

Families Under Trial

April 26, 2020

PASTOR: Good morning. Glad that you are again listening. I've been burdened for our families. I've been thinking about families this past week and a very important time in the lives of our families. I've particularly been thinking about Jacob's family and making some comparisons with Jacob's family in Genesis 37, but let's have a word of prayer first.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the word of God today. We are praying for families today, families that are listening, families that are struggling, families that have been forced to make changes because of the virus.

We pray today that You might do a good work, Lord, in hearts. We depend on You. We need Your help. We seek Your aid. We pray that during this time of this quarantine when families are forced together, we ask, oh Lord, that good changes will develop and we pray to that end. We pray that the Lord Jesus Christ might be glorified in our lives and in our families. And we'll thank you for it in Jesus' name. Amen.

I titled this message Families Under Trial, and we'll be preaching, as we mentioned, out of Genesis 37.

And as we all know, we've had changes in the routine of our lives. I was reading the famous Christian blogger, Tim Challies, and he said this. He was speaking of his own family. He said, on a family level, a time will come when your children's sports leagues will start up again, when their music teacher will call again, when a society convinced it needs to fill their every waking moment will once again offer to do just that. There is no time like right now to decide whether that is what you want and whether that is what they need. As in life, so in family. Take the do-over. Speak with your children about all of their activities, consider whether these things are serving them well, whether they are helping your kids to grow in wisdom and in stature and favor with God and man.

Certainly our lives, as we've mentioned, have changed a lot since this virus came, and that includes our families. Family has, in essence, been forced to come together, and that can be good or, in some families, that may be a little bit disastrous. It's been hard for many families that aren't used to

eating together. Let's face it. A lot of families haven't eaten together for a long time. Some families don't talk very much. Now families are put in a position after many weeks that they need to talk together. Families staying home living together. For some families I think they've been getting reacquainted. That's very positive. And perhaps they have re-prioritized their lives. Perhaps your families may be getting back to having family devotions again or praying together. Those are all great things.

On the other side of the coin, I read a study that said alcohol consumption has gone up by 55% in our country. Can you believe that? It's sad. Many homes are not doing very well. They're not acclimating to the changes and so they're struggling. There's families that just aren't getting long. There's more domestic violence. I'm fearful that some homes will be having divorces, and there's separations and upsets and other things of that nature. They have been brought together.

I'm trusting that the lessons from God's word in Genesis 37 and some other passages we look at will be of some benefit to us. We always seek God's word in trying to find answers. We're always

interested in how the Lord might deal with our hearts through his Holy Spirit as we get into the word of God. So if you would and you have your Bibles, turn to Genesis 37.

I had read something, some advice from an organization earlier this past week, and their advice was this: Families manage the challenges by providing concrete practices and coping strategies for every child and family. Well, that may have some benefit, but I think the word of God is ultimately our help and our hope so we turn to him.

Genesis 37 as we talk about families that are forced together. We mentioned that families need to talk. One of the things I've noticed is that generally when problems develop we stop talking to each other, and sometimes discussions are one-sided. Sometimes dads and moms can preach to their kids and the kids turn it off, but sometimes there's a dramatic need for having some two-way conversation, and we need to hear from our kids. We need to hear from each other. We need to be able to show some love and interest in each other along the journey so I think eating and sitting together, and even though it's, perhaps, been a struggle to start out with, maybe things are improving.

In Genesis 37 we're told this: Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger. He was a pilgrim, an alien, a sojourner. That is in the land of Canaan. We're told it's the history of Jacob. I wonder what our histories look like.

I find it fascinating the first thing mentioned about Jacob's history is what? It mentions Joseph. How many sons did he have? He had 12 sons. The second-youngest son was Joseph, and there was favoritism involved.

It says Joseph was 17 years old, feeding the flock with his brothers, and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives.

Now, you may remember -- let me just try to catch up a little bit with some of these things. Bilhah and Zilpah were the maids or the servant women of Leah and Rachel, and so they also had sons through Jacob. They were his lesser wives.

So we see they're out in the field and it wasn't unusual -- it seems that Joseph was kind of the voice -- I hate to use the word "tattletale," but he would apparently ask Joseph to go out in the field to check on his sons and see how they were doing and to come back, bring a report, and tell Dad what had

been happening with them. And if it was a bad report -- apparently they were not always the best of sons, that sometimes they were up to no good, and they would come back -- or Joseph would come back and he would say things to Dad that they didn't appreciate. Sometimes families function that way.

Later on in verse 14 we're told: Jacob told Joseph, "Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks, and bring back word to me." So this was something that he apparently was accustomed to doing.

So back to verse 2 we're told Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father. I have no idea exactly what that means, but apparently the sons were often not doing what they should have been doing.

Disobedience in the family, that is often one of the traits why families do not get along. Sometimes children do not obey, which is one of the main tenants of what children are to do and to function is that they are to obey their father and their mother because this is right with the Lord. And apparently that isn't what they were doing.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children. I want you to take some earmarks here, and

you'll notice there are some things going on. There's the disobedience of the sons, there is favoritism on the part of Jacob towards -- even though he has many sons, he's got a favorite. Joseph is his very favorite. And it says this: Because he was the son of his old age. We're given a reason, but I don't know if it's a tangible reason, do you think? Because he was the son of his old age.

I realize that one of the things that happens in many families is that children will say, well, you know, he or she was always Dad or Mom's favorite, and maybe there is some truth to that just like in this passage, and that's not a good idea. But there's truth in it often and this also brings about a problem. It brings about families that do not get along, it brings about family struggles, and one of the things that we're coping with right now in the home are family struggles, I think.

We're all brought together when our modern American culture has so much drifting. We're modern Americans. You know, we're told we need to be busy. We're told that we've got to occupy ourselves with busyness or something is the matter with us as a family, something is the matter with us as an individual, and so we don't always get along as we

ought to and so I think some of these struggles are being pushed to the forth -- even to the forefront, and we are concerned that maybe some families are struggling.

In fact, we're told in verse 3 here:
Because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors.

If there's one thing you know about and you were taught as a child in Sunday school, the pulpit, at home, and many other places, do you remember Joseph's coat of many colors? In fact, I think there was a Broadway play even, wasn't there, of some sort: Joseph's Many-Colored Coat or whatever it was.

But reading this, we get kind of caught up with he had this really cool coat and all of the rest of them didn't, but what it meant was not just favoritism but it also meant that he was putting Joseph in a position as being the top dog. He was considered the leader and, you know, he's not the firstborn son. The firstborn son generally had that rank and position, but he didn't have it as the second-to-the-last-born son but he was a favorite so Dad says, You're the leader. You're the top dog.

Well, guess what. All of the older brothers aren't going to appreciate it. Verse 4:

When his brothers saw that their father loved him more -- gave him position, gave him rank. Not just the coat, but that coat meant that. He loved him more than all the brothers.

Do you notice it's favoritism, it's about love, and one of the concerns we have right now is love in our household. How do we incorporate this devotion, this love, this togetherness in our household? What we see in the family of Jacob is there is discontentment. There is separation. There's not togetherness. There is a lack of love.

We hope for that. We -- even in the scope of our local church. We call each other brothers. We call ourselves a church family. That's what the Bible teaches us. We are those kind of people. And we love that kind of attitude and that kind of spirit, but sometimes we don't always treat each other that way as well, and love covers a multitude of sin we're told in scripture.

They're struggling. There's trials and tribulations going on here, and we see it's building up. Do you notice in these first few verses we have the groundwork of problems and troubles?

I am convinced that we see similar things in households across America, in our churches, that

we have certain inherent problems that are common and we see misplaced ideals. We see sinful attitudes and problems.

Notice how it grows. There's hatred now. There's anger. And, see, so often that's what happens, hatred and anger. You say, We would never have any hatred in our home, but there is anger and they seem to coincide. They're almost brothers in their own sense.

It says, Joseph had a dream. Joseph and his dreams; right? He told it to his brothers.

Guess what. They say, Man, we're really happy, Joseph, you told us that dream. What a wonderful dream. I hope you have some more dreams and you come and you tell us some more dreams like this because they're just so wonderful and we love your stories of your dreams and we'll all get together and listen to them more and more and more.

What does it say in verse 5? They hated him even more. So he said to them, "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed."

Maybe there was some pride on the part of Joseph as well. He's a young man. He's the top dog. He's getting revelations from God. Dad always loved you more. This is all the foundations for just a

troubled family, and things are just getting worse and worse.

So he tells them this dream about these sheaves in the field. We're binding sheaves in the field. Behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf.

That sounds like something that's going to endear him to his brothers, doesn't it? Oh, boy. Your sheaves -- your bundle of sheaves, all of you, you're all going to bow down to me.

His brothers said to him, "Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?" They hated him.

Do you notice the word "hate" keeps coming up? Hatred, hatred, hatred. This is going to go somewhere, don't you think? Hatred.

So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

Then he dreamed still another dream. Guess what. He told his brothers. Can you imagine that? Do you think that's a good idea? He says, "Look, I've dreamed another dream. The sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me." He told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked

him.

At this point Dad says, Hey, come on, Joseph. Your brothers are so angry and they're so upset with you that it's coming back to me. Dad hears about it. Maybe he's telling Dad about it, too.

So now Dad is starting to rebuke him and said, "What is this dream that you've dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?" No one likes to feel like they're subservient, do they? And his brothers envied him.

I want you to keep noticing key words. You see the word "envy." You see the word "favoritism." You see the word "hatred." You see certain words that just jump out at the page before you.

There's also maybe a sense of pride on the part of Joseph, that he's the big shot, he's the leader, and this all produces terrible family dynamics. These dynamics are only going to lead to things that are going to bring to fruition disaster and families come apart.

You say, Well, none of these things would ever happen in my family. We don't hate each other. Sometimes we don't get along and sometimes we have

words with each other and we have some problems of our own, but aren't all homes that way? Yes, there are problems at times. We realize these things happen. We know that.

When I examine Jacob and Joseph's family, I do see the correlation though. And there are faltering families today. Let me just share a couple of things. We need God's help. Families need God's help.

My wife was sharing a commercial with me from a drug company, and their particular answer to all of the struggles that we're having with this virus and pretty much life itself is science is our help. Science, they answered, is the help you need. It is the final answer.

But as I understand it in scripture, that the Lord is our help. He's our redeemer. He is our aide. In fact, we're told in Psalm 127:1: Unless the Lord builds the house, They labor in vain who build it.

We need to have the Lord help us. We need all the help we can get. You may be brilliant, you may be wonderful fathers and mothers and children and your families may get along, but I'm going to tell you this again. Things can happen. Families can

dissolve and break apart. We need the Lord's help. Churches need the Lord's help. Church families need the Lord's help. That is always the supply of our aid. And so when you're dealing with this virus and you're saying, boy, you know, there's some tension; there are some struggles; boy, we're glad we're not like Jacob's family; oh, they really hated each other and there was a lot of pride and envy and jealousy and conflicts that were enormous, I do want to tell you this. Unless the Lord builds the house, you labor in vain that build it. You need God's help. You need God's help.

I had a mail conflict this past week. Somebody sent our mail -- the mail person sent our mail to the wrong house, and they noticed that on the letter that was sent it was sent -- it was addressed to me as a pastor. And so they had accidentally opened up my mail, which can be a problem or not be a problem, but they sent a letter and they put it in our mailbox. They handwrote a letter and they said, Pastor Eric, would you pray for us? They didn't give a name or anything. They put the address of the house but they didn't leave their name, but they said, Would you pray for us? And they mentioned their own personal conflict and struggle in their own

household and they wanted me to know about it, and all they asked for was would you pray for us? They at least had an inkling of an idea that they needed the Lord to help them. Wherever they were in their life, they were reaching out to somebody to pray for them. We need the Lord's help. We need the Lord's help.

I'm reminded it starts with marriage. You do realize that when somebody gets married you're marrying someone that's also a sinner just like you, and it produces a problem. You get married to somebody and you say, oh, boy, you know, I thought they were perfect. And then you find out they're not perfect because you're not perfect either. So two sinners get together and they get married and they have to deal with the problems of two sinners in a household; right? You've got to be able to deal with the sinfulness of another person, including yourself.

And guess what. The Lord sometimes blesses us with children, and guess what. We have more sinners in a household so you've got all kinds of sinners in a household that can produce conflicts and struggles and more sin.

Do you think you need the Lord's help? Do you think you need salvation? That's why, as soon as

you can, as Christians you start telling your children about Jesus. As soon as you can, you start telling your children we're sinners. We all like to tell our kids how good they are. Oh, you're such good kids, you're so wonderful, but there has to come a time -- there has to come a time when you tell your kids they're sinners and they need help from the Lord Jesus Christ. They need help to take away their sin and He's the only one that can take away their sin, that there needs to be some repentance, there needs to be faith in Jesus Christ alone for their soul salvation, and we are saddled with the blessing as well as the burden to be sure they hear about the Lord Jesus Christ. Then we need to bring them up in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord. Wow.

So we find sinful human characteristics and we see Joseph's youthful pride. We see Jacob's favoritism. We see the brothers and they're going to start having this evil plotting.

Let's pick up in our passage again here in Genesis 37. So we're told in verse 11 his brothers envied him, and this envy just continued to flower and flourish in a bad way, and his father kept the matter in mind. He knows that he made Joseph his favorite. He knows that he made him the leader.

So we find the boys are out feeding the father's flock in Shechem. So he sends, in verses 13 and 14, Joseph out to find them and to get word back.

So we pick up in verse 15. A certain man found him, and there he was, wandering in the field. He said, "What are you seeking?" And he said, "I'm seeking my brothers. Tell me where they are feeding their flocks."

The man said, "They have departed from here, for I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'" Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan.

Now when they saw him off, even before he came near them -- here is the fruition, the horrible fruition of their envy, their jealousy, their hatred that we have seen building up through this passage, this conflict within the home. They conspired against him to kill him.

Verse 19: They said, "Look, the dreamer is coming!" So they said, "Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we'll say, 'Some wild beast devoured him.' We shall see what will become of his dreams." This hatred has developed into this desire now to kill him. How terrible. How horrible.

We certainly live in a violent culture, and it doesn't seem beyond the scope of even some families doing such terrible things. We hear about spousal abuse. We hear about domestic violence all the time. All the time. If you're on the police force, they would tell you that seems to be the thing that is happening almost the most, domestic violence. Well, we find hatred is lurking in the hearts of so many and sometimes even murder.

Well, Reuben, the oldest, said, "Let us not kill him." He tries to protect the younger brother.

And eventually what happens is they throw him in a pit; right? They throw him in this pit that we find out here, and they end up selling Joseph to these travelers. They're like bedouins, these Midianites, these Ishmaelites, and he is taken off to Egypt as the rest of the account goes. Terrible, terrible account. Jacob is brokenhearted.

So often we find families have broken hearts with or without murder. Children that go astray, parents that break up, families that are disturbed, and we're concerned.

One of the reasons we're preaching -- you say, Why are we preaching on this anyways? If you haven't guessed at this point, we are concerned about

families. We are concerned about families being forced together, being brought together, and we realize that when families are brought together and families are faltering in our culture in the day that we live in that we need to say something about it. So there are family failures. There are angry and screaming families. They scream at each other. They holler at each other. There are constant arguments in many families. They can't get along. It may not be as forceful as Jacob's family, of course, but perhaps we see ourself in the mirror where we see the anger, the hatred almost, the screaming and arguing family, or perhaps we see ourselves with a bitter, unforgiving, and jealous family.

One of the things that happens in many families is families don't want to forgive each other. They don't want to say, Let's talk about this. This isn't right. God would have us forgive each other. Come on, let's get together, and let's talk this over. It's sad, but sometimes it's the coldness, the lack of communication, the lack of forgiveness. Destructive. Very destructive.

The family that becomes distant and disengaged, the person that doesn't want to come out of their room, the person that doesn't want to eat

the meal with the rest of the family, the person that doesn't want to respond any longer and talk and communicate, these things happen in the scope of homes, and sometimes as families are forced together we are wondering if we are being able to get back together in the warmth and the joy of the family or if we are finding ourselves disengaged again. The family that disobeys God, that lives in sin and nothing is being done about it, these are family failures. These are family failures.

I understand we live in a very stressful world and we have no less stress because of this virus. Yeah, I catch some of the news. I'll be honest with you. I'm starting to listen less and less to news, and I just -- it's almost overkill. But I understand there are people not working. I understand people are concerned about their finances. I understand that people are concerned about getting the virus yet. I understand people want to get out there again and become engaged and do all the things that we want to do and normalcy to come back, and the news people are saying, well, you're not going to have normalcy.

But I want you to realize the greatness of our God in these situations. I want you to

understand again that despite all the stress and the troubles that surround us there is a place to turn to, and we hope and we pray and we need to pray for our families and we need to do something about our families.

And, yeah, I understand when we get together here's a bunch of sinners getting together, and even though we may be saved by grace, there may be some tension involved just to even get along all the time. But I trust and hope that we may use this time in a wise and wonderful way for the glory of God, that somehow this will bring families together again, that somehow in the midst of all these things that it will restore our passion for each other because I think it's hard. I think we become -- even in the midst of being put together again, sometimes it's hard for us not to get our eyes off ourselves, become self-introspective, and we become this person again that we want to kind of draw into ourselves and maybe instead we need to remember the one others: To love one another with all of our heart.

So, yeah, the bottom line is with all the faltering maybe some families aren't loving each other as they ought to in the scope of this virus.

Well, finally, I think I need to talk about

family victories. I think there's great value in love in the home. In 1 Corinthians 13 -- and you know the passage in 1 Corinthians 13. It's the love chapter. And in that particular passage in verses 4-7 we're told this, and it really nails -- nails it, what love happens to be, and it's always about others and it's not about ourselves, and the world keeps telling you to look at yourself but scripture keeps telling you to look at others, and the best place to start is within the family.

So we're told this: Love suffers long and is kind. But you don't know my family. That's what people will always say. You don't know my family. But you see, love suffers long. It's kind. It's kind.

It says love does not envy. Did you see what was going on with Jacob's family? Man, you talk about envious and jealous and proud and hateful.

It says love does not parade itself. Unfortunately, you see Joseph was doing a little parading with his dreams as well.

Is not puffed up. Proud; lifted up.

We're told also love does not behave rudely. Boy, that's hard getting forced together as a family; right? Our selfishness comes out. We get

a little rude, don't you think, sometimes? We want things our way and it's hard.

Does not seek its own. This is how love is. It's about others.

Is not provoked. But they're always provoking me. Easy, easy.

Thinks no evil. Don't think the worst about everybody else.

Does not rejoice in iniquity. Oh, boy, I got them back. We don't rejoice in iniquity/sin.

But rejoices in the truth. That's why we share the word of God. We want you to rejoice in the truth of God's word.

It bears all things. Oh, what? Yeah, it bears all things. That's what love does. It bears all things. Sometimes you've got to grit your teeth because they really let you have it.

It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. A lot of stuff fails, but I've got to tell you in the scope of a family love doesn't fail.

Family victories you not only see in love but there's importance in following what the word of God says, and I'm reminded very quickly in Ephesians 5 and 6 simple things: Husbands, love your wives;

wives, submit to your husbands.

I'm reminded in chapter 6: Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother.

I'm reminded of these things. They're very simple formulas, but it's really hard for us in modern America to accomplish these things. We have such few good examples out in the media, out in the scope of things which so often continues to teach us.

Important time of -- importance of time and discipline. Time and discipline. We live in a world where, because we're so busy so often, we hear parental talk of, I've got to give my kids quality time, but I think all of a sudden now we're giving them quantity time. Do you know what I mean? It's quantity time.

So many people are stuck at home and forced at home that all of a sudden now we're dealing with family around us all the time. Maybe there's value to that. Learning to be able to have the discipline in the home, re-instructing each other of our own obligations and duties, I think some of these things have great value. It's hard for us to get out of the rut of who we've been in a modern American family and to get to this point of being quarantined and forced

into our homes the way we have, I think it's restructured a lot of our thinking, and I wonder how we've been dealing with it.

Again, the importance of forgiving one another. You've got to do a lot of forgiving if you have a lot of time with each other, don't you think? You better do a lot of forgiving and you better remember the words I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Ephesians 4:32 reminds us to be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as our Lord forgave us; right?

And finally -- and let me close here with this thought. If you're looking at some spiritual victories right now within the context of family, look for some spiritual victories. Maybe they're small at first or maybe you can have some big ones. That would be great. Maybe somebody might get saved in your home. Wouldn't that be wonderful? Maybe you're seeing each other as we really are.

But there are other spiritual victories, too. Maybe you're seeing people reading their Bibles more. Maybe you're seeing people praying more. Those are spiritual victories. Family devotions, spending time as a family worshipping together is not a bad deal.

And so we see the calamity of Jacob's family but we can see the marvelous victories when we are obedient to the word of God and we seek the help of God who is the one who builds our homes. May God give us the grace and the mercy to be the kind of people and to have the kind of families that might please and glorify our Savior.

Oh Father, we thank You so much for Your word again today. We don't want to be like Jacob's family, filled with envy and strife and problems galore. Instead, we want to, instead, be families that please our Savior. May during this time of this virus produce a dramatic change in our homes, and we'll thank You for the victories that You might give us in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.