

In the Beginning...God: Joseph's Dreams

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Turn to Genesis 37 (Page 27)

Read Genesis 37:1-4

Notice in Genesis 37:2

It says, "This is the account of Jacob's family line."

And then it begins talking about Joseph...

It's talking about Jacob's descendants

And the main focus

At this point in history

Would have been on Joseph

Jacob put a burden on Joseph

Through his affection and his gifts

Jacob put a burden on Joseph

That affected him extremely

They "hated" him

They "could not speak a kind word to him"

That's terrible whenever it happens

But sometimes, our Sunday School imagery has changed it

The picture of little boy Joseph

Being disliked by his older, adult brothers

That's not accurate

I mean, look how much older they are than him in this picture

And I'm sorry

But I hope Joseph didn't look like this

That kids a dork!

Joseph was the youngest of 11 brothers

But we know from the text

That he was born 7 years after Jacob married

But the other 10 were too

So they were all very close together

So, when Joseph was 17

It would probably be something like this

Can you imagine being in this environment

And having all of them
 Each one of them
 Hate you
And having none of them
 Not a single one of them
Say a single kind word to you?

It says that Jacob
 Somewhere along the line
Made an ornate robe for him

So, this was not only
 An expensive gift
 It was a gift of time

The text as I read it
 Seems to indicate he was involved
In the making

We don't know for sure
 But some have suggested
That Jacob began making Joseph's coat
 At Rachel's death
She died in childbirth
 When Joseph's only brother Benjamin was born

And some think Jacob's weaving
Was also part of his mourning
So, Benjamin, if this is right
Would have just been a toddler
So, he wasn't old enough
To connect with as a friend
So, Joseph was the lone favorite

If Jacob wove that coat
As a part of mourning for Joseph's mom
That would have made the coat
More special for Joseph
But that would have *also* made the coat
More painful for his brothers

The coat represented
In fact, *Joseph* represented
To everyone
Jacob's unique relationship with Rachel
And His love for her over the others

I want you to notice something really key

Look again at verse 3-4

It says Jacob made the ornate robe for him

But it says their hatred wasn't about the robe
Their hatred was because of their jealousy
Jealousy that the Bible seems to say was earned

It says Israel loved Joseph more
"Because he had been born to him in his old age"
But they weren't that far apart
So that may have been Israel's excuse
But that wasn't the real reason

He loved him more
I think
Simply because he was born to Rachel
Whom Jacob loved more than Leah

So, the favoritism and the jealousy didn't start at 17
This would have been his whole life

I mean, stop and imagine that
To be hated by your entire social framework
Jacob didn't live in a city
So, his brothers
Were also his main friends
And he was hated by all of them

For all of his entire life

Is it possible

That Joseph was so strong in Egypt

So strong with Potiphar's wife

So strong in prison

Because of the abuse he had lived with

For his entire life

Joseph knew what it was like

To stand apart

Joseph knew the pain of rejection

Joseph had experienced lots of time

Alone

What are we saying?

First of all,

God didn't cause this

The way they treated him was sinful

And God doesn't lead people to sin

So, God didn't cause it

But second,

God doesn't waste a hurt

As God was writing Joseph's story
As He's writing yours & mine
He's aware

He sees your pain
He feels the disappointment
He knows the struggle

And He uses those
Later in your life
For your benefit
And for His

Let's stop and talk about jealousy a minute

Was Joseph's brother's jealousy
Wrong?

The Bible
Again and again
Describes God as a jealous God

Here's one example:

Deuteronomy 6:14-15a (ESV) - You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you — for the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God.

God is telling them ahead of time

Catch that

They hadn't entered the land... yet

They hadn't gone after the gods of the people around them... yet

But God is saying, "I know Me"

"And I know you"

"And if you put them ahead of me..."

It's gonna get ugly

Here's another:

God was talking to Moses

Moses was about to lead them out toward the Promised Land

They were going to be surrounded by cultures and peoples

That did not follow the way of the Lord

They were going to be tempted to live their way

Instead of God's way

To follow their lead

Instead of God's lead

To worship their gods

Instead of the one true God

So, in Exodus 34, God says this to Moses:

Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

God is saying

At the core of who I am

At the level of identity

I am jealous

Dr. J.I. Packer says – “God’s jealousy is not a compound of frustration, envy, and spite, as human jealousy so often is, but appears instead as a... praiseworthy zeal to preserve something supremely precious.”

God’s jealousy is a zeal to protect

To preserve a relationship

Or fight for it when He’s losing them

I appreciate how the Bible includes

The gritty reality in the life of its people

Jacob loved Joseph

More than the other brothers

We don’t have polygamy today

Thankfully

But we do have step families

And Jacob loved Joseph

More than the others
Because Jacob loved *Joseph's mom*

More than the others

And in this room

Some know exactly how *that* feels

Don't you?

So, let me ask you again:

Was Joseph's brother's jealousy

Wrong?

I'm not sure it was

What they did in response was certainly wrong

But I'm not sure the emotion was wrong

Our jealousy can be petty and selfish and spiteful

Our reactions can often be terribly misguided and damaging

But at the core of it

Is often a broken heart

Made in the image of our Father

Who longs desperately for a relationship with the one He loves

Let me challenge us on something:

When you feel the pangs of jealousy:

From a parent

From a spouse

From a girlfriend or boyfriend

Submit those feelings

And your *reactions* to those feelings

To a God who understands

But even more than that

Be reminded that our loving God understands

We were made to have Him number one

We were made to have Him first above all others

And like the Israelites:

We are surrounded by a culture and a people

That do not follow the way of the Lord

We are tempted to live their way

Instead of God's way

To follow their lead

Instead of God's lead

To worship their gods

Instead of the one true God

And it makes Him jealous

When work becomes number 1

When our relationships

With our boyfriend or with our wife

Or even our kids

Slide in front of

Our relationship with Him

His heart burns with jealousy

Why?

Is God being petty and selfish?

No.

But God understands that nothing

No. Thing.

No. One.

Was designed to be

In our number one slot

And if we put them there

It will destroy us

And it will destroy them

And it will destroy our relationship

And like a mama bear robbed of her cubs

God's heart burns to protect His kids

God's heart burns for us

God is jealous

But His jealousy is self-less

God's jealousy is protective and passionate and pleading

Never petty

So Joseph has some dreams

Read Genesis 37:6-7

That'll make you popular

Read Genesis 37:8

They hated him before the dreams

And now they hate him all the more

Verse 9

Read Genesis 37:9-11

Jacob's not exactly

Father of the year

10 of your boys

Hate the 11th one

They can't say one nice thing about him

But you've told him he's awesome

His entire life

He wears the special robe

You wove for him

When his mom

The one you loved more than the others

Died

And now he's telling his brothers

Dreams about ruling over them

So, Jacob

"Kept the matter in mind" – Genesis 37:11b

Good call

My kids are thinkin' about *literally* killin' each other

I'll keep an eye on it

OK – this next section

Comes with a warning label

Sometimes the Bible is super clear

And we should teach those clear teachings... clearly

But sometimes

With other passages

Really smart people debate on the meaning

And I usually let you know what I think

But I also try to let you know that there's some debate

And then other times

Other times

I see something in the text

That's either wrong

Or brilliant

Because no one else seems to see it

Now I tend to think brilliant

But it's debatable

This is one of those times

We'll come back to Joseph

Let me set this up

So, this past week

I went with 60 high school students

And 10 adults

To Holland Michigan for a youth conference

Which should tell you three things:

1 – I'm spiritually full

A week of powerful speakers

And great interactions with wonderful students

I'm spiritually full

2 – I'm physically empty

A week of full days

And short nights

In dorms that were long of volume

And short on air-conditioning

I'm taking a nap this afternoon

3 – My preparation's been a little time strapped this week

Someone before we left

Said, "The sermon'll be easy this week

"Cause you'll hear all of these great speakers"

That's cute

Not true

But cute

But I did get a new angle on Joseph

During one of the sessions

It's either from God and brilliant

Or its from sleep deprivation and Taco Bell

So, you can let me know

But wait till after I've had a nap

Because I'm kinda grumpy!

In Matthew 18

Peter comes to Jesus and says

How often do we forgive people?

Unspoken in Peter's question

This is someone in Peter's life

You don't need a "forgive limit"

For someone you barely know

You ask for a "forgive limit"

An out-clause

With someone that hurts you

Again and again

So, Peter says

How often, Lord?

And Jesus answers

As He often does

With a story

A man owes a king

A great deal of money

Like crazy amount of money

And so, his bill comes due

And he can't pay

And the king passes judgment

Sell off everything

Liquidate his life

And throw him in jail

He begs for more time

He begs for more chances

He begs for mercy

And the king grants it

In fact

The king forgives the debt

Entirely

They guy leaves the palace

And immediately goes looking

For a guy who owes him

A much smaller amount

In parallel paths

He passes judgment

The guy begs for mercy

But this time

Unlike the king

This time, the guy says no

And word got back to the king

Matthew 18:32-33 - "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'"

Jesus here makes the connection

Between the forgiveness

We've *received* from God

And the forgiveness

We *offer* to others

And that's where the speaker

Really connected the story to us

To the students

But / couldn't get away from

The *next* verse

Matthew 18:34-35 - *In anger* his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. "This is how my Heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

"In anger"

Jesus says that our unforgiveness

Angers God

And Jesus *also* said this man endured torture

Directed from the king

To purge him of his unmerciful heart

To purge him of his unforgiveness

I highlighted the word “This”

This – what does “this” refer to?

Torture, right?

This is how God will treat us

He’s willing for us to go through torture

To purge us of our unmerciful heart

To purge us of our unforgiveness

Here comes the heresy...

Is it possible

That 17-year-old Joseph

Who had been hated

Most of his life

Who had been rejected

By his brothers

Who had been the odd duck out

“One of these things is not like the other”

That 17-year-old Joseph

Was full of resentment and unforgiveness

I mean he clearly had

Some social awareness issues

“Hey guys, I had this cool dream”

“Did you see the robe dad made me?”

Awkward.

Is it possible

That God used Egypt

Prison and slavery and isolation

Torture, if you will

To purge him of his unmerciful heart

To purge him of his unforgiveness

Because 22 years later

When his brothers come begging for food

Begging for mercy

Begging for forgiveness

The Joseph they found

Was healthy and whole

Emotionally and spiritually strong

And the vision God saw all those years earlier

The picture God painted

In dreams and visions and aspirations

Had finally come true

On the outside

As well as the inside

Because now they were

Begging Joseph for food

Just like Joseph had

Begged them for love and friendship

All those years before

Listen carefully

I don't want to do with a machete

What the Spirit wants to do with a scalpel

I don't know why

Each of us go through the pain we do

That's above my paygrade

But I do know that sometimes

For some people

God allows us to go through horrible things

To purge us of our unmerciful heart

To purge us of our unforgiveness

Matthew 18:34-35 - In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. ***“This is how my Heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”***

And verse 34 seems to indicate

That sometimes God does more than allow it

Sometimes, **God does the handing over**

This is not the only place in Scripture

That talks this way

Hebrews 12:5b-7a - ***“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and He chastens everyone He accepts as His son.”*** Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as His children.

Is it possible

That God is allowing what you’re facing

Or is even disciplining you

With it

Because He cares more about

Who we become

Then how long it takes for us to get there

God longs for us

To have a heart

Purged of unforgiveness

A heart purged

Of the spiritual and emotional junk

That life pours in

Struggle comes to all of us

And it's far more complex

Then this always equals that

I'm not saying that

But if you're in it right now

Please

I beg you

Please ask God

Is there anything in me

That needs purging

Whatever the cause

We know that God used hardship in Joseph's life

To prepare him

For the vision He had for his life

James said consider it pure joy, when you face trials of many kinds

And we know that God uses

Hardship in our life

To prepare us

For the vision He has for us

I believe all of this screams one message to us

From the pages of Scripture

From the months & years of their life

You & I need God in our life

Without Him

Without Him, our jealousy gets petty

And vindictive

And destructive

Without Him, our resentment

And unforgiveness

Grows and mounts

Until we find ourselves

In the torture chamber

Of our own making

Without Him

The vision He had for our life
Gets dimmer and more distant
Until our life is just a shadow
Of what it could have been

Joseph is not the hero

God is

But Joseph stayed in the fight

Joseph kept his heart soft

Joseph kept his heart pure

And that's all God needed

To lead him to His best