with him.

Like Jesus, Joseph is tempted. When tempted to sin with Potiphar’s wife, Joseph responds – “How can I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” And because He does not give in to the temptation, he suffers more – cast into a dark dungeon, locked up in prison – once again, as good as dead.

But the gates of death cannot hold Joseph. The Lord brings him forth – brings him out of prison so that he might save many lives – shepherding them through the good years and the bad – feeding them with a life-giving bread.

That's Joseph's life – but imagine what life was like for his brothers. Years ago, when Joseph was only 17 years old – they sold him into slavery – and then told their father that he had been killed by a wild beast. Were they burdened with guilt? Hoping their father wouldn't discover their lies. Or had they lived in denial – blotting out the memories of their brother?

Years later, after that betrayal, the brothers find themselves in the midst of a famine which brings them down to the land of Egypt. They find themselves standing before the man who controls their future – who can give them food to survive, or not. And out of the blue this man says – “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.”

Joseph was as good as dead to them – but here he is – resurrected before their very eyes. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus who did not recognize Jesus who walked along with them – so the brothers did not recognize Joseph until he revealed himself to them.

And what is their response when they realize they are standing before Joseph – standing before their brother whom they sold for 20 shekels of silver – standing before the 2<sup>nd</sup> most powerful man in all of Egypt? They are in a state of shock – no doubt shaking in their boots – afraid they are now going to get what they deserve.

Yes, Joseph is very much like Jesus. He stands in the place of God – to be enslaved, to suffer, to be cast into prison, to be restored, to feed, to save – and yes, to judge – all of which sounds very much like the Second Article of the Creed which speaks of Jesus.

His brothers stand before him – fearing his judgment, and rightly so – but Joseph does not give them what they deserve. Instead, he is merciful to them – he weeps over them – he provides them, not just with enough food to get by, but with more than enough for them and their father and their families.

Fast forward to our text for today. Something has changed – their father, Jacob, is now dead. Even though Joseph has been nothing but gracious, forgiving, and loving – they are still living in fear of him. “It may be that Joseph will hate us,” they say, “and pay us back for all the evil we did to him.”

Instead of living as free men – they were living in the prison-house of fear. They live as if Joseph is unloving, revengeful, unmerciful. They live as if Joseph has been keeping score, and expects to be paid back in full.

Joseph is a type of Christ – one who reveals the Christ to us. So, what kind of Jesus do you have? What kind of Jesus will you stand before on the Last Day? What kind of Jesus do you stand before today? Has He forgiven all your debt – or is there some debt that remains? Do you live as free men and women – or are you spending your life trying to even the score with God?

And what about your brothers, those who sin against you? Do you stand in the place of God, as a type of Christ – or do you stand in the way of God, as an antichrist? Do you forgive your brother 77 times – or do you put a limit on your forgiveness, as if Christ's has put a limit on His forgiveness to you? Are you an instrument of God's grace – or have you made yourself to be the final judge?

Dearly beloved, God has called me to stand in His place so that you might hear His judgment. Your sin is tremendous. It is a debt you can never pay. Yet Christ, in His mercy, has suffered and died – shedding His blood – to redeem each and every sin, each and every sinner.

That blood covers you today. You are forgiven – totally, fully, completely. You are debt free, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.