

**I**t's one of the Bible's most mystifying and captivating accounts. If you begin reading at its start in Genesis 37 and read only that chapter, you'll be intrigued by the tale of a young man's arrogant, recklessly perplexing brazenness exhibited insistently.

The trouble he's in at the hands of his siblings appears to be this braggart's reward for thinking more of himself than he should. By the end of the chapter, seventeen-year-old Joseph has bought himself a boatload of heartache and may be destined for a lifetime of missed opportunities. If that's all one reads of "this dreamer" (37:19) whose unique feat seems limited to an amazing ability to interpret dreams, you'll discover Joseph is a character with potential for greatness after failing his youthful auditions.

Ah! But there's much more to the story than we learn in one chapter. Pick up Joseph's legacy again in Genesis 39–50 and you'll find a gripping narrative exposing in detail how the adolescent egotist not only saved himself but was God's intervention to a starving nation. Selected for substantial service by a highly placed official within the Egyptian governor's purview, young Joseph became a trustee of superior duty well beyond his earlier reach. It's the other side of a coin when things don't make sense at first glance.

The Scriptures offer more accounts when things turn out differently from what we might anticipate. Remember the deceitful little weasel Zacchaeus, an affluent tax collector despised universally in Jericho? He could have readily won a ballot among his peers as "Mr. Unpopularity." So disrespected was he that—to the wonder of everybody in his community—Jesus picked him to visit upon addressing his neighbors.

Zacchaeus was perched in a sycamore tree when Jesus called to him: "Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house" (Luke 19:5). How could this be? Zacchaeus' neighbors couldn't make sense of it, muttering, "That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner" (19:7).

Not until Zacchaeus' heart melted by the Master's visit did he and others realize what that meant. He told Jesus, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold" (19:8). "And Jesus said unto him, This day is sal-

vation come to this house. . . . For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (19:9, 10).

## Puzzling Conditions Thrive Today

What was true in Biblical times flourishes now. Stuff that appears headed in one direction may not make a whole lot of sense as it concludes in distant territory from what we imagined. “Things are seldom what they seem; skim milk masquerades as cream,” warbled the petite Buttercup in Gilbert and Sullivan’s 1878 internationally celebrated operetta *HMS Pinafore*. Her couplet underscored the fact that appearances are occasionally deceiving. What we thought might make sense doesn’t.

An abiding interconnection began when a sixteen-year-old girl asked the manager of a western North Carolina religious camp to add her to his summer staff. He told her she must be eighteen. At eighteen, she was hired. Excitedly she went to fulfill her quest. Yet within a few days of her arrival the young lady was in the manager’s office telling him she had to go home.

“What on earth has happened?” the startled superior asked.

Fighting back tears, she explained. “My family lives in the suburbs at the end of the bus line. Every week I take the bus into town to Sunday School. On the way I see lots of children playing in the street. They don’t go to Sunday School because the trip is too far and their parents won’t take them. I’m going home to start a Sunday School in my big house. It’s not right for me to have all the advantages here while they are deprived.”

That decision eventually figured into a church being established in her neighborhood. Things don’t always turn out as they first appear.

Before there were many automobiles, most Americans relied on horseback, buckboards, and covered wagons to travel from place to place. It was true of individuals, families, businesses, and clergymen. On a hot, sticky day circa 1920 a pair of ministerial pals drove their respective horse and buggies along a common rural pathway. Eventually they met up with one another.

“Charles,” said one of the men, “if you aren’t in a hurry, turn around and follow me to the home you just passed about a

# God surprises us sometimes when we least expect it. Things are seldom what they seem.

half-mile back. A little old lady there will have a pitcher of lemonade and some cookies. She's wanted to meet you."

The man accepted his friend's bidding, and the two were soon at a high-ceilinged farmhouse, cool and pleasing under shady oaks. A little old lady on crutches merrily ushered them inside. As the men sat down, she retrieved refreshments. Upon her return she put them on a table, poured glasses of lemonade, then stood by the mantelpiece. Charles offered her his chair but was distressed when she told him, "I can't sit down. I have iron braces from my shoulders to my feet."

The guest then mumbled some words of sympathy. Her memorable retort was unforeseen: "Don't be concerned for me. I have an idea God needed someone down here to wear iron braces and smile and be happy to show His power to help in the troubles of life." Things are seldom what they seem.

## The Unexplained Happens to All

Sometimes the dilemmas of life occur closer to home.

When the job I had could no longer support a family, I was drawn to an interview in another state. I looked the position over and found it appealing. My wife said she'd be satisfied with whatever I decided. I prayed and could not find peace. I turned the offer down on Friday without knowing why. I wondered all weekend if I had made a mistake. On Monday, I found out why. I received a call from a man asking if I'd like to join his team. It was then God revealed what had made little sense. I was interviewed, was offered that job, accepted, and spent the happiest years of my career after having faith that there must be something better.

God surprises us sometimes when we least expect it. Things are seldom what they seem. ■

---

*Retired journalist Jim Cox devoted his lifetime career to religious institutions. He is a freelance writer in Louisville, Kentucky.*

