

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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The Early Culture of Hate in Joseph's Life

Genesis 37:1-11

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Here are the two points to today's sermon:

- The culture of hate started early in Joseph's life.
- Left unchecked, the culture of hate toward Joseph grew.

INTRODUCTION: For the past three weeks, we have studied the women in Joseph's life. Let me recap the family tree:

- Abraham and Sarah (Joseph's great-grandparents) had Isaac.
- Isaac married Rebekah (Joseph's grand-parents) and had Jacob.
- Jacob married Rachel (Joseph's parents) and had Joseph.

Joseph was one of 12 boys who became the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Today, we begin Joseph's story.

THE CULTURE OF HATE STARTED EARLY IN JOSEPH'S LIFE

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 37:1-4

Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan. ² This is the account of Jacob's family line. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them. ³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. ⁴ When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

EXPLANATION: Jacob and his family were back where they belonged, in the land of Canaan, the land that God promised to give to Abraham and his descendants. Unfortunately, a familiar story of conflict unfolds.

Let's review the conflicts I've told you about in recent weeks:

- Sarah could not get along with Hagar.
- Jacob could not get along with Esau.
- Rebekah could not get along with Leah, and
- Now Joseph and his brothers cannot get along with one another.

As a reminder, Bilhah and Zilpah were originally Leah and Rachel's servants. They were given to Jacob as wives and bore him four sons. While this passage specifically mentions those brothers (the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah), later scripture indicates that all the brothers held negative feelings for Joseph because of their father's favoritism.

While many of us have heard about the coat of many colors, the Bible does not actually give much of a description of the coat that Jacob made for Joseph. While males traditionally wore an outer cloak, some scholars believe that what made this coat special was its length. Instead of the shorter coat that shepherds would have worn, this may have been a longer coat that indicated Joseph had been chosen to provide administrative duties for his father rather than do the grunt work of actually tending the herds. Sibling rivalry is nothing new, but Joseph did not help his situation. After all, it kind of seems like he was a tattletale.

If Joseph knew that his brothers already had hard feelings against him, why did he bring a bad report? Was he just trying to get them in trouble? We do not know the answers to those questions, and the Bible does not tell us what the report was about. However, we do know that the Hebrew word here that is translated "bad" is also sometimes translated "evil" or "wicked." A variation of the word is even used to describe the people of Sodom. Therefore, we can safely assume that Joseph's report was not something petty. In a later passage, Jacob sends Joseph to check on his brothers. So, it can also be assumed that Joseph's report was at the request of his father. The important thing to remember is that Joseph's brothers, who were older and should have been more mature, were in the wrong.

ILLUSTRATION: A man lived in a rural area where it was common to burn your own trash. Sometimes, the fire would die down before the pile had been completely burned. When that happened, the man would go out into the yard and find a large stick. Then he would go poke around in the fire, stoking the flames back to life. One day, when the man was not looking, his little grandson decided to do what his grandpa always did. He picked up a large stick and started poking around the ash and logs until the fire kicked up and threw a hot ember onto his younger sister causing a significant burn.

EXPLANATION: Joseph's family never learned to handle conflict in a Godly manner. They had seen the conflict between their mothers and likely heard stories about the earlier family rivalries. They grew up in an atmosphere of jealousy and deceit. Joseph didn't realize that even if his intent was not to harm, his actions were like fuel to a smoldering fire. Like the little boy who stoked the fire, the brothers imitated the attitudes of their parents, and the result was disastrous.

LEFT UNCHECKED, HATE TOWARD JOSEPH GREW

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 37:5-11

Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. ⁶ He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: ⁷ We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it." ⁸ His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said. ⁹ Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." ¹⁰ When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" ¹¹ His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

EXPLANATION: God's word is not always chronological. Sometimes a story will appear out of order. For example, if you look back a couple of chapters, you will discover that Rachel, Joseph's mother, died right after delivering another son, Benjamin. Here, however, Jacob references Joseph's mother as if she were alive. In

addition, verse 3 seemed to indicate that Joseph was the youngest, but we know that Joseph's brother, Benjamin, was born after him.

It is possible that the author of Genesis finished Rachel's story before he began Joseph's. It's only natural that as mother and son, some parts of their stories overlapped. This story, beginning when Joseph was 17, may have taken place before Rachel died. If so, it would be interesting to know what Rachel thought of this dream, but we are not given that information.

Of course, Joseph's brothers did not care too much for Joseph's dreams and the insinuation that they would one day bow before him. Jacob's reaction at first seemed as hateful as the brothers'. He actually rebuked his son. That means he criticized him or put him in check. Basically, he wanted to stop Joseph in his tracks.

At first glance, the thought of Joseph, the then-youngest in the clan, being head over them all, was foreign. Culturally, the oldest always retained the position of honor. These dreams, therefore, came off as presumptuous and arrogant. They offended the father and brothers' sense of pride. I wonder when it occurred to Jacob that he, the youngest of his own mother, had been promised the greater portion before he was born?

ILLUSTRATION: A teenage boy decided to skip school one day. Unfortunately for him, his father drove past a place of business and noticed the boy's vehicle outside. The father told his mother, and that evening there was a very loud family discussion. The mother was upset and lost her temper and yelled at her son. Later on, as the boy sat in his room sulking, his preschool sister came to the door, put her hands on her hips, smirked, and said, "So, Mike, how was school today?"

Siblings have a way of aggravating one another. You probably remember sitting in the back seat of a car and complaining to your parents, "He touched me!" Or you may have pulled your sister's hair, only to act innocent when she screamed.

EXPLANATION: Given what we know of Joseph's character, however, I doubt that he was trying to antagonize his brothers. He may have genuinely been curious about the dreams and wanted his family's opinion. Of course, at this time, he had no way of knowing what terrible things were going to happen to him, but God knew.

He sent these dreams so that Joseph would have something to cling to in the darkest times. When it looked as if everyone Joseph loved had turned on him, when it seemed as if God himself had abandoned him, Joseph could think back on these dreams and remember that there was still more to come, that his story was not yet over.

- Joseph's life was full of conflict.
- Joseph shared his dreams.

ILLUSTRATION: There is a children's song that many of you may know. It says, "Oh be careful little eyes what you see. Oh be careful little eyes what you see. For the Father up above is looking down in tender love. Oh, be careful little eyes what you see." The song then goes on to say, "Be careful little ears what you hear," and "Be careful little mouths what you say," and "Be careful little hands what you do." I cannot help but think of that song when it comes to this story.

Joseph's brothers saw their father's favoritism and they grew jealous because of it. They heard their brother's dreams, and they grew angry because of them. They spoke out of that anger and envy, and, eventually, as we will learn later, because of their hatred, they applied their hands to violence. They would have been better to have taken the message of that little children's song and applied it to their lives. What if they had chosen to look at their father and brother with love instead of jealousy? What if they had listened to Joseph's dream and pondered with him what plans God had in store? What if they had spoken words of understanding and encouragement instead of rejection and anger?

APPLICATION: Is it very different from our families today? What kind of example are we giving our children and grandchildren and the people around us? Not all conflict is avoidable, but when faced with conflict, how do we handle it?

- Are we careful how we choose to view the events and people in our lives? Do we try to look at life and circumstances and people through the eyes of God? Or are we intent on seeing everything from the perspective of me and I?
- Are we careful what we hear? Do we listen to words of discouragement and take them to heart? Do we allow ourselves to be lured into arguments? Or do we give grace and mercy and dismiss words said in anger?

- Are we careful what we say? Do we look for reasons to give encouragement? Do we speak life, love, and joy into the lives of our friends, family, and strangers?

If Sarah had handled the conflict differently in her life, is it possible that her grandsons, Jacob and Esau might have dealt with their disagreements in a different way? If Jacob learned how to rely upon the Lord more and himself less, is it possible that Rachel and Leah could have learned to love without jealousy? Is it possible that Joseph's story could have been different? Is it possible in our own lives? Instead of drama and division, can we be people of love and unity?

INVITATION: The difference between teaching and preaching is this: teaching should increase your knowledge, preaching should lead to action.

Do you need to pray for strength to handle conflict biblically?

Do you need to ask God to help you extend mercy and grace to others in the same way he extends it to us?

If you do not know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, then that's the first step to achieving peace in your life. He wants you to live in victory. He does not want you to be consumed by the anger and hatred of this world. I'd be happy to talk to you more about salvation and pray with you.

Acts 4:12 ¹² Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

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