

JANUARY 18

Genesis 37-38

Genesis 37

Jesus commanded His disciples to “see the log” in their own eyes because of the consequences that personal blindness has in making disciples. In a family that's important too. Today we find Jacob repeating behavior in his family, that his parents, Isaac and Rebekah, were also guilty of: favoritism. This story might also shed some light on Reuben's dark behavior.

Vs. 1-4 Notice Joseph's age. He would have been a baby, maybe less than one, when they entered Canaan. Now 17 years have passed. This would put Reuben's age between 28 and 30.

Notice also that Joseph is with the sons of the maids, not the sons of Leah.

Here is little Joseph, the snitch. He is openly honored and favored by Jacob, who let it be known that he loved Joe more than the others. Joe was probably protected, given a cool robe, and now, after 17 years of this, there is huge animosity toward him. What a neat place to grow up. What a nurturing environment. The stage is set for a disaster.

Vs. 5-11 Into this “accident waiting to happen,” God interjects two dreams, the second one actually gets Jacob mad. Notice that Jacob refers to *your mother*, meaning Leah. Rachel had died by this time. Leah was the leading lady, and Jacob later says that she was buried in the family burial site, a place of honor.

Vs. 8 and 11 show that God used the poor family dynamics to His advantage. God's plan was to put Joe in Egypt, and in doing so He revealed and catalyzed the evil of the brothers. There are a lot of things going on here, from which God will bring good, but it will be a long process. Later, God will use all their hatred to convict them.

Vs. 12-24 So what was Jacob thinking by sending Joe to check up on the brothers? Jacob was “out to lunch” when it came to understanding his family.

V. 18 It's amazing that the brothers had no hesitation to want to kill Joseph. While this might reflect the hell on earth Jacob allowed his life and family to become, these were adult sons who could have forged their own relationships with God.

V. 19 This gives me the sense that the dreams had recently occurred, so their anger and jealousy were still hot.

V. 22 Reuben has a secret plot to free Joseph, but leaves to do something. Notice that Reuben's plan is through trickery. He was Jacob's son.

Vs. 25-28 Once they had Joe in the hole, they were so happy, that they had lunch. Probably if Joe yelled too loud they threw the occasional rock in the hole.

Vs. 26-27 It is good to pay attention to Judah's words. He is being less than noble here, but he is honest. He saves Joseph and he saves his brothers from murder and bloodguilt. This is the only good thing we've seen any of Jacob's children do so far. In doing this, Judah shows them how they can get some “cash for the trash.” The brothers probably all bought iPads from the Midianite traders.

One note of interest is the mention of these Midianites (from one of Abe's sons) being Ishmaelites (Abe's first son). It could be that Jacob's sons referred to all of Abe's other descendants as Ishmaelites, or it could be that the descendants of Ishmael and Midian began mixing together. In the history of Israel there is very little mention of Ishmael's descendants, but the Midianites play a major role in many events.

Vs. 29-30 First, Reuben's "trick" backfired. As the firstborn, Reuben should have openly stood against his brothers. They showed him who was boss.

Vs. 31-35 How amazingly sad this is. Jacob the trickster is wounded by his sons. And what an evil trick. They held this secret for years, watching their father suffer under their lie. And we don't know it yet, but holding the lie was rotting their souls. Later when Jacob learns Joe is alive, it says that Jacob's spirit revived. That means that here his "spirit" "died."

The result and judgment of Jacob's trickery is complete, but it has permeated the entire family. And don't think that Joseph was free from this influence in his heart. I have a feeling that the next 13 years will be hard, "cleansing" years for Joe.

Certain aspects of this story are suggestive of Jesus, being rejected by his brethren, being sold, becoming their salvation. It is interesting that it was Judah who did this. Jesus comes from his lineage. Judah will also play a role later in this story. We'll see that Jacob rejects Reuben's offer to help, but accepts Judah's offer. There is something good about Judah, that in the midst of this dysfunction, we don't see yet.

As disciples, there is something about this story that is important to see regarding God's sovereignty and man's sin. This complete family catastrophe was not God's doing, but He used it in all its complexities and misunderstandings. God often uses disharmony and malfunction to help us. We look at this story and understand that God was going to use Joseph to save the family and eventually grow the nation in Egypt, but do we see that God was protecting and preparing Joseph? Joseph was also a problem and a chip off the old "Jacob" block. God had to get Joseph out of that family to mold him through the trials of captivity and injustice. I don't think there was a plan "B" in making Joseph the man he became, and he might not have been that man any other way. Also, it is usually recognized that being sold into slavery saved Joseph from the effects of Canaan's sexually saturated culture and idolatry.

A couple years after one ministry malfunction I had in Germany, I realized that one of the "blessings" of this malfunction was that it created distance between our kids and a potentially devastating influence in the church. Not all relational malfunctions are bad, even if we don't understand them at the time. We have to trust God's wisdom.

This is all to say that when we see what happens in our lives or the lives of others, we shouldn't automatically feel defeat if there is failure or disharmony, or if hard events intervene. Just as in Romans 8:28, our confidence as disciples making disciples is that God uses everything in our lives as we love Him, even our deaths, for His good and His glory.

Genesis 38: The Adventures of Judah

So, why is this chapter here? We don't yet know that Judah will be anyone important, but he gets a whole chapter. Some suggest that this chapter shows the sexually saturated culture and influence that Joseph was "saved" from. Possibly. The chapter definitely shows God's sovereignty in preparing the line of Christ. If you put all of the time together of all these events, this is happening at the same time and during all of the years of Joseph's servitude, imprisonment and rise to power (20+ years). It could be that this event with Tamar and the birth of the babies happened shortly before Judah and the others went to Egypt to buy grain. Perez had to have been born before they all went to Egypt. I say this because the chapter begins after Joseph is sold and this event occurs after Shelah was grown and able to enter into a sexual relationship (16-19 years old?) with Tamar to bear children for his brother Er. Then you have the birth of the babies. So, this chapter must encompass at least 20 years if not more.

Vs. 1-11 This sets the stage for what is about to happen.

V. 7 It is interesting that God took the initiative on this. The wonder is that He doesn't do this more often. Since all of us are guilty before Him, He could use His right to punish us quickly

like this at any time. In Romans He says it is because of His mercy and wisdom, using even the rebellious for His purpose and glory.

Notice that the social “law,” regarding continuing the lineage of the dead man, was already in place before the giving of the law. Created in the image of God, man creates order, imitating the order of the Creator.

Vs. 8-9 Remember why Onan does this here when we get to the story of Ruth. It will help you understand why the near kinsman will not take Ruth. Boaz gets Ruth.

Judah was either a bad dad, or the power of the culture ruined the boys, or both. His first two sons were evil and God put them to death. Tamar became the “black widow” in Judah's mind and so he holds back giving her his last son. Obviously there is not a sense in any of this of anyone going to God and asking Him for advice. Everyone was just doing what seemed right in their own eyes.

V. 11 Now, Tamar's action was interesting. At this point in Jacob's family, the promise to Abraham has been lost from view. There is no sense of anyone pursuing it. At least Jacob had pursued it. It may have been that Tamar realized Judah was next in line to receive the blessing of the firstborn. I don't know. It might also have been that the promise was why Judah didn't want to give Shelah, his last son, to “the black widow.”

All we know is that the line of the promise continues through Judah, and this story is somehow important. My guess is that the promise, somehow, figures into the actions of both Judah and Tamar.

Vs. 12-23 This was a very dangerous thing for Tamar to do. In a roundabout way this was legal and right, because Judah should have made provision for the continuance of his son's family and for children for the widow. That Tamar did this means she was pursuing what was right, even though it was wrong. And to think that God will use this.

Vs. 24-26 So, what do you see in Judah that makes him a better man than his brothers? In v. 26 you see two things. First, Judah admits guilt and declares he was wrong and she was right. Have you seen that anywhere in Jacob's family? Jacob never did it. Reuben, Simeon and Levi never said they were wrong. Judah publicly testifies to his wrong and clears Tamar. Second, Judah never has sex with her again, which was another way of acknowledging his sin and respecting the relationship before the Lord. This doesn't look like much, but it is the first glimmer of anything from this dysfunctional family. In a few chapters Judah will shine.

Vs. 27-30 How do you know this is the line of the promise? Because something weird is happening regarding the conception and birth. At least that has been the case so far. In Genesis 46:12, the sons are not listed as Er's; they are Judah's. This is the line of the promise that flows to David and then to Jesus via Perez.

For us as disciples there is a lot here and for me it boils down to pursuing the promise and trusting God. The world may look random and out of control around us, but God is working. As for us, we are to stay in the Word, loving and following our Lord in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples. And sometimes we get to see how God uses all the chaos for His own glory.

Matthew 12:22-45

This is a major confrontation and shows what the religious leaders finally came up with to “explain” and discredit Jesus. Although the situation looks like any other conflict Jesus had with the religious leaders, this lie about Jesus' power would begin to infect many of the people in Israel.

Vs. 22-24 The scribes (lawyers who decided the meaning of the law and laid out rules for obeying the law) were also a part of this. In Mark 3:22 they went on record as saying Jesus was possessed by Beelzebul.

Vs. 25-32 This is actually a very serious talk that Jesus gives them.

For us as disciples, what I find interesting is that Jesus was very relaxed in dealing with this accusation. Mark 3:23 says that when Jesus heard this, He called them to Him and tried to show them the silliness of their logic. We disciples need to have that same relaxed sense of hearing what is being said, and then seeking to give the other side of the story, firmly, with meekness, humility and a smile. In 2000 years, Christianity has not crumbled in the face of “facts” and “accusation.” We need to be confident in God.

I tend to define the sin against the Holy Spirit very narrowly. You actually had to be there, hear Jesus, see Jesus do a miracle, and then say, “He is possessed, because that miracle was of the devil,” to have committed the unpardonable sin. I don’t think we can commit this sin today.

Vs. 33-37 This was a challenge and an accusation aimed at the religious leaders, who put on a “front” of being good, but were really evil within. The real challenge here is that God is keeping track of what we say and, if needed, will prove by our words that He is just.

Vs. 38-42 Apparently the desire to see a sign was not honest. Jesus’ words are, accordingly, hard.

Vs. 43-45 The description of the unclean spirit, I think, is real. Jesus is telling us something that happens in reality. However, the real point of the story is that if you just clean up morally, but don’t put something in place of the evil that was there, the evil returns worse than before.

Jesus’ presence drove back the spiritual forces, and many people were cured. Nationally it was a good time. But the warning was, “if nothing takes the place of what went out;” that is, if they didn’t accept Jesus as their Messiah, “what happens next will be worse.” The evil of that generation would return with a vengeance once Jesus was gone.

Notice that by bringing with it other, more evil, spirits, it was making sure it couldn’t be driven out again.

As disciples, we don’t offer people restored marriages or personal order, etc., as important as those things might be. We offer people the ability to be forgiven and have God enter their lives. He saves them and breaks the power of sin and leads them. Anything less is just cleaning the house, not filling it with the Savior.

Psalm 16

David wrote most of the psalms after running from Saul and being in constant danger. As disciples, it may not be until we are put down for trying to live for Christ and making disciples, that we will appreciate what David and the Spirit have written here.

Vs. 1-2 David had been poor and then successful and rich; and now he was desperate, poor and living on the land. It takes a lot to finally bring a person to the reality of v. 2. This is easy to say, but to mean it is priceless.

Vs. 3-4 Here is a contrast. David had come to appreciate those who loved the Lord, simple and poor though they might be. David had had friends in high places, who were all against him now. As David saw them living in darkness and rebelling against God, he understood that they were really deepening the sorrow of their own lives. David had probably worshiped with these people. Now he understood their hearts and knew their devotion was false.

Vs. 5-6 These verses take on a deeper meaning if David wrote them in the wilderness. This reminds me of Paul’s words in Philippians 4:12-13, *I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and*

hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. I think this is why the Lord often leads His disciples into the wilderness in the harvest. That is where we learn this.

Vs. 7-8 Imagine David living day-to-day leading 400 men and their families in the wilderness of Judah and southern Israel. What a place to learn the amazing guidance of the Lord and to find His security in insecurity.

Vs. 9-10 What a place to find gladness, joy and security. Verse 10 is quoted by Peter in Acts 2:27 in his Pentecost sermon. Jesus is risen! That is the basis of our security and hope as followers of our Lord.

V. 11 The Lord drove David into exile. There (like Joseph) He made David learn and know the path of life, the joy of God's presence and what true pleasures are. Amen.

For me, vs. 2 and 5 have the deepest meaning. As disciples, what do we really want? In John 4:34, Jesus said, *My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.* All of what I really want in this life, or want to see before I leave this place, is in Christ, "to do the will of Him who sent (I'd substitute "saved" for "sent") me, and to accomplish His work." It all boils down to Jesus, following Him in the harvest and being blessed to see the salvation of the lost and to see people made disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples.

Proverbs 3:27-32

Vs. 27-28 Two years ago the Lord really hit me with these verses, to give aid to people immediately. So, for this reason, I always carry cash to give out if I sense someone needs it.

Vs. 29-30...especially when driving or talking to someone in lower management who didn't make the decision we're mad about.

Vs. 31-32 As disciples we often envy the "decisive person of action," but God can use all kinds. None of Jacob's cleverness really helped him. We don't have to take assertiveness training to be better disciples. We need to fall deeper in love with Jesus and dare to share His story and make disciples.

It was a scared Sunday school teacher who finally overcame his fear and walked into a shoe store and shared the gospel with a shoe salesman who had been attending his class. That salesman was saved and he walked away from shoes to save souls. D. L. Moody's life was changed forever, and the Lord used him to change countless other people. All because of a timid Sunday school teacher. God uses all kinds, so we don't need to envy anyone. We just need to follow Jesus as disciples.