

## Genesis 37 Where Will Envy Lead?

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro  
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Today we begin with the classic story of Joseph and how he was sold into slavery by his brothers. It's a familiar story to many people – we know how he was sold into slavery and then rose to become the second most powerful man in Egypt, but do we remember why his brothers sold him? It was because they envied him – something that started in their hearts led to action with their hands.

Envy, at times, doesn't seem that big of a deal, most of the sins that stay inside our hearts don't – until they slip out and show up in our actions. Envy played a role in Satan's choice to rebel against God – he said, "I will be like the most high," in other words, "I want what He's got!" and we know where that path led.

This morning we will trace the path of envy and see its effects when it is allowed to grow and fester in our lives...it's not a pretty picture.

[1](#) Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. [2](#) This is the history of Jacob.

Joseph, *being* seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. And the lad *was* with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father.

[3](#) Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he *was* the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of *many* colors.

Joseph's Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat – "coat of many colors" is a traditional translation, but it's not quite accurate. A better translation is "a garment with long sleeves." This is different from the vest that would be worn by the typical shepherd or worker – sleeves would get in your way when performing manual labor and for that reason, shirts with sleeves were only worn on special occasions or by leaders. This garment was something special, something different, and was immediately recognizable as such. It was also probably expensive.

So for the second youngest boy in the family to be wearing it would seem a little odd to his brothers – and that oddity quickly grew into agitation.

[4](#) But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, **they hated him** and could not speak peaceably to him.

[5](#) Now Joseph had a dream, and he told *it* to his brothers; and **they hated him even more.**

[6](#) So he said to them, "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: [7](#) There we were,

binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf.”

[8](#) And his brothers said to him, “Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?” So **they hated him even more** for his dreams and for his words.

[9](#) Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, “Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me.”

[10](#) So he told *it* to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, “What *is* this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?” [11](#) And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter *in mind*.

Jacob has a pair of dreams that involve different symbols, but which point to the same thing – one day, he, one of the youngest members of the family will be elevated to a position above everyone else. In this society it just wasn’t going to happen – rank and privilege came according to your order of birth.

BUT, the second time he heard it, something grabbed dad’s attention – he remembered after all, the promise God made to his mom that he, Jacob, the younger of a set of twin boys, would be served by his elder brother Esau.

Starting here in the very beginning of history, God was establishing a pattern – He rarely chooses to use the most likely candidate. Biblical history is full of men and women who would have never been chosen to do the things they did by anyone but God.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians, “God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; [28](#) and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, [29](#) that no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Cor 1:27-29).

Joseph’s dad has experienced a bit of this himself already, so he tucks it into the back of his mind.

His brothers on the other hand, are a little less forgiving - because of his dreams and because of his position as his father’s favorite son from his favorite wife, Joseph’s brothers envy him. This envy turns into hatred and hatred is eventually manifested in a desire to harm him.

This progression helps us to see a truth that Jesus constantly focused on: it is the roots of sin in our hearts that produce the fruits of sin in our lives. We look at this story and say, it would be terrible to kill your own brother or sell him into slavery. Jesus looks at it and says, “it’s just as bad to envy him.”

Remember, He said “Whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery in his heart” (Matt 5:28). The desire to act is there in root form, in your heart, all you lack is the right opportunity, and perhaps the guarantee not to get caught and that root will launch out a stem and branch and burst forth in the fruit of action. The sins that are manifested in your life are born out of desires in your heart; this is why Jesus focused so much on our motives.

Jesus also said that it is out of the overflow of the heart that the mouth speaks (Matt 12:34) – that if good things come out of your mouth, it is because God has cleansed you inside and is developing good things there, but when bad things come out of your mouth, it’s only because a little bit of that sludge in your heart has leaked out into the open.

Our hearts naturally produce this black tarry slime called sin that we can do one of three things with – we can try to hold it in and let it build up and fester like a cancerous tumor consuming us from the inside out, or we can let it fill up in big buckets and then throw it at other people when they provoke us, or we can let Jesus siphon it out and decontaminate it.

This is why we need cleansing – this is why we need to be washed in the blood of Christ. This is why we need him to be our primary cardiac surgeon. We need Him not just to forgive us of the sins we have already committed, but to change our desire to commit more before our sins grow out of control.

Fortunately, if we will submit to Him, if we will allow Him to have His way in us, if we will let go of our selfishness, He will do just that.

Phil 2:13 says it is “God who is at work within you **both** to will *and to do* according to His good pleasure.” He wants to give us new desires, and then, once we are plugged into Him, *He will produce His fruit in us* – we don’t have time to go into it now, but refresh yourself on the promises of John 15.

But if we remain apart from Christ, we resist His work of cleansing and renewal – we seek our own desires which produce sin in our lives that either hurts us or hurts others.

Turn with me to the book of James and let’s look at this idea a little more:

James 3:[13](#) *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.* [14](#) *But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.* [15](#) *This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.* [16](#) *For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.* [17](#) *But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.* [18](#) *Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

Envy and self-centeredness lead us astray – they lead us to hurt other people and to hurt ourselves. Joseph’s brothers envied him, which led them to hate him because they could not get what he had, and eventually they wanted to harm him in order to quench their envy.

As a side note here - according to this passage, if you are trying to figure out what to do, how to make a decision and you need wisdom – one of the first things you need to do is assess your motives – why are you considering the options you are considering? Are you envying something? Are you being self-seeking? If so, that *root* of sin in your life will manifest itself as a *fruit* of sin sooner or later as your lust for what you desire overwhelms your self-control and good decision-making. This is why we need to constantly offer up our hearts and their motives to God and say, “search me and know me O God, and see if there be any wicked way in me” (Psalm 139:23-24).

Now, compare envy with love, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 13, the famous love chapter:

1 Cor 13:4 Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not **envy**; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

So, when I put myself first, I wind up envying other people, because they have stuff I want. As a result I can’t enjoy them anymore, I can’t be happy for them, I find it difficult to be kind to them, I find it easy to be rude, or at least indifferent.

But when I love God and love my neighbor as myself, I don’t envy, I can actually rejoice.

So how do I get there? How do I go from envying you to loving you? Well, 1 John tells us “we love because He first loved us.” When we awake to the love God has for us, **then** we can be content in what we have, because by having Him, we have all we need, and therefore I’m not so jealous of you anymore.

The answer isn’t just to try to hold in all my jealousy and frustration, so I don’t wind up acting out in some socially unacceptable way because of my envy, the answer is to receive a heart transplant from God and to desire *Him* more than anything else. Only then will I be kept from hurting myself or hurting you.

Until my heart is changed, it will remain fertile soil for roots of self-desire to take hold and eventually manifest themselves in my life, and even once my heart is changed, the weeds of selfish desire and envy must regularly be pulled out – by the roots.

If they aren’t look at the possible results:

[12](#) Then his brothers went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. [13](#) And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers feeding *the flock* in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them."

So he said to him, "Here I am."

[14](#) Then he said to him, "Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks, and bring back word to me." So he sent him out of the Valley of Hebron, and he went to Shechem.

[15](#) Now a certain man found him, and there he was, wandering in the field. And the man asked him, saying, "What are you seeking?"

[16](#) So he said, "I am seeking my brothers. Please tell me where they are feeding *their flocks*."

[17](#) And the man said, "They have departed from here, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan.

[18](#) Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him. [19](#) Then they said to one another, "Look, this dreamer is coming! [20](#) Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, 'Some wild beast has devoured him.' We shall see what will become of his dreams!"

[21](#) But Reuben heard *it*, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, "Let us not kill him." [22](#) And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood, *but* cast him into this pit which *is* in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him"—that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father.

[23](#) So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the tunic of *many* colors that *was* on him. [24](#) Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit *was* empty; *there was* no water in it.

[25](#) And they sat down to eat a meal. Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry *them* down to Egypt. [26](#) So Judah said to his brothers, "What profit *is there* if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? [27](#) Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he *is* our brother *and* our flesh." And his brothers listened. [28](#) Then Midianite traders passed by; so *the brothers* pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty *shekels* of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

[29](#) Then Reuben returned to the pit, and indeed Joseph *was* not in the pit; and he tore his clothes. [30](#) And he returned to his brothers and said, "The lad *is* no *more*; and I, where shall I go?"

[31](#) So they took Joseph's tunic, killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the tunic in the blood.

[32](#) Then they sent the tunic of *many* colors, and they brought *it* to their father and said, "We have found this. Do you know whether it *is* your son's tunic or not?"

[33](#) And he recognized it and said, "*It is* my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces." [34](#) Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days. [35](#) And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, "For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning." Thus his father wept for him.

Their actions haven't made anything better. Now there is grief, pain, and remorse. This is often the case with sin – when we give in to our desires *they don't satisfy us, they mock us*.

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You come down from every high, there is a moment after or morning after for every drunken party, every sexual encounter, every out burst of rage and anger – for a moment you get the release you were hoping for, but after that come the consequences and you're left trying to hold things together again.

Over twenty years later his brothers would remember: “We *are* truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear” (Gen 42: 21).

He was there, begging for mercy, perhaps crying – absolutely powerless against the combined strength and will of his brothers – picture that, remember, he's around 17 years old. How can you hurt someone like that? How can you wound someone like that? How can you turn a deaf ear to pitiful cries for mercy? Answer: by caring more about yourself than you do for them.

The human heart truly is desperately wicked, who can know it (Jer 17:9)? You, every one of you, and I, are capable of this kind of wickedness *and only the grace of God or lack of occasion have kept us from it.*

Fortunately, God was at work despite all their actions and we see a foreshadowing of that in our last verse:

[36](#) Now the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh *and* captain of the guard.

The stage is set for what God is going to do. God would eventually use Joseph to save his family and the whole nation of Egypt from starvation. Years later when Joseph is reconciled with his brothers he will tell them – “you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people” (Genesis 50:20).

God used these sad events to bring about the salvation of this family from famine. Several centuries later, He would use a Jesus, whose earthly parents descended from this family, to bring ultimate salvation to all mankind.

It is amazing to see how much Joseph had in common with Jesus:

Both were loved by the father.

Both were sent by their father to their brothers.

Both were rejected by their brothers – According to John's gospel “(Jesus) came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11).

And their right to rule was questioned

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- Joseph's "brothers said to him, "Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?"
- Pilate asked the Jews regarding Jesus "Shall I crucify your king?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15).

Both were sold for pieces of silver

Both had their garments taken from them

And though they were both rejected, and their brothers thought they were rid of them, they would both show up later bringing salvation.

But we find an important distinction as well – Jacob had a sign of his father's favor – his coat, but Jesus had nothing because his mission centered on Who He was, not what He had.

Jesus was born in a borrowed manger

- preached from a borrowed boat
- rode on a borrowed donkey
- ate in a borrowed room
- and was buried in a borrowed tomb.

And now, even though He has His own place, He wants to live with you.

Here's the key to avoiding the damage that sin can cause in your life – allow Jesus to come in and to start ripping the roots out. It's not always a pleasant experience, but it's necessary. He wants to take your life and redeem it, to turn you from producing black tarry sludge to producing fruit that tastes sweet and refreshing – fruit that can be shared with others and received with joy. Let's ask Him to do that work in us now.