

LIES BRING TEARS OF ANGUISH

Genesis 37: 29-36 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

As I pondered our text, I read a prayer by J. Ligon Duncan, a Presbyterian pastor. Join me in your heart as I pray. “Our Lord and our God, it is an easy thing in happy times, to embrace Your providence. But when we ourselves, are surrounded by family division, by inscrutable discouragements, by seemingly meaningless afflictions and by hopelessness, it is the last thing in the world we want to do to embrace Your sovereign providence, and yet O God, the very secret of our faith is to trust You despite all the evidence to the contrary. Help us then for our sakes, for our good, and for Your own glory to trust in You, and to remember that You move in a mysterious way, Your wonders to perform. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.”

As we turn to our text, our first words are, “When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes.” That means he immediately went into mourning. Reuben’s absence from the other nine brothers is not a difficulty in the text, but a normal sign of the authenticity of his design to save his brother from death. The life of shepherds always contains much coming and going from the main camp by one or more of the shepherds. Shepherds are never out with thousands of sheep alone. With flocks to supervise, this oldest brother of the twelve, needed to absent himself, so he could secretly return to the wilderness pit, as he did, without arousing suspicion. In that manner, by having detached himself from his brothers, he planned to secretly rescue his brother, Joseph.

As we ponder this sad account, God’s word reveals five vicious results of letting jealousy and hatred loose in our lives. These vicious results remind me of inviting a roaring lion into your marriage or into your family or into your extended family. If you have allowed jealousy or hatred into your life, watch out for the awful fall-out. It will be devastating and it will not be easily stopped. Sin that gains a foothold is like an eagle with its feet fastened on its prey. It doesn’t give up without a fight. As Jesus said of casting out the deaf and dumb spirit in Mark 9: 29, “this kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting.” What are these five vicious results of welcoming jealousy and hatred into our lives?

WELCOMING JEALOUSY AND HATRED INTO OUR LIVES OFTEN LEADS TO CONSPIRING TO MOCK GOD’S WORD. (I.) Notice v. 29.

“When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes.” Let’s double back and pick up what Joseph’s brothers welcomed into their lives. Notice 37: 4, 5, 8, 11 and 18-20. We read, v. 4--“But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him. v.-5—“Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it

to his brothers, they hated him even more. v. 8, “His brothers said to him, “Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us? So, they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. v. 11, “And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.” v. 18-20—“They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them, they conspired against him to kill him. They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, (hear the mockery) and we will see what will become of his dreams.” Even though the brothers conceded with Reuben not to kill Joseph, but put him in a pit, they also conceded with Judah to sell their brother. In selling him, their original mocking conspiracy against Joseph, and against their father Jacob was acted out.

John Calvin wisely points out that Joseph’s brothers were, in fact, mocking the revelation of God. They were saying that God's word was not true and that it would not come true, and they were making light of it.” He was right. This was not mere jesting or a mere brotherly mocking going on. This mockery was the rejection of the divine revelation which had been given to Joseph from God—unpleasant as it may have been to them. The brothers’ initial plan to kill Joseph, and later to sell him into slavery, the lesser of the two awful evils, was the brothers’ plan to thwart the revelation of God, “then we will see what will become of his dreams.”

Beloved, it is a dangerous and vicious result, often of jealousy and hatred, that leads us to attempt to frustrate the designs of Almighty God. Did you know that we can become brazen with God, almost like we are one of two alpha male wolves proving our will be done? We believe we can derail a dream or plan God gives. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram tried that with Moses, and they were swallowed alive.

Not long ago, I watched a documentary “Unbranded” about a horseman, Ben Masters who broke mustangs on the open range as we have them here. His plan was to mellow a dozen wild horses down and use them as riding and pack horses to ride from the Mexico Border to the Canadian border. The scenery is magnificent on that 3,000 + mile journey, which took them through Wyoming. But on this trip with Ben Masters was an ex-Marine, named Jonny. Jonny agreed to be one of the four riders of the mustangs—the wild horses going from Mexico to Canada.

On April 1st of 2013, Ben Masters and three partners, Jonny, Thamer, and Tom, saddled up 12 wild mustangs and set out on their five-month, 3,000-mile journey from Mexico to Canada. They followed a patchwork of public lands from Nogales, Arizona, to Montana’s Glacier National Park, crossing the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone along the way. Only one of them had grown up on a ranch. All along the way, Jonny’s jealousy and hatred of Ben Masters, the leader of the Border to Border trip, was obvious and it grew worse and worse, like a ferocious dragon. Often in camp, it was an alpha male challenging alpha male showdown, with Jonny

challenging the route Ben Masters was taking them on, challenging his leadership and Ben would maintain his goal, but he refused to fight Johnny. But, after 158 days, when they four riders were one mile from the Canadian border, Jonny proved the fierceness of his jealousy and hatred of Ben Masters. He knew the goal was border to border. So what did he do? He separated himself from the team and refused to ride to the Canadian border, where cameras were waiting to capture Ben Master's dream on wild horses. Jonny separated himself and stopped a mile short. It was a masterfully ugly moment of jealousy and hatred that broke Ben Master's heart, his dream and his hopes. Sad—that's what it was—just like selling Joseph. So sad. Beloved, that's what happens when we welcome jealousy and hatred into our lives. We can conspire and mock other's dreams, but be certain, God is the final Judge we must deal with Him. He tells us in His Word, in Galatians 6: 7, "Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap." We can conspire to mock God and His dreams for us, but it's a dragon egg that has hatched in our soul, that threatens to ruin our lives now and for eternity. Secondly,

WELCOMING JEALOUSY AND HATRED INTO OUR LIVES OFTEN LEADS TO LYING, A BETRAYAL OF TRUST AND HUMAN DIGNITY.

(II.) Notice Reuben's grief is still front and center in Genesis 37: 29-32. We read, "And Reuben returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go? Then they took Joseph's robe of many colors and brought it to their father..." Reuben was the eldest brother and therefore, he was directly answerable to his father, and already, we know, he was on the outs with his father for committing incest with his father's wife—his mother Rachel's handmaid--Bilhah. This getting rid of Joseph just might be the last straw for Reuben. Reuben was beside himself with grief. Would Jacob his father, cast him out of his home?

Sooner or later, Reuben must have been told the whole awful story that Judah inveigled the brothers to all sell Joseph for 20 shekels of silver. The sale was made with Ishmaelites, nomadic sons of Abraham's son by Hagar. No doubt, these Ishmaelites were from the land of Midian—250 miles southeast of Jerusalem. So it was right to call them both Ishmaelites, from their tribe and Midianites from their territory. And where were these lies perpetrated against Joseph? It was in Dothan from which Joseph went into captivity. In God's providence, this band of Ishmaelite traders from Gilead appeared in the distance on their way to Egypt. Joseph's brothers saw them coming, and Judah said, "Let's sell Joseph rather than kill him." Slave trade went on in the Near East from much earlier days. Slaves were usually captives of war or they were taken in raids. Dothan was on the main drag—I-80, if you will, the main travel route on the way down to Egypt from Damascus, and these traders and slave owners were simply going along the normal coastal road to the south. Their imported spices were a staple part of their trade

with Egypt. Now Dothan is an interesting place for God to appear to have left Joseph abandoned. What do we know about Dothan. In II Kings 6: 13-17, we find Elisha and Gehazi surrounded by enemies, when Elisha prayed for deliverance. At Dothan, Elisha was surrounded, by his enemies—Syrians. It was at Dothan that Elisha prayed that the Lord would open his servant—Gehazi’s eyes so that he could see that those who are with them, that they were more than those who were against them. It was God’s mighty rescue of Elisha in Dothan in 893 B.C. So, where was God over 800 years before, in 1729 B.C. when God did not restrain the vengeful, murderous plot of Joseph's brothers, and when God didn’t save Joseph when he cried in the pit? What was going on? God's providence is a strange thing. And when we're in the middle, viewing His providence, it is rare to understand it.

So here the brothers almost repeated history. What would they use to deceive their father? They slaughtered a goat and dipped the coat of many colors in the goat’s blood. Jacob and his mother Rebekah, used two young goats to fool his father Isaac. What an irony! Isn't it an irony that as Jacob deceived his father with the food and the skins of two kid goats, so Jacob was to now be deceived by his sons’ lie, through the blood of a goat. Don’t you feel for Jacob, as he viewed the coat covered with dried up blood. What kind of sons were these men? They had no respect for their father. They lied to him, deceived him, planned, and schemed their lie, in-order to evade, and escape having to tell Jacob the truth. Thirdly,

WELCOMING JEALOUSY AND HATRED INTO OUR LIVES OFTEN LEADS OTHERS TO BELIEVE OUR BETRAYING LIES. (III.) Notice

Genesis 37: 32-34. “They brought the bloody coat to their father, and said, “This we have found; please identify whether it is your son’s robe or not.” And he (Jacob) identified it and said, “It is my son’s robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt, torn to pieces.” What a lie Jacob believed! Let’s take a moment to look at the truth his sons never told him. Their lie was to try to escape the awful truth that they sold their brother. Have any of us become so cold and callous in our jealousy and hatred of a brother that we’ve become immune to listening to the voice of God telling us to bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ? Have we sold our sisters or brothers? Every time we refuse to commit ourselves to Christian love and unity that Christ commands, we sell our brothers and sisters. When we lie, and deceive others, in what we say about them, we sell them. How far do we go to cover up our shame with a sham? How few scruples do we have when we lose our sense of responsibility to tell the truth by our jealousy and hatred? How evil are our hearts as our sins of hatred and jealousy are eating us alive like cancer, destroying the moral fiber of our consciences? Now notice what happened to Jacob. Jacob made his own conclusion. The brothers brought their father misleading evidence, just like Jacob once brought his father,

Isaac misleading evidence, wearing Esau's earth-smelling clothing and wearing goat hair on his neck and hands. You may say—Joseph's brothers never lied. They just left the conclusion up to their father. And notice also, Joseph's brothers refused to speak his name. They said, "This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not." These words were not simply directed towards the favored son, but also towards the father who favored him. These were heartless words to bring such sad news from such hate-filled and jealousy-filled brothers that they couldn't speak his name. They were just like the older brother in the story of the prodigal son who angry called his brother—"this son of yours."

Robert Louis Stevenson once wisely said, "The cruelest lies are often told in silence." Misleading evidence cements in our minds a belief in the unbelievable. Jacob believed an unfounded assumption, as Isaac once believed Jacob his son was his eldest son, Esau. Jacob chose to misinterpret the data given him, but the lie was a shrewd bit of misleading evidence. We know from Genesis 37:36 that Joseph was sold as a slave- but he was safe. We read, "Meanwhile, the Midianites had sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard." So great, was the reality of Jacob's loss, that the lie he believed impacted him for 23 years as he kept mourning the loss and death of his son Joseph who was yet alive. Jacob colored his reality by making up his own conclusion, but his sons were sure that's what he would do. Jealousy and hatred make up lies that have no scruples. This lie Jacob believed is a powerful illustration of the principle—"If we believe something is true that isn't, it may as well be." Joseph was not dead, but while Jacob believed he was, as far as Jacob was concerned, Joseph was dead. In the same way, as Christians, we have been in truth set free from sin, but if Satan can persuade us we are still under the tyranny of sin, we may as well be. Fourthly,

WELCOMING JEALOUSY AND HATRED INTO OUR LIVES OFTEN LEADS US TO DISREGARD THE SORROW OUR BETRAYALS CAUSE.

(IV.) Look at Genesis 37: 34-35. "Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol (the grave) to my son, mourning." Thus, Joseph's father wept for him." No weeping with Jacob would stop his tears. His grief was inconsolable. Jacob was broken in spirit. Jacob's heart and mind seemed to stop. The old patriarch was overcome with grief and loss. His sons' deed of hatred and jealousy against Joseph, not only appeared to have destroyed their hated brother, but in fact, those deeds did all but destroy their father. In the unbearable weight of Jacob's sadness, all he had left in his mind was three-year old son Benjamin. Benjamin was the last bit of Rachel's memory that still endured for Jacob. Fifthly,

WELCOMING JEALOUSY AND HATRED INTO OUR LIVES OFTEN LEADS US TO THINK OUR PLANS HAVE SUCCEEDED, BUT WHAT HAPPENS IS WE HAVE SPIT INTO THE WIND, BUT GOD HAS WON.

(V.) Notice Genesis 37: 36. We read, “Meanwhile, the Midianites had sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, the captain of the guard.” God was in charge all the way in the life of Joseph: God had to get Joseph to Egypt! Joseph didn’t end up at a sale-barn or a labor pool, being sold as a laborer to build a pyramid. These Ishmaelite sons of Abraham knew where to make the most. They sold Joseph to Potiphar, captain of the guard for Pharaoh. Reuben’s plan of escape for Joseph was not God’s sovereign plan. Sometimes genuinely good, godly plans, are not His will.

Our good plans can fail. In God’s sovereignty, the righteous can suffer needlessly, from our limited perspective. Our plans almost succeed, but then we watch helplessly as defeat is snatched from the jaws of victory. Be honest. Sometimes, we all struggle with God’s will. Some prayers go unanswered, our godly counsel sometimes fails, the Gospel faithfully preached, falls on deaf ears, and some godly people die young. A man came in for assistance last Friday. He worked for a mover all the way from Alabama to Rock Springs. Ronald Joseph needed a bathroom break. The moving truck stopped. He hurried back out to find the truck gone, and he was not paid—though owed a lot. I begged him to receive Jesus, but he said, “All our family passes up the offer to be born again. If March is okay, what’s wrong with April?” He was a sweet man. I wept. Why did he turn down receiving Jesus? Just like Joseph’s brothers spit into the wind, Ronald did too.

But remember, God wins. Think of it. If Joseph’s brothers never sold him to the Midianites, then Joseph would have never gone to Egypt. If Joseph never went to Egypt, he wouldn’t have been sold to Potiphar. Without being sold to Potiphar, Potiphar’s wife never would have falsely accused him of rape. If she wouldn’t have falsely accused him, he never would have gone to prison. If never in prison, Joseph never would have met the baker and butler of Pharaoh. If he’d never met the baker and butler of Pharaoh, he never would have interpreted their dreams. If he’d never interpreted their dreams, he’d never gotten to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams. If he wouldn’t have interpreted Pharaoh’s dreams, he wouldn’t have been the Prime Minister. Without being Prime Minister, there would have been no second in command Administrator for the severe famine coming on the land. His family back in Canaan would have died from the famine. If his family back in Canaan including Judah, perished from the famine, the Messiah couldn’t have come the tribe of Judah. If the Messiah couldn’t have come forth from Judah as prophesied, then Jesus would have never come. If Jesus never came, you and I would be dead in our sins, without hope. God is still on the throne today, even in our tears of anguish, as Joseph was separated from his family. Rest in Him today.