

DATE: January 11, 2009

TEXT: Genesis 37: 18-34

TITLE: "Genesis XXI: The Patience of God"



This morning I am returning to our study of Genesis. In my first sermon on Genesis I told you that Genesis is structure around 12 "accounts." This morning we begin the 12th and last account. It is the longest account taking 13 chapters of scripture. It is the story of Joseph. Chapter 37 begins the account. As I read and reread this chapter again and again one lesson jumped out at me... the amazing patience of God. I want to share 4 lessons this morning as we look at God's patience.

Lesson # 1 Note the amazing unfaithfulness of humanity. I did not read the entire chapter... allow me look at the three main characters in this story.

First, we look at Jacob. You will remember Jacob had 12 sons. The 12 sons had 4 different mothers. The most loved wife of Jacob was Rachel. Genesis 37: 3 states

"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 a richly ornamented robe for him."

Remember Jacob's father had made the same mistake. Isaac had loved Esau more than

Jacob. Why... possibly he looked the most like Rachel. Jacob was a fool. Jacob had detached himself from the emotions of his family. He refused to see the great emotional damage his favoritism was causing his 11 sons.

There is a lesson here. Husbands and fathers who detach themselves from the emotions of their family cause great, great damage. We live in a society where many men detach themselves emotionally from wives and children. Irresponsible husbands.... irresponsible fathers is never the will of God. Husbands are to love their wives and I believe their children as Christ loved the church. Christ wept for his church. Christ died for his church. Men, do not follow the path of Jacob.

But let us look at next at Joseph. Joseph also was a fool. To be fair, he was only 17 years old, but he was still a fool. He seemed to take his favored position and rub it in the noses of his brothers. He received this wonderful coat... the decorative coat or the coat of many colors... and he wore it where ever he went. I remember when I first got my varsity letter coat. I lettered as a Sophomore in track. I ordered and received my coat in the summer. I remember one October

day... it got down to about 55... I said... cold enough... I can wear my coat to school. I could show off the coat... and of course me inside the coat. I was just 16.

That was Joseph. The coat was also a sign of authority and power. Then Joseph had a couple of dreams. In one of the dreams he saw 12 sheaves of grain in the field and then he saw 11 of the sheaves come to his sheave and bow down to it. In the other dream Joseph he saw the sun and the moon and 11 stars bowing down to him. What did Joseph do when we awoke from these dreams? He put on his coat and went and told his brothers. Let me tell you... they really appreciated that. Also the text tells us the 12 brothers were out in the field tending the sheep when Joseph left them and gave a “bad report” about them to his father. Joseph was really making friends. Joseph was a fool. He allowed his pride and his arrogance to rule the day. God had to teach him a lesson. He did.

Next, let us look at the brothers. The brothers hated Joseph. One day the brothers were out tending the sheep when Jacob sent Joseph to check up on them. The bible says they saw him coming from afar... his coat was visible from a great distance. When they saw him they plotted to

kill him. Reuben, the oldest brother, convinced them to not kill him... but to just throw him in the dry well. They did. Reuben went to tend the flocks when Judah saw a band of Midianites approaching. He convinced the brothers to sell Joseph and make some money.

The story ends with the plot to deceive their father. They kill a goat... tear the coat and pour blood on it. They take the coat to their father and report that a wild animal had eaten Joseph.

The brothers were evil. No motivation justified the actions of the brothers. They were filled with jealousy and bitterness. Have you noticed where most of the jealousy and bitterness is evident? In families. I have noticed that one of the most difficult processes the families go through is the distribution of assets after a loved one has died. Brothers and Sister that have never had a major fight in the past end up angry and bitter toward each other over a picture or jewelry or their "fair share" of the inheritance.

I see anger and bitterness between parents and children. Children resent parents and rebel... parents get tired of the fights and end up bitter against the children. Sometimes in

families grudges can last for decades. *Ephesians 4:31 gives this command....*

31Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Bitterness destroys relationships. Bitterness destroys a person. Yes, families are a primary target of bitterness... but there is another primary target.... God. Many, many people are angry and bitter at God. They blame Him for the events of their lives. They blame Him for the choices they make. Bitterness destroys faith. Surrender the bitterness to God. Allow Him to give the power to forgive. Forgive not for the other person... forgive for your own health and your own faith.

Remember, these 12 brothers were destined to be the leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel. They had a long, long way to go. They too had to be taught by God. God did indeed teach them... as we will see.

The overall lesson of this point is this... humanity rejects the way of God. Humanity always chooses sin. This is not my diagnosis of humanity... this is God's diagnosis.

Romans 3: 9-12 states this truth....

We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. 10As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

This is indeed a harsh diagnosis. But I believe if we are honest we look around the world we see the truth of this diagnosis. Humanity kills other humans. Humanity allows ½ the world to go hungry. Humanity chooses genocide again and again.

But we can see the same locally. And we can see the same in ourselves. Our natural tendency is selfishness. Through training and through the power of the Holy Spirit it can be minimized and controlled... but it is still within us.

I believe many people try to deny this diagnosis. The "I'm O.K., you're O.K." mentality is common. The belief that education will prevent ills in society is common. Let me say this..... please hear this statement... God desires to heal his people. REPEAT However, the first step to healing is to accept the diagnosis of God. We need to be healed. In and of ourselves we are not O.K. I love the words of Paul. He is honest... with himself and with the people around him.

Hear these words of Paul from *Romans 7:18ff*

18I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.[a] For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.

If we are honest... wouldn't we say the exact same words. We must be honest with ourselves and accept the diagnosis of God. We are like Jacob. We are like Joseph. We are like the brothers.

Lesson # 2 Please notice the patience and the love of God. God does not give up on Judah... God does not give up on Joseph God does not give up on the brothers and God does not give up on us. I quoted the words of Paul in Romans 7... Hear now the Words of Paul in

Romans 8

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. 3For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering....Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 6The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; ...You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you....And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. ...For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." 16The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ

Do you see this lesson? Yes, We are sinful, selfish people... but God does not give up on us. God sent his Son to overcome our sinfulness and God sends his Holy Spirit to empower us to overcome our selfishness.

Jacob... as foolish as he was... was used by God to be a great patriarch. The 12 brothers as foolish as they are.... and quite truthfully I am skipping stories that point to even greater sin, become used by God to be the leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel. And Joseph, we will see in the next few weeks is used by God to save his family and the people of God. And God has patience with you and with me. He guides us and forgives us and teaches us to be his disciples. Allow me to close with these words of Paul in *Philippians 3*

12Not that I have already obtained (spiritual maturity), or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Can't we say the exact same words. We are not "there". We continue to struggle. Praise God... he is patient with us. Let us move forward. Let us fix our eyes of our Lord and move forward. The journey of Joseph is also our journey... we will continue it next week.

AMEN