

29. Favored son, hated brother

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Some of you know that I have an older brother who is a neurosurgeon in Seoul, South Korea. He was one of those sick people who gets nothing but boring A plus while I was getting variety of letters in my report cards. My teachers liked me so much that they even gave me 'F' in red letter. I believe that 'F' stood for FANTASTIC.

When it came to school stuff, my parents favored my brother who was an honor student all his life. But when it came to be a human being, they favored me because my brother was such a stuck-up, callous and cold person to everyone around. On the other hands, I was a happy-go-lucky kid who could care less about stupid studies.

Even though it was not a complete favoritism by my parents to one particular kids, there was an obvious tension between my brother and me like any other siblings.

Joseph was the favorite son of Jacob but the hated brother of his siblings. Jacob knew all together well about favoritism by parents. Because his twin brother Esau was his daddy's favorite and Jacob was his mama's favorite. He ought to know not to do that kind of thing. But in his stupidity and passive attitude, he repeated the same mistake his parents made. He favored two sons – Joseph and Benjamin from his loved wife Rachel more than any other sons from other wife Leah and two concubines.

Jacob was asking for a nasty family problem that brought a conspiracy to murder, human slavery and deception. Yet God used all these awful things to bring glory to Himself later.

Joseph is the man who responded to broken dreams and impossible circumstances with a faith that propelled him from the pit of slavery to the pinnacle of power.

We can divide the life of Joseph which extends throughout the rest of Genesis except of chapter 38 into three sections:

1) Joseph's start: Birth to age seventeen – Genesis 30:24-37:2

Joseph's mother and three other women were competing for his father's love and attention in his family. To make the matter worse, from the beginning Joseph was loved by his father exclusively, since his mother was his love for life. This brought jealousy, lust and hatred.

2) Joseph's struggle: Seventeen to age thirty – Genesis 37:2-41:46

As Joseph entered into young manhood, contention and jealousy turned into rejection by his own brothers which led to enslavement and imprisonment.

3) Joseph's success: Thirty to death – Genesis 41:46-50:26

The last eighty years of his life were years of prosperity under God's blessing. Joseph had a perfect opportunity to take revenge on his brothers, but he blessed and brightened their lives instead.

A. JOSEPH THE TATTLETALE

Genesis 37:1-4 Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. 2 This is the history of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. And the lad was with the

sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father. 3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors. 4 But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.

Joseph is sort of a pampered favorite of Jacob, who doesn't mind tattling on his older brothers at all. The words "bad report" comes from a Hebrew word "Snitch" where we get an English word "Snitch". Just kidding!

As an outward display of this, Jacob gave Joseph a tunic of many colors. From what we read, it should be like a funky technic-color coat. But it was not. This tunic was more than a simple gift from a loving father. It was a long-sleeved garment worn by the nobility of the day, a symbol of authority and favored position within the family. And the rest of Jacob's sons jealously hated Joseph for it.

B. JOSEPH'S FIRST DREAM

Genesis 37:5-8 Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more. 6 So he said to them, "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: 7 There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf." 8 And his brothers said to him, "Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

When kids are little, they wouldn't take nap in the afternoon or go to sleep early in the evening. But once they become teenagers, you cannot keep their eyes open long enough to do anything. They get up late in the morning, they sleep during the classes and they take nap when they come home from school. Like these teenagers, Joseph likes to sleep. So he said, "I have a dream."

At best, Joseph showed a great lack of tact. Surely he knew how much his brothers hated him.

C. JOSEPH'S SECOND DREAM

Genesis 37:9-11 Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, "Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me." 10 So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?" 11 And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

If Joseph was unwise in telling the first dream – knowing how irritating it was to his brothers – he was even more wrong sharing this second dream. At this point, Joseph is a contrast to Jesus. Jesus wants us to be as He was on this earth: an "others-centered" person. Joseph seems to fall short in this area for now.

D. JOSEPH'S NEW ASSIGNMENT

Genesis 37:12-17 Then his brothers went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. 13 And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers feeding the flock in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." So he said to him, "Here I am." 14 Then he said to him, "Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks, and bring back word to me." So he sent him out of the Valley of Hebron, and he went to Shechem. 15 Now a certain man

found him, and there he was, wandering in the field. And the man asked him, saying, "What are you seeking?" 16 So he said, "I am seeking my brothers. Please tell me where they are feeding their flocks." 17 And the man said, "They have departed from here, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan.

Dothan was located 20 miles north of Shechem. Shechem was the city where those same brothers had slaughtered every male out of rage over their sister's rape.

E. JOSEPH'S BROTHERS' CONSPIRACY TO MURDER

Genesis 37:18-22 Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him. 19 Then they said to one another, "Look, this dreamer is coming! 20 Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, 'Some wild beast has devoured him.' We shall see what will become of his dreams!" 21 But Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, "Let us not kill him." 22 And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him"--that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father.

That tunic Joseph wore was like waving a red flag in front of a bull. Joseph purposely wore this tunic when he was heading out to his brothers where they were 80 miles away from home. They hated it because it set him apart from them.

Reuben who was the first born should have said, "You are not going to kill our brother. Over my dead body. Not on my watch." But he didn't, because he wanted to do right by Joseph without alienating himself from his brothers. His desire to be nice to everyone will fail to prevent a great evil.

Later on his father Jacob spoke of him as 'Unstable as water'. That was a perfect description of this compromising man Reuben. Active wickedness is always stronger than a half-hearted godliness.

F. CALLOUS ENOUGH TO SELL THEIR BROTHER

Genesis 37:23-30 So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the tunic of many colors that was on him. 24 Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit was empty; there was no water in it. 25 And they sat down to eat a meal. Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry them down to Egypt. 26 So Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? 27 Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh." And his brothers listened. 28 Then Midianite traders passed by; so the brothers pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt. 29 Then Reuben returned to the pit, and indeed Joseph was not in the pit; and he tore his clothes. 30 And he returned to his brothers and said, "The lad is no more; and I, where shall I go?"

There is a comment from Judah that was not recorded here: "Boys, no sensing killing a perfectly good merchandise when we can sell him and make money. After all, we are Jews."

Joseph's brothers must have had a perverse pleasure as they ripped off the tunic of many colors from Joseph. Just like that, each believer in Jesus Christ is given special

assurance of the Father's favor. Certainly, many spiritual enemies want to rip from the believer the assurance from our Father in heaven.

They could sit down and enjoy food while their hearts were bent on murdering their own brother. A scientist could calculate the exact time required for Joseph's cries to go 25 yards to the ears of the brothers. But it took 22 years for that cry to go from the ears to their hearts, because their hearts were filled with hatred and jealousy.

Some of you might say, "Well, that was in Israel many centuries ago. That kind of things doesn't happen in our country." Yes, it does. Susan Smith claimed that her two little children were kidnapped by a man in 1995. The entire country came to a screeching halt when the truth was known. She put her two children in the backseat of her Mazda sedan and let the car fall into a lake, because she didn't want have those two children while she is dating her new boyfriend. If that is not bad enough, you all remember Andrea Yates who killed her five children by drowning in her bathtub in Jan. 2001. This is a part of human wickedness at its worst.

Imagine your own siblings tossing you into a pit to die, then sitting down for a meal with cold hearts. Imagine being sold as a slave, taken into a country you didn't know, to be owned by a man you'd never seen before. An all this while you were only seventeen years old!

G. THE DECEPTIONS THAT RUN IN THE FAMILY

Genesis 37:31-36 So they took Joseph's tunic, killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the tunic in the blood. 32 Then they sent the tunic of many colors, and they brought it to their father and said, "We have found this. Do you know whether it is your son's tunic or not?" 33 And he recognized it and said, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces." 34 Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days. 35 And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, "For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning." Thus his father wept for him. 36 Now the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard.

They killed a kid of the goats and used that blood on the tunic. Does this matter of deceiving a father with a goat remind us of something we've heard before?

Remember that when Jacob and his mama Rebekah were conniving, they used a kid goat for the savory meat dish, and they took the skin of the goat and put it on the hands and neck of Jacob to deceive his father. Now the sons of Jacob are using the blood of a goat to deceive their father, who is none other than Jacob himself. Jacob is deceived in exactly the same way that he had deceived.

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

Maybe you can relate with Joseph's situation. Maybe everything was going well with you and all of sudden, the bottom drops out and you have no idea what is happening in your life. You are wondering if God knows what is going on. Take a heart. God knows everything exactly. As a matter of fact, He allowed all the things to happen in your life for your own benefit. If you trust Him, He will take you through this difficult time.

Let's make applications from this study:

H. APPLICATIONS

1) No family is exempt from adversity.

There is no place in this fallen world where one can escape trials. There is only One our God who can give us the refuge and strength to endure and grow through them.

2) No enemy is more subtle than passivity.

Passivity is not patience, nor long-suffering that we need. When discipline is required to handle your children, you must do it according to God's way with calm hearts and agreement from both parents. If you don't, you are going to see a child who is not disciplined, doesn't care about anyone or anything and becoming a monster who is going to be a social misfit in later years.

3) No response is more cruel than jealousy.

If you let the seed of jealousy take root in your hearts or your children's, because it will destroy the family's unity and harmony. Jealousy is one of the most effective and powerful arsenals of satan. It always starts with a little resentment in our hearts.

Song of Solomon 8:6b For love is as strong as death, Jealousy as cruel as the grave; Its flames are flames of fire, A most vehement flame.

James 3:16 (NASB) For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.