

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

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JOSEPH: Our God Is Always Faithful (Broken, but Blessed)

Genesis 37:1-4

This morning, we are beginning a study of the life of Joseph, a man who lived nearly 4,000 years ago.

His story makes episodes of Dateline seem bland. There's betrayal and deceit. There's a murder plot. There's human trafficking. There's a false accusation that lands an innocent man in prison. It's dark and, at times, difficult to watch. And it's beautiful. We learn about faithfulness and forgiveness, redemption and restoration.

So, let's jump right in and look at our first text in this study, Genesis 37.

Genesis 37:1-4

Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. 2 These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. 3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. 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.

Okay. That's as far as we will get this morning. My goal is to simply lay a bit of a foundation for the rest of our study and prepare our hearts for the Lord's Supper. So, let me just give you a few observations from the verses we just read.

The story of Joseph begins when he is 17 years old. But something that should stick out to you is that it doesn't begin the way you would think it might begin. It doesn't say, "This is the story of Joseph." Notice verse 2. It says, "These are the generations of Jacob...". Then, it jumps into the life of Joseph. What's that about?

That brings me to our first observation.

Observation #1 – Joseph's Story is BIGGER than Joseph

2 These are the generations of Jacob.

That phrase might not mean a lot to you, but it's a pretty big deal in the book of Genesis. Remember, the Lord used Moses to write the book of Genesis for the people of Israel. The word Genesis means "beginning." So, through the direction of God's Spirit, Moses is giving the people of God a history of certain important beginnings. And one of the ways He breaks down each new beginning is through the Hebrew phrase that is translated "These are the generations of..."

Let me show you a little of what I mean.

- *Genesis 2:4 - These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.*

What new beginning is this recording for us? This is the account of creation, so it's the beginning of the heavens and the earth.

- *Genesis 5:1 This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.*

What new beginning is this recording for us? It's the beginning of the human race from the first man who was made in the likeness of God.

- *Genesis 6:9 These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.*

What new beginning is this? It's the new beginning of the world and humanity after the flood.

In many ways, the book of Genesis is broken down into sections that are marked by the words "these are the generations..." Let me quickly show you the next few. All of them literally relate to Joseph.

- Genesis 11:27 – begins the section that focuses on Abraham, the Father of God's chosen people, the nation of Israel
- Genesis 25:12 – begins the section that focuses on Abraham's son, Ishmael. Ishmael was born when Abraham chose to sinfully take on another wife besides Sarah. Ishmael became the father of nations that were a perpetual threat to Israel all the way up to the present day.
- Genesis 25:19 – begins the section that centers on Isaac, the son God miraculously gave to Abraham and Sarah in their old age as the fulfillment of His promise.
- Genesis 36:1 – begins a section about Esau, the son of Isaac and brother of Jacob. Esau gave up his birthright as the firstborn...and Jacob stole his blessing.
- Then, in our text, Genesis 37:2 – we have the final section of Genesis, it features the family of Jacob.

So, notice what Moses is doing in Genesis, the book of beginnings. He is telling the story of the beginning of the universe, the beginning of humanity, the beginning of the fresh start after the flood, and the beginning of a chosen family that would become a nation descended from Father Abraham.

And that's where Joseph enters the picture. He is the primary figure in the family of Jacob, and his story is just an extension of the story of Abraham's family, the nation of Israel.

So, what's the new beginning for the family of Jacob that is represented in the story of Joseph? Where does it fit in Israel's history? I think you'll be able to figure it out. What's the next book of the Bible after Genesis? Exodus. And where are the descendants of Abraham when the book of Exodus begins? The nation of Egypt.

So, Joseph's story explains how the people of Israel found a new beginning in the land of Egypt. Even more, his story is the story of how God saved the people of Israel from a severe famine by sending Joseph ahead.

Genesis 50:20

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

God wrote the life story of Joseph. In all the darkness and difficulty, God is the One who is at work and in control. He is rescuing and saving and preserving His people.

Joseph isn't the hero of this story, God is. He is the One at work. Joseph's life is a monument to the faithfulness of God. That's why the subtitle of this series is Our God is Always Faithful. As much as we will come to admire and celebrate Joseph, the Lord is the One who is truly faithful on every page and in every detail. The story of Joseph is bigger than Joseph. It's a story about the faithfulness of God. We'll come back to that in just a minute.

Let's move on to the next observation.

Observation #2: Joseph's Family was BROKEN

The brokenness of Joseph's family is one of the most obvious parts of this story. Next week, we will see that his brothers hatch a plan to kill him. At the last minute, they decide to sell him to a group of slave traders so they can make some money off him.

But that's not when the family drama began. There's brokenness all over the few verses of our text.

1. Joseph's family was broken by Generational Sin

37:2 ...Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives.

Notice the two names of Joseph's father's wives – Bilhah and Zilpah. What stands out to you about those names? They aren't the names we think of when we think of Jacob's wives. Jacob's wives were named Leah and Rachel. So, why does verse 2 say Jacob's wives were Bilhah and Zilpah?

Leah and Rachel were sisters. Jacob fell in love with Rachel and made an agreement with her father to marry her. But Rachel's dad was a scoundrel. He played a nasty trick on Jacob. He switched out the brides on their wedding day so that Jacob would unwittingly marry Leah, Rachel's older, less attractive sister. Once Jacob found out that he was married to the wrong woman, he demanded to have Rachel as his wife, as well.

So, now Jacob has two wives. He loves Rachel and tolerates Leah. But Leah was the only one who could actually have children. That made Rachel insanely jealous, so she convinced Jacob to take her servant, Bilhah, and have children with her – making Bilhah Jacob's third wife. Bilhah had two sons with Jacob. And that made Leah jealous, so she demanded that Jacob take her servant, Zilpah, and have children with her – making Zilpah Jacob's fourth wife. Zilpah had two sons with Jacob, as well.

Does that sound familiar? It should. It's the same sin as Abraham, Jacob's grandfather. Abraham's wife Sarah couldn't have children, so she demanded that Abraham take her servant, Hagar, and have a child with her. That's how Ishmael was born. And it was nothing but trouble...to this very day. The Ishmaelites became the Arab people. And how's it going between the Arabs and Israel? It all stems back to Abraham's sin in taking Hagar as a wife.

And, here in our text, we see that Jacob has continued that generational sin...and it broke his family, dividing his children. But that's not the only way this family was broken.

2. Joseph's family was broken by deceit.

37:2 And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father.

That phrase “a bad report” is an interesting phrase. It could mean that Joseph witnessed his half-brothers misbehaving behind their dad’s back and he came and told Jacob about it...in other words, the kids were hiding their sin from their father. That kind of hidden sin destroys families.

But the phrase “bad report” may also have another meaning. In Hebrews, it’s the same phrase that is used to describe the report that the spies delivered to the nation of Israel when they came back from the land of Canaan. (Numbers 14:36). Their report itself was bad. It was manipulative. To use a modern phrase, it was fake news. In Proverbs 10:18, that Hebrew word is translated as “slander.” Some scholars believe Joseph wanted to get his half-brothers in trouble, so he brought a manipulative report to Jacob that painted his brothers in a bad light.

Either way, this was a deceitful family that hid the truth from one another. And that’s another generational sin. Jacob was a deceptive, manipulative man and his sons followed his example. But there’s even more brokenness here.

3. Joseph’s family was broken by Favoritism.

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors.

Israel is just another name for Jacob. That’s why his descendants are often referred to as the children of Israel. And Joseph was Jacob’s favorite son. He didn’t even try to hide it. He made him a technicolor Dreamcoat. It made him stand out and served as a reminder to everyone in Jacob’s household that there was only one wife Jacob actually loved, Rachel. And her son was the son Jacob favored above all the rest.

Jacob was a terrible dad. He actively sowed seeds of division and bitterness by favoring one son above all the others. And that brought about another way in which Joseph’s family was broken.

4. Joseph’s family was broken by Hatred and Bitterness.

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.

Fueled by their father’s favoritism, Joseph’s brothers despised him. They were so bitter that they couldn’t even speak peacefully to him. Their words revealed their hearts. So, get this picture. The family among all the families of the earth that God had chosen was a family that was broken on every level.

This is a story about a boy from a deeply broken family. Broken by generation sin, deceit, favoritism, hatred, and bitterness.

And that brings us to our third observation from our text.

Observation #3 – Joseph’s family was BLESSED

Look back with me at verse 1...

37:1 1 Jacob lived in the land of his father’s sojournings, in the land of Canaan.

What does this tell us about blessing? Notice where Jacob lives with his family – the land of Canaan. In the Bible, the land of Canaan is the land of God’s blessing. It’s the land that was flowing with milk and honey. It’s the land that would become the home for the nation of Israel, the land they still dwell

into this very day even though the nations that surround them have tried to take from them over and over again.

So, get this. Joseph grew up in a family that was broken and dysfunctional. By all earthly standards, they deserved to live in the slums and lose everything they had. But, in spite of all their brokenness, they lived in the place of God's blessing.

How? Why? What was it that caused them to be blessed in spite of their brokenness? Well, I've already told you. Their God was faithful...even when they weren't.

It's an essential part of this story. It's a word called "covenant."

The word "covenant" basically means "an agreement." It's a formal agreement between two parties where promises are made concerning what at least one party is committing to do for the other. It's kind of like a contract except that covenants are basically all about relationships.

The Greek word for covenant is a reference to someone's last will and testament. And that's what the word testament is referring to in the Old and New Testaments. Or the Old and New Covenants.

So, the entire story of the Bible is a story that is set within covenant relationships between God and people, covenants that are built on promises and expectations that define the relationship between God and people. You can think of a biblical covenant as an agreement or relationship built on unchanging promises between God and people.

And way before Joseph or Jacob were born, God made a covenant with their forefather, Abraham. He promised to make Abraham's descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. And He promised to give them the land of Canaan to live in...the land of God's blessing.

Here, at the very beginning of Joseph's story, we are getting a glimpse of the point of Joseph's story. God is faithful to keep His covenant people...even when they aren't faithful to their covenant God. He shows grace to broken people. He blesses us, not on the basis of our goodness but on the basis of His covenant grace.

And that's our big idea for this morning...

Big Idea: Our covenant God graciously makes a way for broken people to live in the place of His blessing.

This is where the story of Joseph becomes our story. You may not be a child of Israel, but you can be part of God's covenant people.

Listen to the words of Jesus in Luke 22...

Luke 22:19-20 And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

Jesus came to make a new covenant between God and man. Through His death on the cross, He took on the brokenness of our sin. He died the death we deserved to die, as our substitute. The wrath of God over all our sin was poured out on Jesus at the cross. And, in His shed blood, He became a sacrifice to establish a new covenant between us and God...a covenant of forgiveness and redemption and blessing.

The way we enter that New Covenant is through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. And, just like every other covenant, the New Covenant of Christ is filled with amazing promises that God is faithful to keep as blessings to His people.

Ephesians 1 is a passage that is filled with the covenant blessings of God that are true for us when we trust in Jesus. We don't have time to go through them all but let me list some of them for you.

- In Christ, we are holy and blameless in the sight of God (Ephesians 1:4). Better Robe – Righteousness
- In Christ, we are adopted as Sons and Daughters of God (Ephesians 1:5)
- In Christ, we are redeemed and forgiven of ALL our sins (Ephesians 1:7)
- In Christ, we are made heirs who will inherit everything that belongs to God (Ephesians 1:11)
- In Christ, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13)
- In Christ, we are guaranteed to acquire possession of our heavenly reward (Ephesians 1:14)

So, listen closely all you Josephs and Josephines. You are broken. Your family is broken. Your marriage is broken. Your circumstances are broken. Your life is broken. But your God is faithful.

In His faithfulness, our Covenant God has made a way for broken people, like you and me, to live in the place of His blessing.

And it all comes to us through Jesus. Joseph's story is your story. He isn't the hero, and neither are you. Jesus is. Like Joseph, Jesus will take you from brokenness to blessing. He will rescue you from the pit and place you in the palace of God Himself. He will robe you with the robe of His own righteousness so that God the Father will treat you like His favorite Son.

So, trust in Jesus today. In you broken life, look to Jesus today. And enjoy living the dream as Jesus lives in you.

And that brings us to the Lord's Supper. This is a reminder and display of God's covenant to us in Christ. It's a way for us to say that we are trusting in the work of Jesus to accomplish for us what we don't deserve in our brokenness and sin.