

44. 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 got nothing but boring A plus while I was getting a variety of letters in my report cards. My teachers liked me so much that they even gave me 'F' in a pretty red-letter. I thought that 'F' stood for FABULOUS.

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

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

Joseph was the favorite son of Jacob. He knew all too well about favoritism by parents. Because his twin brother Esau was his daddy's favorite and Jacob was his mama's. 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 the other wife Leah and two concubines.

Jacob was asking for a nasty family problem that caused 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 into 3 sections with the exception of chapter 38:

1) Joseph's start: Birth to age 17 – Genesis 30:24-37:1

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 the love of his life. This brought envy and hatred by everyone else.

2) Joseph's struggle: Age 17 to age 30 – Genesis 37:2-40

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

3) Joseph's success: Age 30 to death – Genesis 41-50:26

The last 80 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 daddy about his older brothers at all. The words "bad report" comes from the Hebrew word "Snitch."

As an outward display of this, Jacob gave Joseph a tunic of many colors. From what we read, it sounds like a funky techno-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 hated Joseph for it with envy.

Hatred is a terrible sin because it generates other sins. In Proverbs 10:12, it says, "*Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins.*" Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Hatred in the heart is the moral equivalent of murder according to Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:21-22.

B. JOSEPH'S TWO DREAMS

Genesis 37:5-11 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. 9 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.

At best, Joseph showed a great lack of tact. Surely he knew how much his brothers hated him. If Joseph was unwise in telling the first dream – knowing how irritating it was to his brothers – he was even more wrong sharing his 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. These two dreams brought envy and malice into the hearts of his 10 brothers. Not wise.

It has been said, "Envy was the most precious daughter of the devil because it follows his footsteps by hindering good and promoting evil. Envy has a sister named Malice, and the two usually work together." Envy gives us inward pain when we see others succeed, and malice gives us inward satisfaction when we see others fail. Envy and malice usually generate slander and unwarranted criticism, and when these two sins hide behind the veil of religious zeal and self-righteousness, the poison they produce is even more deadly.

During the OT and NT times, the Lord used dreams to speak to His people. Can the Lord still use dreams to communicate with us? He is God, He can do whatever He wants. But we have something far more assuring than dream: The Word of God.

C. JOSEPH'S BROTHERS' CONSPIRACY TO MURDER

Genesis 37:12-22 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. 18 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 wore this tunic when he was heading out to his brothers where they were far away from home. They hated it because it set him apart from them.

Reuben who was the firstborn should have said, "You are not going to kill our brother. Not on my watch." But he didn't, because he wanted to do right for Joseph without alienating himself from his brothers. His desire to be nice to everyone will fail to prevent 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 half-hearted godliness.

I don't think that Reuben said this because of his love for Joseph though. Rather he knew that he was in trouble with his father because he had sex with his father's concubine. I believe that it was his effort to redeem himself in the eyes of his father.

D. 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?"

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. But many spiritual enemies want to rip off the assurance of our Father in heaven from the believers.

It's difficult to understand how the men could sit down and calmly eat a meal while their brother was suffering and begging them to set him free. It only took an instant for Joseph's cries to go from the pit to his brothers' ears. But it took 22 years for that cry to go from the ears to their hearts because their hearts were filled with hatred and envy.

Some of you might say, "Well, that was in Israel thousands of years ago. That kind of thing doesn't happen in our country." Where have you been? The nightly news is filled with the murderous crimes that were caused by one's envy and malice. It is nothing new because it is a part of human depravity 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. And all this while you were only 17 years old. Mind-boggling, isn't it?

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

James 3:16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

E. 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 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 same deception made a full circle and came to Jacob. The sons of Jacob are using the blood of a goat to deceive their father, who is none other than Jacob himself.

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 to 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 happen-

ing 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 me ask you these questions:

- 1) **Do you have a favorite child among your children? Stop. You will bring immense family problems later if you don't already have them.**
- 2) **Do you have envy and hatred in your heart toward someone? Stop. You are sinning against the Lord. Repent.**

H. APPLICATIONS

- 1) **No family is exempt from adversity. Partiality only makes it worse.**
- 2) **No response is more cruel than envy.**