



A Post Tenebras Lux Sunday Sermon...

What Comes of His Dreams...

Genesis 37:1-20

Father, we come to you this morning confessing to you our great need. Father we need and we desire that the Holy Spirit come now and take the written word and as its true author and therefore its infallible teacher to instruct us in the truth of your Son in whose name, we pray, Amen.

He was already an old man...somewhere around eighty-five years old. He was an old man with ten sons...ten sons and a daughter born to three different women...three different women whom he did not love.

He had just about lost hope when at last the son he had always wanted finally came along.

The boy, you see, was born to the one woman he really did love...to the only woman he had ever loved...to the one wife he thought would never bear him a child and because of that and because he was an old man...he doted on the boy. He loved him in a way he didn't love...couldn't love the others. The boy was the son of his old age... the son of a woman that he loved more than he loved life

itself. And because he lavished the boy with his affection...the boy was the blood of his heart.

The old man's name was Jacob... and the boy's name was, of course, Joseph.

Jacob loved his son Joseph...he loved him more than all his other sons put together. He couldn't help himself; he didn't really try.

Now it is easy to be critical of Jacob...to be critical of his partiality toward Joseph...but Joseph was an easy child to love. He was a beautiful child...the kind of child that a parent finds themselves staring at as they sleep...the kind of child that a parent thinks is about the most beautiful thing that ever was...the kind of child that makes a parent marvel that such a beautiful thing could have ever come from their body.

Joseph was strong and vibrant...he was brilliant and insightful. He was obedient and submissive. He had a tender heart toward his father's God and he obeyed his father as if he were God. As a result of all those things and as a result of his extraordinary love for him...his father set him apart...set him apart from all his brothers. He did that by giving him a wonderfully ornate robe.

The robe was a sign and a seal to Joseph of his father's love for him but to his brothers it became something much different...to them it was a hateful thing...it became the focal point of their relentless, abiding, consuming jealousy and hatred¹. They hated Joseph prior to their father giving him the robe...but they hated him all the more afterwards.

Now if you understand that, the text this morning will come alive for you I think. So with that in mind, I invite you to take your Bibles or the order of service and follow along as we look at Joseph's story together.

^{NIV} **Genesis 37:1**...Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan. ² This is the account of Jacob. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them. ³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. ⁴ When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

Now the first thing that you ought to notice about the story is that Joseph was really just a boy...only seventeen. He was the eleventh of twelve sons and that meant that all of his brothers in the story were older than him...some perhaps as much as thirty years older than him and yet...they despised him. They despised their kid brother...and when I say that I mean it just that way. The way the text puts it is heartbreaking, **"They hated him and could not so much as speak a kind word to him."** The Hebrew is especially sad. It says, **"They could not so much as speak shalom to him"**...that is, they could not speak **"peace"** to him².

Now I would have thought that they would have put up with their kid brother Joseph for the sake of their aged father³. I would have thought that they would have let their father dote on the boy out of love and respect for him...but they didn't. They couldn't. Their hatred for Joseph consumed them.

Now some of you known personally the kind of hatred the story describes...the kind where a person cannot make eye contact with you or speak kindly to you or even bear the fact that you are using up the planet's valuable resources by

drawing another breath...the kind of enmity where a person lies in wait listening carefully to every word you say...in hopes of twisting into something that can be used against you...in order to strike you down...the kind of enmity where a person rejoices in every heartbreak you suffer...celebrates every sorrow that comes your way. That's the kind of enmity Joseph's brothers felt for him...they hated him...so much so that they could not so much as stand to be in his presence. They held him in complete contempt.

Now the text is clear enough here I think...they hated him first of all because he was willing to expos their flaws⁴. The text says he gave his father a bad report about his brothers. It doesn't say what his brothers did...they may have been slothful...they may have been dishonest. It doesn't say...it simply says that whatever they had done concerned Joseph enough that he told his father.

They hated him for that.

But the text doesn't stop there...it goes on to reveal the underlying reason...the real heart reason they hated him. It does that by explaining that Jacob loved Joseph more than all his other sons and that he demonstrated his love for him by giving him a lavishly ornamented robe. You see, their hatred stemmed from their jealousy of him.

Now I grew up hearing that Joseph's robe was a coat of many colors...and it may have been...the Hebrew is somewhat vague. It may have been multi-colored...or it may have been carefully adorned or embroidered. It is possible that it may have simply been tailored in a special way. The point is not so much that the robe was multi-colored but rather that it was different...it was special...it was

lavish...that it was sufficiently ornate to demonstrate Jacob's special love for his son Joseph⁵. Now because of the robe...and because of the affection it represented...his brothers hated him all the more.

Now the most remarkable thing about the story of Joseph is that God took his brothers' hatred for him...their fanatical, consuming hatred...and used it to advance His own good and sovereign purpose. I think that is an important thing to remember.... crucial to understanding Joseph's story. God not only took evil and turned to good....He actually ordained Joseph's pain and sorrow to his family's salvation.

You see God had a plan and He pushed that plan along by inflaming the jealousy Joseph's brothers felt for him. You can see that, I think, in the fact that God sent Joseph two dreams...two dreams that He knew Joseph would tell to his brothers...two dreams that were in fact the same dream...two dreams that would drive his brothers to the brink of uncontrollable rage...to the brink of murder.

The dreams come up in verse 5.

^{NIV} **Genesis 37:5**...Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. ⁶ He said to them, "**Listen to this dream I had:** ⁷ **We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.**" ⁸ His brothers said to him, "**Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?**"⁶ And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

Now the first thing that I ought to point out...the first thing that ought to be obvious and is not...is that Joseph and his brothers were not farmers. They were

not the kind of people that stayed in any one place long enough to grow crops like wheat or barley. They were not farmers...they were Bedouins.

They were people of the tent...they were not people of the plow.

I think that fact is more important than we might think...if the dream had been given to simply proclaim Joseph's preeminence over his brothers...his dream would have had sheep or goats or some other form of livestock bowing down to his livestock. That was the life they knew...that was the imagery they knew. But that is not the imagery of the dream and the reason that it is not is because the dream is about more than that. You see the importance of sheaves, that is, of grain, will come up again in the story. You see the issue of the sheaves bowing down before Joseph is prophetic...his brothers will indeed bow down before him...and they will bow down before him not just because he has preeminence over them...that was always true because of the depth of his character...but rather because he will become the lord and master of the sheaves...the very thing that God would use to save their lives⁷.

Now Joseph's second dream is similar to his first dream. Look at verse 9.

^{NIV} **Genesis 37:9**...Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. **"Listen,"** he said, **"I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."** ¹⁰ When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, **"What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?"**^{8 11} His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

Now I just want to make two points about these few verses. First, this dream was extended beyond his brothers to include his parents. Secondly, the imagery is

changed from sheaves to stars and celestial bodies...which probably meant that the dream would have cosmic or far-reaching implications...which it did.

Thirdly, it is important, I think, to notice that although his father rebuked him for the dream...his response was different than that of his sons. Verse eleven adds that **"his father kept the matter in mind."** That is almost the exact same phrase that Luke will use later on to describe the way Mary **"treasured up"** the events of Jesus' early life. That is exactly what Jacob did. He **"stored up"** everything Joseph said...that is, he wondered what it could mean.

Now in verse 12, the story turns back to the brothers...back to their jealous hatred of Joseph...and back to Joseph's goodness and naiveté. Look at it with me.

^{NIV} **Genesis 37:12**...Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, ¹³ and Israel said to Joseph, **"As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them."** **"Very well,"** he replied. ¹⁴ So he said to him, **"Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me."** Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron. When Joseph arrived at Shechem, ¹⁵ a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, **"What are you looking for?"** ¹⁶ He replied, **"I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?"** ¹⁷ **"They have moved on from here,"** the man answered. **"I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'"** So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan.

Now let me stop for a second and point out that Joseph here seems a lot more like a victim than a deliverer. He was so unsure of himself. He was uncertain about what to do or where to go. You can sense that he was like an innocent lamb seeking shelter among ravenous wolves. It is hard to imagine looking at him here that he will ever rise to a place of prominence. He seems like a perfect

victim. But God had not hammered him out on His anvil yet...that was all in the future.

Look at verse 17.

^{NIV} **Genesis 37:17**...So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. ¹⁸ But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. ¹⁹ **"Here comes that dreamer!"** they said to each other. ²⁰ **"Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams."**

Now I think this little section of Scripture is one of the saddest in the Bible. It is sad because all Joseph was doing was pursuing his father's command. It is sad because the brothers despised him from afar...they could not...they would not look at any of his redeeming qualities...the wonderful gift that his father had bestowed on him was not the source of any sort of gratitude for God's kind gift to their father...rather, it became the focal point of their insatiable jealousy and contempt...and so, they planned to kill him.

Now I think most of you probably know the story of Joseph well enough that I do not have to go through it in any sort of detail. But just in case some of you don't know it...I want to relate it quickly...so you'll understand what it has to say to us this morning.

Joseph's brothers stripped Joseph of his richly ornamented robe and threw him into an empty cistern, a pit in the ground used to catch rain water, and then sat around and argued about whether to kill him or not when finally one of the brothers recommended instead that they sell him to a passing caravan of slave traders.

Now the scene is dreadful...the brother who recommends they sell him actually says, **“What will we gain if we kill Joseph...instead, let’s sell him into slavery. After all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.”**

You can see the irony of that I think. It mixes greed with some sort of twisted altruism...**“Let us be compassionate...let us show our tender side and simply sell him into slavery and a life of misery...let’s do that rather than kill him...after all, he is our brother and besides selling him would mean that we would profit two pieces of silver each.”**

So that is what they did. They sold him into slavery and then took his richly ornamented robe, dipped it in goat blood and took it back to their aged father along with their lies, **“Look we think this is Joseph’s robe...the one you gave him...it looks like he has been killed by some savage beast.”**

I can’t imagine how hard that must have been for Jacob...to receive back the robe that he had had made as a token of his love and affection...to receive it back covered in blood...to think that his beloved son had been torn to pieces by wild animals. It makes my heart ache simply to imagine it. The text says that Jacob could not be comforted...some of you know what that means.

So, Joseph was taken down to Egypt and sold to a man named Potiphar...and became his steward...something like his house manager...until Potiphar’s wife saw how handsome he was and tried to seduce him. She tried to seduce him and because he did not want to betray his master he ran from her...and that enraged her to the point that she lied and claimed he had tried to rape her. She even

showed her husband the cloak that she had pulled off Joseph when he ran from her.

Now I want you to think about that...twice he was faithful...twice he was despised...twice the garment that represented his status was violently torn from him...twice he was cruelly mistreated. In both cases his faithfulness cost him dearly. In this second case, he was cast into prison. And there Joseph languished. Now there is no way to know how long Joseph suffered there...my best guess is around ten years. Think of that...ten years. We do know that he was charged with the care of the other prisoners and that he was faithful to that charge...still, it was prison and prison in an ancient and cruel time. No doubt it was a time of deep despair, loneliness and sorrow. He was forgotten...his name and his face faded into the dark pages of history past...he was forgotten by everyone on earth except the God who put him there in the first place.

Eventually, however, God gave Joseph the interpretation of two of his fellow prisoner's dreams...and that led after another couple of years to his being allowed to interpret a dream for Pharaoh...and that led to his being placed in a position of power unmatched in Egypt. And when that happened, Joseph's status was changed again for the final time. It is wonderful irony that throughout his story people were constantly tearing off garments in an attempt to destroy his status before men...and still he remained faithful. Ultimately God vindicated him by having Pharaoh clothe him in garments that represented an unparalleled amount of wisdom, power and strength.

NIV Genesis 41:42...Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. ⁴³ He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and

men shouted before him, "**Make way!**" Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.

That position gave him the authority to prepare the nation for a coming famine by storing up extraordinary quantities of grain and when he had faithfully completed that task...the whole world came down to Egypt to bow down before Joseph...and to buy his grain...and somewhere near the end of that line...were ten unsuspecting Jewish brothers. They came to buy grain and when they did...they bowed down before him, at first without knowing it and then later on purposely...when they found out who he was and feared for their lives. In fact, his brothers bow down to him five different times in the story.

Now that is remarkably ironic, don't you think?

To me, the really ironic thing is that Joseph could have done whatever he wanted with them and did not. He could have given them their comeuppance but instead showed them kindness they neither expected nor deserved.

They sold him into slavery and he responded by providing them a wonderfully safe and fertile place to live.

They stripped him of his garment and he responded by clothing them in the finest garments of the land.

They sold him for twenty pieces of silver and he responded by putting the silver they spent on food back in their sacks.

Still they continued to expect him to get even. They did that because that was what they would have done. I don't think there is anything that makes that clearer than the conclusion of the Joseph story in chapter fifty. Turn there for a moment...to chapter fifty, verse 15.

NIV Genesis 50:15...When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, **"What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?"** ¹⁶ So they sent word to Joseph, saying, **"Your father left these instructions before he died: ¹⁷ 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father."** When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

You see they thought once Jacob died that there was nothing to stand in the way of his retribution and so they concocted this tale about what their dying father had asked Joseph to do. And the tale broke Joseph's heart...because they still did not understand him...still did not trust him. You can see that in verse 18.

NIV Genesis 50:18...His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. **"We are your slaves,"** they said. ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, **"Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ²¹ So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children."** And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

That is so lovely don't you think.

Now I have been toward a particular thought...a particular conclusion...and I want to come now to that conclusion. When we read this story we tend to cast see ourselves in the place of Joseph in the story...that is, we tend to see ourselves as the one who has been wronged or mistreated and abused. That is a natural

way to look at such a story...and that is, of course, the problem. It is entirely natural, worldly, fleshly.

But you see when we read this story we ought not to see ourselves as the Joseph character but rather as one of his angry, deceitful, jealous brothers. You see Joseph is not a picture of every man or woman who has ever been mistreated but rather is a picture of an innocent who was mistreated for the sake of...in the place of his brothers...for His brothers good. God Himself ordained that such should be the case.

God Himself ordained that the Lord Jesus Christ should stand in relation to us just as Joseph did to his brothers...that he should bear the infinite anger and wrath of God that we might not have to. He went ahead of us to prepare the way that we might live and not die. He suffered in our place in order to preserve us from certain death and judgment. He was innocent and yet the cumulative weight of our self-absorption, of our self-love, our self-adulation was poured out upon Him...that we might live and not die. And still we find it hard to trust Him...to entrust to Him the uncertainty of our future...the uncertainty of the details of our life...how that must grieve Him...let us lay aside our doubts, our fears, our uncertainty and commit to receive from Him all that He has to give us...let us receive His love, His affection, His tender nurture...let us love Him as He has loved us...let's do that and see what comes of His dreams.

Let's pray.

Communion Meditation

Ten weeks ago to the day, a friend of mine preached a sermon on the same text I used this morning...his name was Dustin Salter. In his sermon, he approached his sermon as a lesson on providence...much as Calvin himself had done five hundred years before. I wanted to consider it this morning Christologically...but Dustin wanted to look at it from the perspective of providence...both ways are appropriate.

Anyway, at one point near the end of his sermon Dustin said this:

What happens when life doesn't turn out as you thought it would? It certainly wasn't turning out the way Joseph thought it would. You must trust providence. You see, there was no way for Joseph to see the end of the story in the middle of the story. We read the ending in chapter 50; he couldn't read it when he was in 37. You can't say, "**God, if you let me know what's going to happen by next month, then I'll trust you. God, if you let me know what's going to happen by next Saturday, then I'll trust you. God, if you'll let me know what's going to happen by next semester, then I'll trust you.**" You can only see the hand of providence at the end of the story. You can only see him after it's over. In the middle of it, you have to trust and pray like John Newton: "**God, will...what you will, how you will, when you will.**"

This is a problem that I've had in my own life in the past six months. I wanted a guarantee that everything would be ok when I moved to Furman. I wanted a guarantee that I could raise all the money, I wanted a guarantee that students would come to RUF, I wanted a guarantee that my house would sell in Ft. Worth, I wanted a guarantee that everything would go ok. The guarantee is never an *easy life*. The guarantee is a *changed life*, which in the end is the best kind of life: one that changes us, more and more, into the image of Christ.

Three days after saying those words Dustin had a bicycle accident and suffered a head injury that put him in a coma from which he may never wake up...but in the end...he will never be forgotten. Even now the Lord Jesus is tending over him...tending over his well-being...protecting his soul and his wife and his kids.

That's the message we see when we participate in the Lord's Supper. We see his body torn...our sin did that...but Jesus' broken body became bread for our souls...it's the same with the cup. Our sin caused His blood to be shed but it became a cup of joy and sustaining mercy to us.

Let's pray.

¹ ISBE. "Joseph." The appearance of such a coat a little earlier in the decoration of the tombs of Benichassan among Palestinian ambassadors to Egypt probably indicates that this garment was in some sense ceremonial, a token of rank. In any case Joseph, the son of Jacob, was a Bedouin prince. Did the father by this coat indicate his intention to give him the precedence and the succession as chieftain of the tribe? It is difficult otherwise to account for the insane jealousy of the older brethren ([Gen 37:4](#)).

² Word Bible Commentary on Genesis Vol. 2. "Indeed, so deep was their hatred that they could not 'speak civilly to him.' 'Civilly' means lit. 'for peace.' This remark thus foreshadows the whole story of Joseph and the loss of peace between the members of his family.

³ John Calvin, Commentary on Genesis, 37.2. Calvin writes: "But it was not surprising that the boy should be a great favorite with his aged father, for so it is wont to happen: and no just ground is here given for envy; seeing that sons of a more robust age, by the dictate of nature, might well concede such a point. Moses, however, states this as the cause of odium, that the mind of his father was more inclined to him than to the rest. The brethren conceive enmity against the boy, whom they see to be more tenderly loved by their father, as having been born in his old age. If they did not choose to join in this love to their brother, why did they not excuse it in their father?"

⁴ Some commentators (WBC Vol. 2) think that Joseph gave a false report to his father because the phrase is an "evil" report...that is, they think Joseph lied to his father about his brothers. But the text is ambiguous and unlikely especially in that Joseph admits no wrong. The incident would seem to be completely out of character with everything else we know of him.

⁵ Martin Luther, Genesis vol. 6, pg. 322. "There remains, however, the other grammatical difficulty concerning the robe with many threads. I readily acknowledge that I do not know what sort it was. In the German translation we have translated "a coat of many colors," following the usual interpretation. Lyra says that it was a silk garment; Burgensis passes over this passage in silence. Others think that it was a garment woven together from many threads, that is, of diverse colors, where the warp is red and the woof is purple, an iridescence when two kinds of colors appear to be mixed. But their opinion does not seem a likely one to me, although I have nothing to offer against it. In the Hebrew it says: "He made for him כִּתְּמֵי , " that is, a coat of threads, or a linen coat, which the Greek version has translated πολύμιτον, that is, having many threads. But whether it is a garment of many colors cannot be gathered from the text. This word, moreover, is found nowhere else in Holy Scripture except in 2 Sam. 13, about Tamar, whom her brother

Amnon defiled. For in that place the text says: "She put ashes on her head and rent her *polymitam* robe, her פָּסִים." "For with such cloaks (מְעִילִים) the virgin daughters of the king were clad of old" (cf. 2 Sam. 13:18, 19). I would like to interpret it as a beautiful white smock, a white garment such use in oriental regions, in which the most beautiful and most distinguished garment was white and made of linen. Western people, by contrast, are delighted with purple."

⁶ Net Bible writes: **tn Heb** "Ruling, will you rule over us, or reigning, will you reign over us?" The statement has a poetic style, with the two questions being in synonymous parallelism. Both verbs in this statement are preceded by the infinitive absolute, which lends emphasis. It is as if Joseph's brothers said, "You don't really think you will rule over us, do you? You don't really think you will have dominion over us, do you?"

⁷ They actually bow to him five different times...an important number in Genesis based on the fact that he gives Benjamin five times the portion of food he gives the others and five times the clothes he gives the others.

NIV **Genesis 42:6** Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the one who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground.

NIV **Genesis 43:26** When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts they had brought into the house, and they bowed down before him to the ground.

NIV **Genesis 43:28** They replied, "Your servant our father is still alive and well." And they bowed low to pay him honor.

NIV **Genesis 44:14** Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers came in, and they threw themselves to the ground before him.

NIV **Genesis 50:18** His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

⁸ Net Bible has, "**tn Heb** Coming, will we come, I and your mother and your brothers, to bow down to you to the ground?" The verb "come" is preceded by the infinitive absolute, which lends emphasis. It is as if Jacob said, "You don't really think we will come...to bow down...do you?"