Rob Byker ***Covenant Family Ties: (5) The True Dream Master***

Rehoboth CRC **Genesis 37:13-36, Genesis 45:4-11**

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 ***The Aggravating, Obnoxious Dream Coat***

 ***The Suffering Dreamer***

 ***The True Dream Master***

 ***The Aggravating, Obnoxious Dream Coat***

One night in 2006, this Doberman Pincher guard dog named Barney “just went beserk” and tore up 100 teddy bears at the teddy bear museum in western England---including a famous teddy bear named Mabel. Mabel’s first owner was this charming boy from Memphis named Elvis Presley and because of that that, a wealthy English aristocrat bought Mabel years later and then loaned his prized teddy bear to the museum.

In the days that followed the teddy bear massacre, people speculated as to why Barney went beserk that particular night. He had never shown any aggression towards the teddy bears before. It turns out that earlier that night Greg West, Barneys handler, was petting Mabel and cooing about what a nice little Mabel she was, and something snapped in Barney. Greg’s special treatment, his favoritism of Mabel, triggered Barney’s jealousy and out came the fangs. Barney transformed from teddy bear protector to teddy bear punisher in a second.

Favoritism can do that. Especially purposeful favoritism. Most parents know that every child needs to feel loved and worthy and important and so they take pains to treat their children equally. But there are a few parents out there who play favorites without any remorse. If a child cries out to them, “You’re playing favorites”. They’ll say, “And your point is? Sure I am. I have a favorite, a prized child and I want to make sure the whole world knows about it.” Jacob is like that. He engages in what one writer calls, an “in your face express of raw favoritism.”

Jacob should have known better. He himself had suffered first-hand the pain of his father’s favoritism of Esau. He knew how awful it felt to be treated as second rate. But instead of making Jacob tenderhearted towards the least of these, Jacob’s suffering made him even more cruel to them. Jacob’s gift of the coat of many colors to Joseph seems designed not just to make one son feel special but to make the other sons feel like scum. Jacob means to inflict pain with his gift and that’s a devilish thing to do.

It’s not just devilish, it’s foolish. Once Joseph receives the robe, all Joseph’s bad tendencies flare up. The special coat confirms his beliefs that he is superior to his brothers, so he spouts off about his special dream in which all the brothers bow before him. Some people who are envied feel bad about it. They try to turn the focus off themselves and onto others. But Joseph enjoys being envied. That’s why he wears that aggravating, obnoxious dreamcoat everywhere. That’s why When Joseph has another grandiose dream, he’s quick to return to his brothers and brag about it, even though he sees that it makes them murderously angry.

It’s no wonder that when his brothers see him in a solitary place near Dothan that they throw him in a pit and talk about killing him. Jacob steers them away from murder, by appealing to family ties. He says, “He is our brother after all” . So they decide to selling their brother as a slave and then profit off the sale. Such is the quality of their family ties.

Now I don’t want to excuse the deplorable sin these brothers commit against Joseph, but I do want us to consider that Jacob had created a family environment in which sins like envy could only grow. Jacob dashed his sons self-worth with that dream coat, so that like Barney the guard dog, they were becoming ferocious beasts towards their brother.

Let’s consider that the covenant family can either aggravate sins like envy or hamper such sins. Paul says in Romans 12, “Honor one another above yourselves.” If the church is an honor saturated environment then envy hardly has a chance to grow up. Clearly, Jesus also wanted everyone to receive honor. He says, “Whatever you do to the least of these my brothers, you do to me”. Talk about covenant family ties! Jesus is so tied to the least in the community, the overlooked people who never get dreamcoats, that Jesus says, “Your treatment of the least of these equals your treatment of me.”

Another way to hamper the development of envy is to quit making comparisons. Envy thrives on comparisons, let’s be very slow to compare ourselves with one another. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:12, “We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves with themselves, they are not wise.” It’s far wiser to compliment someone for their singing, serving or teaching, and focus on the precise blessing that came to you through their gift. There is no need to compare them with others, so that others feel diminished when you praise them. Following the Holy Spirit, we can learn the art of building others up without tearing anyone else down.

***The Suffering Dreamer***

But we also need to look at Joseph, the suffering dreamer. The brothers seek destroy him and disable his dream. They say in verse 20, “Let’s kill him and then will see what comes of his dream.” Thankfully, they don’t murder him, but it’s still awful to sell a brother into slavery. It’s still awful, to ignore his pleas for deliverance---as the brothers admit to doing in Genesis 42. From this day forward, Jacob’s life goes very dark. He enters a nightmare of intense suffering that will last for decades.

In addition to betrayal, he later suffers daily temptation as he constantly resists the sexual advances of Potiphar’s wife only for her to turn around and falsely accuse him of trying to seduce her. He’s then thrown into jail. In addition to betrayal, temptation, false accusation, and jail time for a crime he didn’t commit, while in jail, he helps interpret a dream for the cupbearer to the king and begs the cupbearer to remember his act of service. But the cupbearer soon forgets and he languishes in jail for more years. And throughout this whole time, he prays to the Lord but it seems like the dream giver has forsaken him.

Suffering, especially unjust suffering, puts the greatest strain on covenant family ties. Can you relate to such suffering? Probably some of us can. Probably some here have been forgotten by people who promised to remember. Probably some have done the right thing and got punished for it. Probably others have been accused wrongly, which to me seems like of the sharpest types of suffering out there. How do we handle such suffering as Christian’s?

Some people respond by retreating. They give up on trying to shine for Jesus and they hide their light, their witness. They shrink back from walking with Jesus in the fellowship of suffering and retreat the first sign of trouble. Others respond by rebelling. They shake their fist at Jesus and purposefully try to do things which would displease him. They will make Jesus and others pay for the suffering that came into their life. They are entitled to better treatment. There are probably other responses. But let’s consider how Joseph responded. Joseph responds by trusting God’s covenant dream and staying true to God’s lifestyle.

First, he trusts God’s covenant dream. The Lord had told Abraham in Genesis 12, “I will bless you to be a blessing. All nations of the world will be blessed through you.” Furthermore, in Genesis 17:6, The Lord made an additional promise to Abraham “I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.” Very likely, Jacob reminded Joseph of these promises when he gave Joseph the dream coat. Now even though Joseph handled that dream in a foolish, wrong way, the Bible never says it was the wrong dream. Children of Abraham are destined to rule. They can expect God to put them into situations of significance. For as Jesus put it, “No one lights a lamp and then sticks it in a closet. No, they place the lamp in a strategic place so it gives light to the whole room.” God does the same with his light bearing people.

And as he journeys to Egypt, Joseph believes this covenant dream. He believes that God will bless him in order to be a blessing. He trusts God.

But secondly, Joseph also stays true. The blessings of God’s covenant dream call for mature believers who stay true to God’s path of service and right living. And everywhere God placed him, whether it was Potiphar’s house, the prison, or in Pharoah’s house, Joseph stayed true to that covenant lifestyle. In Genesis 39, it says, “The Lord was with Joseph”. The Lord’s presence didn’t just comfort Joseph, it also inspired him to do his for his boss, as though doing it unto the Lord. This is how Christian’s distinguish themselves. Jesus never said, “If you want to be great in God’s kingdom buy yourself a fancy robe and start acting like a diva.” He did say, “If you want to be great in God’s kingdom, learn to be the servant of all.”

We might not understand why God puts in the places and settings He has, but we should assume that God calls us to serve and shine like Christ everywhere and in every setting—even in an Egyptian jail cell. This is our non-negotiable calling. Joseph lived this way and everywhere he went was blessed because of his presence. Potiphars house, the prison, and Pharoah’s kingdom all blessed because of Joseph’s service and life.

 Joseph arrives in Pharoah’s house, because the Lord causes the cupbearer to remember Joseph when Pharoah is stumped by some dreams of his own. Joseph not only interprets the dream, which foretells seven years of prosperity followed up with seven years of famine, but Joseph also proposes to Pharoah a sensible royal policy which will preserve life during the lean years. Joseph shows himself as the just the sort of person who could be second in command over all Egypt. He’s now been elevated to the place where people bow to him. And one day his brothers appear in Egypt looking to buy grain. They bow before him. The original dream is fulfilled.

***The True Dream Master***

Well, at least sort of. As Joseph recognizes in Genesis 45, the dream was never really about superiority over his brothers. God’s dreams are always about service and salvation and that’s what Joseph emphasizes when he reveals himself to his brothers. He says, “Don’t be angry, don’t be distressed about your awful betrayal of me. Notice God’s hand in all this. You meant if for evil but God meant it for good, the saving of many lives.”

Back on that horrible day in Dothan when the brothers see Joseph approach them, they literally say, “Here that dream master. Let’s kill him and see what comes of his dreams.” In selling Joseph into Egyptian slavery, they thought they were abolishing God’s dream but they actually advancing it. God had always intended to raise Joseph to royal position in Egypt, so he could interpret dreams and set up policies that could save thousands and thousands of lives. And now, by their dastardly deed, done to destroy the dream, they bring Joseph to the very place God intends. They advance the dream.

When terrible suffering comes, its tempting to retreat or rebel. But we must remember that we serve the true dream master. He knows how to use the very circumstances that look hopeless to us, and bring great blessing out of them.

My absolute favorite example of this is a story Ravi Zacharias tells. His translator in the 1970’s was man named Hein. Hein was captured by the communists, sent to a POW camp and treated horribly because He was a Christian. In that prison camp, he slowly lost his faith in Jesus. One day he said, “God’s not here. I was wrong to believe he cared. This is my last day as a Christian. Tomorrow when I wake up, no more God, no more prayer.”

He got up the next morning and said, “No God today.” Then he received his assignment for the day, “Clean the latrines.” The worst assignment in the camp. “It figures”, Hein muttered. As he finished cleaning the trash cans of soiled paper, he found one that said Romans 8. He looked closer and read: “If God is for us, who can be against us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” Hein began crying. “Lord, you would not let me out of your reach for even one day. You brought your word to me in this smelly place.”

The next day Hein asked the guard, “Could I clean the latrines again today?” The guard thought it was smart alecky comment so he said, “You’ll clean latrines every day for sassing me like that.” It turns out this very guard had been tearing out pages of the Bible and using them for toilet paper. Hein was able to collect and rinse off and keep most of Romans and many other pages as well. God brought his life-giving Word to Hein while Hein was on the worst assignment in the camp. No matter how bad things get, you can trust dream master. So trust him and also stay true. Keep serving him wherever He has placed you. Keep shining for Jesus no matter how dark it gets. Know that your Lord makes all His dreams come true, and does so in ways that are exceedingly, abundantly, beyond our best imagination. Amen.