

Genesis (The Promise-Keeping God)

Week 4/8 “The Invisible God”

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Bible Passage: Genesis 37:2-36

Lord, help us to see you working in both easy and difficult times. Open us to your ways and your word, in Jesus' name. Amen.

1-Divine revelation.

2-Peak Jealousy.

3-The Invisible God.

Three things, and it is all in Genesis 37 where we are introduced to Joseph, the great grandson of Abraham, the son of Jacob. Here he speaks truth to his father about some family members behaving badly and then shares his dreams, dreams that are clearly a.

1-DIVINE REVELATION.

God speaks through dreams, visions, and his word.

Genesis 37:2

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. (Gen 37.2)

I know as the youngest child myself, I would happily give over the details of the shenanigans and secrets of my older siblings, in order to curry favour with my parents.

But is this what Joseph is doing?

Well, the text gives us no clues, at least not yet, leaving room for youthful pride and poor timing as the source of his truth-telling, and not some greater vision of the great man tha he will become.

Verse 5.

Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. He said to them, 'Listen to this dream I had: we were binding sheaves of corn out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered round mine and bowed down to it.'

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. (Gen 37.5-8)

The truth is spoken and the recipient's interpretation is given, and the result, **they hated him all the more.**

But is the dream from God?

Well, at this point it is worth noting that God's revelation did come to his people in different ways in the Old Testament.

Sometimes through direct speech (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and others), sometimes through visible appearances (the burning bush), sometimes through personal encounters (Jacob wrestling with God), and sometimes through dreams, as we see here.

But what about us? Can God still speak through dreams?

Acts 2:17 quotes Joel's promise that "your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."

So yes, God can and does use dreams.

But we must keep in mind that we now have the completed written Word of God and the final revelation of the Son. As Hebrews 1:1-2 teaches us, "God who spoke in many ways in the past has now spoken to us by his Son."

Any experience today, including a dream, a voice or a wrestling, must be tested by Scripture and cannot stand above or beside it as equal revelation.

Now back to Joseph.

Hated by the family, he continues to speak of his dreams regardless of how they are perceived, verse 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.’ 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?’ (Gen 37.9-10)

Jacob is annoyed, but it appears that he made the right choice in choosing Joseph over the others, for they have already demonstrated their desire for deception and how quickly their jealousy turns to hatred.

But what about the dream?

Well, in ancient cultures these astronomical symbols of the sun and the moon and the stars, they represented rulers, meaning their rhetorical questions.

‘Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?’ are completely understandable, this is clearly what the dream was about, but to hate him because of what he said, to be jealous of him, well that’s not going to go well, is it?

Verse 11.

*His brothers were jealous of him, but **his father kept the matter in mind.** (Gen 37.11)*

Father Jacob was annoyed, for he had rebuked Joseph, yet he kept the matter in mind, and this is our first hint from the text that these dreams may be from God.

For Jacob had experienced God at work and he knew that God could select the younger to rule over the older, and that God could declare his choice by an oracle or a dream.

For this is also Jacob's story, is it not? Not to mention that his older brother resented him, hated him and had murderous intent for him.

Meaning there is often a clear jealousy against those chosen by God.

And we get this. Except we want to redirect people's jealousy of our friendships, our Hope, our joy in Christ, our certainty of eternity.

We want to redirect it into a fear of missing out, rather than jealousy so they might come and see.

1-Divine revelation

Is ours in Christ.

2-Peak Jealousy.

Favoritism and envy quickly grow into serious sin.

And back to verse 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. 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. (Gen 37.3-4)

This robe, often called the coat of many colours, given to a younger child, was clearly ostentatious and provocative.

It was a visible sign of both the favouritism, and the fact that Jacob had clearly learnt little from his youth, and the crop of hatred that followed his favouritism.

Its no different for Joseph, actually it is worse, for the jealousy gave 10 men a willingness and a desire to kill their younger brother.

And we can learn from this.

Jealousy left unchecked grows quickly and leads to serious sin. How Jacob could not see this is beyond me, and we know he couldn't see the trouble that was brewing, for he sends Joseph alone to check on his brothers and report back what he sees.

Brothers who saw him coming and began a plot to kill him.

In Verse 19.

'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.' (Gen 37.19-20)

Both the coat, the source of their hatred, and the dreams, the source of their jealousy, are named here as the motives behind their desire to kill him.

And it is true, jealousy is ugly, a great deceiver, for it blinds us from what is right, and justifies what is wrong.

Fortunately, not everyone is deceived and Reuben steps in. Reuben was the eldest brother and ultimately responsible for whatever happens to Joseph.

Verse 21.

When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. 'Let's not take his life,' he said. 'Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don't lay a hand on him.' Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father. So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe – the ornate robe he was wearing – and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it. (Gen 37.21-24)

A cistern is not a well so much, but a hole dug in the ground in order to capture and store rain water, fortunately this one was dry, so drowning was not an option, yet it was a prison none the less.

A temporary prison in Reuben's mind, who had encouraged this over killing Joseph and so that he could eventually return him to his father, alive.

But it didn't work, for their hatred and jealousy ran deep, to the point of indifference as they enjoyed a meal and continued to plot against him.

Verse 25

As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt. Judah said to his brothers, 'What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.' His brothers agreed. (Gen 37.25-27)

“What will we gain” means what will we profit and it is no metaphor, it is a harsh monetary word meaning they care so little for their brother, that he is not even worth killing without some material gain.

They sell him to the traders as a slave and he is taken to Egypt, and all without Reuben's knowledge.

Verse 29.

When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. He went back to his brothers and said, 'The boy isn't there! Where can I turn now?' (Gen 37.29-30)

Interesting that his first response is not “what will happen to Joseph”, but “what will happen to me”.

Meaning, it sounds like his motive to protect Joseph was not about Joseph, but about fear of what his father might do. So together they hatched a plan to cover it up.

Verse 31.

Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, 'We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe.' He recognised it and said, 'It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces.' Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. 'No,' he said, 'I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave.' So his father wept for him. (Gen 37.31-35)

The irony of a deceiver who deceived his father with a goat, being deceived by his children with a goat is surely not lost on anyone.

And WOW.

This sure was a terrible story of jealousy, hatred and deception?

But where is God? Is he invisible? our third point.

3-The Invisible God.

God is always working, just not in the way we expect.

In Genesis 37, our chapter, God, the LORD, Elohim, YHWH is not mentioned once, in fact there is no explicit divine speech or action here at all, it is as if God is silent, invisible as this terrible story reaches its climax with Joseph sold to one of Pharaoh's officials, Potiphar.

And yet he is not absent.

Joseph's dreams are still his. The brothers' hatred is held back from its full murderous desire. The promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is not broken, even though everything looks like it is falling apart.

God is working here.

Besides, this isn't the end of the story, for the invisible God is already pointing us beyond Joseph to the true and greater Son.

Joseph is the beloved son of his father. So is Jesus!

Joseph is stripped of his robe and sold by his brothers. Jesus is stripped and sold by one of his own!

Joseph is thrown into a pit and taken down to Egypt, as good as dead to his family. Jesus is buried in a tomb and goes down into death itself.

He is the one that this story truly points to.

Let's wrap up

1-Divine Revelation.

Joseph's dreams were not the product of pride or ambition, they were from God and he simply shared what he had seen.

His brothers heard it and hated him all the more. They took the revelation and turned it into a reason to despise him.

And this is the point. God can speak, and people can still refuse to hear.

Divine revelation, word, dream or vision is not a guarantee of a right response. In this case the brothers took what God had shown and used it as an excuse for violence and jealousy.

2-Peak Jealousy.

Today's story demonstrates the hurt and pain caused by jealousy and favoritism. If left unchecked and unrealised, it can quickly grow into serious sin.

Meaning, brothers and sisters, the best time to deal with jealousy is when we notice ourselves keeping score of others' recognition, awards and achievements, and not when we are responding in uncharitable ways.

And lastly

3-The Invisible God.

Genesis 37 makes no mention of God, yet he is clearly present in Joseph's dreams and as their jealousy is limited and their hatred held back from their full desire.

And this can say something to us as well, for surely I am not the only one who has felt like God was absent in my struggles?

Yet at the same time I know that God is present, helping, guiding, working, how? Because he promises to be.

John 14:16-18 "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever - the Spirit of truth... I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

Litany for the Holy Spirit

Let us pray to God the Holy Spirit, saying, 'Come, Holy Spirit, come!'

Come, Holy Spirit, creator, and renew the face of the earth.

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Come, Holy Spirit, counsellor and advocate. Touch our lips that we may pray aright and proclaim your word.

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Come, Holy Spirit, power from on high, make us agents of peace and ministers of wholeness.

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Come, Holy Spirit, giver of life, breathe on your Church and make us a living people, holy and free.

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Come, Holy Spirit, bond of love, pour your love into our hearts that we may serve you with joy.

Come, Holy Spirit.
