

# POOR JOSEPH

An authentic narrative from the 1800s

*“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”—1 Timothy 1:15*

A poor half-witted man, named Joseph, whose employment was to go on errands, and carry parcels, passing through London streets one day, heard psalm-singing in the house of God: he went into it, having a large parcel of yarn hanging over his shoulders: it was Dr. Calamy’s church, St. Mary’s, Aldermanbury. A very well dressed audience surrounded the doctor. He read his text from 1 Timothy 1:15—*“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”* From this he preached, in the clearest manner, the ancient and apostolic gospel, the contents of this faithful saying, namely, that there is eternal salvation for the vilest sinners, solely through the worthiness of Jesus Christ, the God that made all things. *“Not many mighty, not many noble, are called”* by this doctrine, says the apostle; *“but God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty”* (1Co 1:26, 27).

While the elegant part of the congregation, perhaps, listlessly heard this doctrine, and, if they were struck with anything, it might be only with some brilliant expression or well-turned period, Joseph, in rags, gazing with astonishment, never took his eyes from the preacher, but drank in with eagerness all he said, and trudging homeward, was heard thus muttering to himself: “Joseph never heard this before! Christ Jesus, the God who made all things, came into the world to save sinners like Joseph; and this is true: and it is a *‘faithful saying!’*” Not long after this, Joseph was seized with a fever, and was dangerously ill. As he tossed upon his bed, his constant language was, “Joseph is the chief of sinners; but Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and Joseph loves Him for this.” His neighbors who came to see him, wondered on hearing him always dwell on this, and only this. Some of them addressed him in the following manner:—

“But what say you of your own heart, Joseph? Is there no token for good about it? No saving change there? Have you closed with Christ, by acting faith upon him?” “Ah no,” said he, “Joseph can act nothing; Joseph has nothing to say for himself, but that he is the chief of sinners; yet seeing that it is a faithful saying, that Jesus, He who made all things, came into the world to save sinners, why may not Joseph, after all, be saved?”

One man, finding out where he heard this doctrine, on which he dwelt uniformly and with so much delight, went and asked Dr. Calamy to come and visit him. He came, but Joseph was now very weak, and had not spoken for some time, and though told of

the doctor's arrival, he took no notice of him; but when the doctor began to speak to him, as soon as he heard the sound of his voice, he instantly sprang upon his elbows and seizing him by his hands, exclaimed as loud as he could, with his now feeble and trembling voice, "O sir! you are the friend of the Lord Jesus, whom I heard speak so well of Him. Joseph is the chief of sinners; but it is a faithful saying, that Jesus Christ, the God who made all things, came into the world to save sinners, and why not Joseph? Oh, pray to that Jesus for me; pray that He may save me: tell Him, that Joseph thinks that he loves Him for coming into the world to save such sinners as Joseph." The doctor prayed: when he concluded, Joseph thanked him most kindly; he then put his hand under his pillow, and took out an old rag, in which were tied up five guineas, and putting it into the doctor's hand (which he had kept all this while close in his,) he thus addressed him: "Joseph, in his folly, had laid this up to keep him in his old age, but Joseph will never see old age; take, and divide it amongst the poor friends of the Lord Jesus; and tell them that Joseph gave it to them for His sake who came into the world to save sinners, of whom he is the chief." So saying, he reclined his head. His exertions in talking had been too much for him, so that he instantly expired.

Dr. Calamy left this scene, but not without shedding tears over Joseph; and used to tell this little story with much feeling, as one of the most affecting occurrences he ever met with. It naturally suggests the following observations:

1. Let us notice the foundation of Joseph's belief. It was the great truth, that the only Saviour of sinners is God "*manifest in the flesh*" (1Ti 3:16; Rom 8:3), which affected his heart and supported his confidence. Indeed, when a sinner is properly humbled under a sense of his sins, he will feel convinced that none but a Divine and Almighty Redeemer can possibly save him; hence his trembling heart will turn to Christ, as "*over all, God blessed for ever*" (Rom 9:5); and, viewing the infinite value of his sacrifice on the cross, will believe and rejoice in Him with "*joy unspeakable, and full of glory*" (1Pe 1:18). On this firm foundation the soul of the penitent will rest secure, because His blood "*cleanseth us from all sin*"; "*he ever liveth to make intercession*" for those who believe on Him, and they "*shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of [his] hand*" (1Jo 1:7; Heb 7:25; Joh 10:28).

2. The gospel produces love to God and His people. Joseph had received the word, not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God—and it wrought effectually on his believing it. He manifested that a saving change had been wrought in his heart, of which he gave no small evidence, in admitting that Joseph had nothing to say of himself. He experienced the truth of the apostle's assertion, "*We love him because he first loved us*" (1Jo 4:19). "Oh pray," said he, "to that Jesus for me; pray that He may save me: tell Him, that Joseph thinks that he loves Him for coming into the world to save such poor sinners as Joseph." Whatever may be said about loving God for what He is in Himself, it was a sense of the love of Christ manifested in saving sinners, that first attracted his attention, drew forth his warmest affections, and occupied all his thoughts. Thus it is with every sinner saved by grace. A sense of the love of Christ shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5), infallibly produces love; and this is shown by universal obedience to the will of God (Joh 14:21), and studying to adorn the doctrine of God by a life and conversation becoming the gospel (1Pe 1:15, 16). Joseph

could not now manifest his love to God in this way, but he does it by showing love to people, and that because they were the friends of Jesus. When he heard Dr. Calamy's voice, he exclaimed, "O sir, you are the friend of the Lord Jesus, whom I heard speak so well of Him, and whom I love for what you said of Him"; and to this profession of love he added a substantial proof, in giving to the poor friends of Jesus all he possessed in the world.

3. The gospel is sufficient to support the mind in the immediate prospect of death. Joseph did not comfort himself with the thought that he was no worse than his neighbors, and therefore, as God was merciful, he would be safe enough. The atonement of Christ was the only and exclusive ground of his hope and confidence in the view of death, judgment, and eternity. Being justified by faith (Rom 3:28), he had peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ, and rejoiced in hope of the glory of God (Rom 5:2).

Death is a subject of the greatest importance. *"It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment"* (Heb 9:27). Think of this, ye that forget God, and put far from you the thought of death. Remember that your breath is in your nostrils; perhaps this very night your soul may be required of you, and what then would be your situation? Be entreated then to consider your ways, and flee for refuge to the hope set before you in the gospel. It still remains *"a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,"* even the *"chief"* (1Ti 1:15); *"Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved"* (Act 4:12). *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"* (Act 16:31). – Anonymous



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