

OF DREAMS AND DYSFUNCTIONS**Genesis 37**

Intro: I remember participating in a seminar where a keynote speaker said, with great authority, that 80% of American families were dysfunctional. His point was that the normal American is far less than perfect and, by definition: *not operating normally or properly*. I swallowed his statement “hook, line and sinker”. After all, he was an expert and I was just . . . a pastor. I’ve reflected often on his words over the intervening 25 years. I think they were to make us feel better if we had come out of a childhood of chaos and/or abuse – as many of the attenders had in that meeting. It worked. I felt better, even though I’d never considered my family of origin or the young family Kathy and I had produced as not operating on all cylinders.

And then, if we look at many of the families we read about in the Bible, we realize that we are VERY normal in comparison to them. You can start right at the beginning and find a brother killing a brother with Cain and Abel who were the first born of Adam and Eve. And Noah’s family? They may have survived the flood, but tremendous strife came right along with them. And think about David’s family of origin as well as the one he produced – it was a soap opera. The list could go on and on but we don’t have time. And besides, we’re going to look at Joseph and what we can learn from his life. We can see dysfunction in just this one family, and we’re not even going to cover that much of it. And, really, that is not our mission when it’s all said and done. We will instead learn how Joseph thrived and triumphed despite his family’s huge faults.

As I said last week, we’re digging into Genesis 37 today and each week’s talk will use at least a chapter as it’s background text. That’s why I gave you a heads up last week so that, in the event that I do not read the entire chapter, which by the way, I will do today, you still have all the background and context. So, here’s a heads-up for next week – read Chapter 39 next week – and if you want to see just a little added example of how messed up Jacob’s family was, read chapter 38, which I will not be preaching from.

It’s been a long time since I’ve done a series from the Old Testament and I thought it’s high time we did. The Old Testament has been taking some hits lately because people want to say it isn’t about Jesus or its too violent and some other rather lame reasons. The problem is, it’s the Bible that Jesus used – and, for that matter, it’s the Bible Paul and all the other writers of the New Testament used. Jesus also said he did not come to change a single dot of an “i” or cross of a “t” in it. On top of it all though, is the fact that JESUS IS ALL THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT! In fact, some Bible students look at Joseph here in Genesis 37-49 and see that he is a “type” or parallel of Jesus. I have a responsibility to help us learn from this integral segment of scripture. So, for the next nine weeks, we are going to look at a family that was full of dreams and dysfunctions, and see that most likely, they even look a lot like a normal modern family from pretty much anywhere in the world.

And starting right out on that subject, notice how . . .

God uses imperfect people to carry out his perfect plan

- Listen, (Read Genesis 37:1-11)
- Jacob was an incredibly flawed person, but you could say he came by it honestly. His mother helped him steal his brother’s birthright and his Uncle Laban perfected the bait and switch method as he made sure his daughters were married off – to Jacob, by the way. But Jacob also was a servant of God who had actually been given a new name which was Israel which means “*a man seeing God*” after an all-night wrestling match with an angel of the Lord. God uses imperfect people, like Jacob and like you and me.
- The very meaning of the name “Jacob” has a hint of deceit in it. It means supplanter or one who undermines. Jacob lived up to his name. He was a shrewd operator in his business dealings, farming practices, and family relations. He adroitly swindled his older brother, Esau, out of his rightful inheritance. He had two wives, the daughters of his Uncle Laban – who were sisters. He far preferred the younger of the two whose name was Rachel. He had 12 sons and numerous daughters with those two wives and their hand-maidens who were little more than concubines. If that sounds like trouble, it was.
- Our text points out that there were factions in the family and hatred was prevalent. One thing unified the older sons of Jacob – they especially hated their second youngest brother Joseph, who was a son of Jacob’s favorite wife, Rachel. It is also pointed out in verse three that Jacob *loved Joseph more than any of his other sons*. This is not a healthy family situation to say the least. Favoritism is not a good way to parent. In fact, it’s a very wrong way to parent. Jacob was amazingly imperfect, and yet God used him anyway.

- And look at this boy, Joseph. He was a beautiful dreamer. I've often looked at this passage and thought, "Wow! Either Joseph was clueless or arrogant, or maybe both." He had dreams that definitely put him at the top of the hill. And that's okay, but then he had the nerve to tell his brothers and father about it. That's where the beautiful part comes into the dreamer's equation, because I think that in the midst of a flawed family with an imperfect father and hateful siblings, God preserved Joseph to be a naïve and innocent vehicle of his redemptive plan. In a house divided, God introduced his divine plan.
- A quick aside here about dreams:
 - Don't ignore them. Joseph's dreams were clearly from God. They foretold a divine plan of deliverance for not only Joseph's family – who despised him for those very dreams, but also for an entire nation.
 - God speaks through dreams. He may use you and your dreams in a prophetic role as he did young Joseph, and he may simply be telling you about something that needs to change in your own life. Now, if you're like me, you will not remember 99% of your dreams, but sit up and listen and analyze the ones you do remember.
- Next, we have an eternal truth . . .

Hatred loses – every time

- (Read Genesis 37:12-36)
- In the face of Jacob's clear favoritism, the jealousy of Joseph's older brothers simmered away. And then when Joseph shared his dreams, the jealousy boiled over into full-blown hatred. Watch out for that. Have you ever gotten jealous over someone or something? When it goes unchecked it gets ugly very quickly. Examine it, analyze it, and deal with it, and don't delay.
- Unchecked jealousy comes out in various ways, and the worst way is hatred. In the case of Jacob's sons, it was hatred that would not have stopped at murder except that a more profitable solution presented itself. They sold their own flesh and blood for a mere 20 shekels of silver – perhaps \$200 in modern U. S dollars or less than the price of a slave.
- Once again Joseph's naiveté is evident, not to mention Jacob's seeming cluelessness about sending his favorite son into the clutches of his murderous brothers. He sent Joseph on a 100-mile trip to check up on his brothers and right into trouble. Joseph's trouble was trouble indeed to quote Wes King's son.
- But, it turns out, it worked precisely into God's plan. And notice how . . .

Deceit never works out

- The brothers waste no time. As they see Joseph coming in the distance, verse 18 tells us they plotted to kill him. In their exact words, "*Here comes that dreamer!*" they said to each other. "*Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams.*" Genesis 37:19. They didn't know that their scheme against their dreaming brother would quickly turn into a nightmare that, in actuality, would continue on for many years.
- One of the brothers named Reuben thought the better of murder and suggests that they only throw Joseph into a cistern and thereby not have his blood on their hands. His plan was to rescue Joseph and somehow return him to Jacob. His bumbling brothers thought that simply letting their despised little brother die a slow death in a wilderness pit somehow left them off the hook for murder. Just look at their complete lack of conscience as they strip him of his special coat and throw him naked into a nearby cistern. (describe middle eastern cisterns – bottle shaped – it was impossible to climb out of one). And THEN, they sit down to have a meal! I mean, I think if I had just committed a murderous act, or at least set it into motion, I'd kinda lose my appetite. Not these guys. Hate ruled their hearts.
- And look at their scheme. It's a picture of how deceit will always come back to bite you. This particular family's culture had always been one of dishonesty. It's sad to say, but Jacob, himself, had no-doubt been the one who instilled deceit into his sons. It's easy to do and is easy to learn. As parents and grandparents, – well, actually, as Christ Followers, honesty and integrity isn't just the best policy, its way of godliness. Let's be honest people.
- Reuben didn't have the nerve to stand up to his brothers and defend Joseph. Instead he chose to lay low and act behind the backs of his murderous brothers. In the end, the Ishmaelite traders traveling to Egypt

from their home in Midian showed up and presented a financial option for his brothers. In the end, Reuben hesitated and missed his chance to do the right thing. Here's a takeaway for you at Reuben's expense, stand up for the right thing immediately – later will be too late.

- As for the brothers who made a few bucks by selling their despised sibling, they came up with a plan to take Joseph's special coat and splash it with goat's blood and tell Dad a wild animal had killed the boy. Real princes of men right? And could they have predicted their father's level of grief and guilt at sending his son into the clutches of some marauding animal? Did they foresee that their father would grieve for the rest of his life – or most of it? Deceit never works out. But, they probably didn't care.

Conclusion: Here is something to remember as I wind this up, it was all God's plan. Did he make the brothers do their treachery? No! Does he make hateful and deceitful people? Never! But did he use men's despicable plans to provide deliverance? You bet he did! God brings good from bad. He builds on our dreams and redeems our dysfunctions. It's all according to plan. You'll see. To be continued . . . Amen.