

The Bitter Root of Jealousy
Gen. 37:1-11

Introduction:

I am taking a class right now taught by Rev. Linda Warren. I know the ladies have heard her speak at Retreat. Every class is like that for me, and this is the third class I have taken with her. I sit with my mouth figuratively open, many times with a lump in my throat or tears in my eyes. She has a special gift for teaching and speaking to groups. I sit there and think, “Wow! Will I ever be able to give riveting sermons that speak the Word with authority and power like Linda? Oh, God, why can’t I be a dynamic speaker like that.”

I listened a few weeks ago as Pastor Corey McPherson preached in our church. I watched him hold his Bible in his hand the whole time. I listened to his diction and the clarity of his message... and I thought, “Wow! What a good sermon, simple, yet it spoke to the issue and had an impact on many of us here. I wish I could speak clearly like that.”

I watch our DS, Dallas Mucci, when he comes around. During the early part of the service you can see him thumbing through his Bible, pausing here and there. Then it’s time for the message. He gets up and starts talking. He brings a message that hits the mark, and he has no notes to refer to. He probably decided only moments before what he was even going to speak about. “Oh God, will I ever be able to do that?”

I believe if we are really honest, each of us has a little jealousy inside us. It may not be overt. It might be just these little subtle twinges of emotion that rear their ugly head every now and then. Most of the time we may not even realize it is jealousy we are experiencing...

“Why is so-and-so’s house always so neat, and my house is a wreck ...”

“Did you see that, another new car? What’s with that? That’s three this year! ...”

“Why can’t I play guitar like that person? ...”

“Will I ever be able to get up and belt out a song like she can?..”

“They just got another promotion? What the heck? ...”

“How do you get away with that? I would have gotten my head handed to me! What are you, the favored one or something? ...”

Our church has two softball teams. Each year the team I’m on flounders through the season – statistically. We have a good team; we have a good time. Most of all we really try to bring the love and friendship of Jesus onto the field with us. Yes, it is nice to win once in a while, but that is not paramount in our minds. Our goal is the fellowship and the witness for Jesus (not that our other team doesn’t want these same things, but they are a winning team). For a couple of years the Mighty Warriors have been awarded the League Sportsmanship Award. I have to tell you that this really bothered me. The League President even told us that we exemplify what the league stands for in our attitude, etc., but the other team wins the Sportsmanship Award? To really rub salt in the wound, that year we were not even recognized as participating in the league; they forgot us somehow. What was I feeling? I couldn’t be happy that they won this prestigious award because I was hurt and jealous of their recognition. What a horrible feeling.

Illustration 1:

Two shopkeepers were bitter rivals. Their stores were directly across the street from each other, and they would spend each day keeping track of each other's business. If one got a customer, he would smile in triumph at his rival. One night an angel appeared to one of the shopkeepers in a dream and said, "I will give you anything you ask, but whatever you receive, your competitor will receive twice as much. Would you be rich? You can be very rich, but he will be twice as wealthy. Do you wish to live a long and healthy life? You can, but his life will be longer and healthier. What is your desire?" The man frowned, thought for a moment, and then said, "Here is my request: Strike me blind in one eye!"

Thomas Lindberg

Jealousy is a bitter root, and God wants to weed it out of our lives.

Read: Gen. 37:1-11

I – Family history may tend toward jealousy ... v.1-2a

vv. 1 – 2a brings a connection of Jacob's past to this story about Joseph. Jacob was the twin yet younger brother of Esau, both born to Isaac and Rebekah. As these boys grew, Isaac favored Esau. This fostered jealousy between Jacob and Esau. We won't get into their story now, but Joseph's mother also was jealous of her sister Leah (Jacob's other wife).

Gen 30:1

When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!"

Joseph is the first born of Rachel, but he is the second youngest of all brothers.

Jealousy is a bitter root that embeds itself without us realizing it, but God wants to uproot jealousy in our lives.

II – Bad Reports can initiate jealousy ... v. 2b

In our text, Joseph tends sheep with his half-brothers. He brings a bad report back to their father about these sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. So Joe was a snitch; he ratted on his half-brothers and they were tweaked. Why would they care what Joseph had to say about them, even if it were true? They must have known that Jacob would heed Joseph's words. Later on the brothers would bring a bad report about Joseph to their father that would break his heart.

Have you ever had a bad report spoken of you? Many years ago now, I had worked my way up the food chain in the MIS department at BNL. I was the supervisor of the Systems Development section. A co-worker used me to get to the position they wanted and then gave a false report up the line that cost me my position. Then he moved the person he wanted into my slot. Not fair - not nice - not based on truth. I hated him for it. I wanted to see him fall – hard. I deserved my position – I worked for it! I despised the person who had my job. I questioned God and His plan for me. It took me years to overcome this with God's help.

Bad reports can initiate jealousy, but God wants to weed out that bitter root today.

III – Favoritism incites jealousy ... v. 3-4

These verses tell us that Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other sons. It even tells us why. Joseph was born to Jacob in his old age. Not only that, but he was born from Rachel, and Jacob loved Rachel from his youth, but she was barren. Finally, she gave birth to Joseph, after all those years being barren.

Jacob displayed his favoritism toward Joseph by giving him a very special gift – In many translations it is called a coat of many colors – or a long sleeved robe. No one really knows what this is, but it was a definite object of scorn to his brothers. This special gift proved to all that Joseph was special in Jacob's eyes and favored more than them. This favoritism caused hatred to burn towards Joseph by his brothers.

“Hatred” – According to Vine's Dictionary – “The strong sense of the word typifies the emotion of jealousy.” So hatred and jealousy can be related. In fact hatred is the fruit of jealousy – and the fruit of hatred is murder or attempted murder as we will see.

The brothers could not say a kind word about him. Are there some who have hurt you or some who have it better than you? No matter the conversation you just can't seem to say anything nice about them? Has favoritism effected you in some way? Maybe a sibling relationship – or a co-worker?

If favoritism is such a serious problem that can cause a deeper root of jealousy, shouldn't we also be careful we don't show favoritism to others? We could incite jealousy in others by showing favoritism – when God wants to root out jealousy. How does God want us to act toward others? *Rob and Krystn came over the other night to wish us a happy anniversary. My daughter-in-law was talking about her job and people on the job. One of her co-workers was awarded the Employee of the Month recognition. Krystn's face was glowing as she told us how happy she was for that person. It was genuine!*

One sign of jealousy is when it's easier to show sympathy and "weep with those who weep" than it is to exhibit joy and "rejoice with those who rejoice."

[Thomas Lindberg.](#)

**Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if there may be a bitter root of jealousy at work!
God wants to weed out that bitter root today!**

IV – Special Revelatory Knowledge can fuel jealousy ... v. 5-9

Joseph has a dream and tells it to his brothers. The dream indicates that his brothers will, at some point, bow down to him. NO WAY! Did you ever get told that you would be reporting to the person you can't stand most on your job? Joseph's brothers are outraged.

In our culture dreams are not perceived the same way as in the days of the patriarchs. God spoke to his people in dreams. Dreams were a means of God's revelatory knowledge. Today God speaks and reveals things to us through His Word and by the voice of the Holy Spirit. However, the fact is still that special revelatory knowledge can be given to individuals, and this can fuel the bitter root of jealousy in us.

God gave dreams to his people and also to pagans. Dreams need to be interpreted in order to understand their meaning. Joseph is special. He is given revelatory dreams here, and also is given the interpretation of revelatory dreams later on in Egypt. But this special knowledge is a source of more hatred by his brothers.

Then Joseph has a second dream, very similar to the first. In fact, they have the same meaning. Later in the Joseph story, his own words describe this phenomenon. Pharaoh has two dreams that Joseph interprets. Then he explains:

Gen 41:32

The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon.

So Joseph's two similar dreams were real and from God. They were revelatory and sure since he had the same dream twice. We don't know in this text what was to happen, but we can be sure that his brothers will one-day bow before their little brother, whom they now hate. Telling his revelatory dreams to them fuels their deep bitter root of jealousy, and they hate him all the more.

Think of those you know who are "in tune" with God. Do they speak words of revelation that cause your insides to churn a little? Who do they think they are anyway? Why didn't I see that or hear that from God. Maybe they even have a word from the Lord for you. Does that offend you or get you angry to some degree?

Jealousy is a bitter root that needs to be uprooted by God so we can be free.

V – God's providence can weed out the bitter root of jealousy ... v. 10-11

Jacob rebukes Joseph, but this seems to be due to his lack of respect. Will his parents really bow down to him? But in verse 11 – the truth comes out. All the hatred shown in this passage is all due to one sin. His brothers were jealous of Joseph. Their jealousy led to hatred, but the problem really was that they were jealous. Listen to what verse 11 says regarding Jacob ... **He kept all this in mind.** Jacob was once given a revelatory dream himself. He can't be too quick to judge against his son now. (Gen. 28)

This phrase is a clue that the text is a foreshadowing of something that will take place in the future. We know the story. Joseph is sold into slavery in Egypt. He goes through various ups and downs, and eventually he becomes Pharaoh's second in command. He had correctly interpreted Pharaoh's dreams that saved the nation of Egypt and also by God's providence saved Israel and his family. The brothers come to him in search of food to buy and without recognizing him, bowed down to the ground before him. What do you know? The event happened exactly like in the dreams – just as the events happened exactly like Pharaoh's dreams. This was a great way to end this scene since it leaves us thinking – "What could these things mean?"

Jealousy is a bitter root, but God's providence is the key to uprooting it in our lives.

VI – God wants to weed out jealousy in your life? ...

God has a plan and we are all part of it individually and collectively. He always does what is right for us. Others may seem to be favored (for now), but they may be part of God's plan for the future. We may not know that now, but we will find out for sure somewhere down the road. Whatever is from God will happen exactly as He plans. We can overcome and weed out jealousy in our lives by understanding God's providence. We can have peace in every situation when we understand God's providence personally.

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary:

Providence – "1 - divine guidance or care; God conceived as the power sustaining and guiding human destiny"

Provident – "making provision for the future."

Nothing could stop the events of our text from coming to pass. All the hatred and jealousy in the world would not change one piece of God's plan from being carried out exactly as revealed. There was no need for the brothers to hate Joseph if they understood God's providence.

Within two years of my work problems, I was asked to join the staff of another department. I had no idea then that this would be a life changing move for me. It opened the doors to new opportunities professionally, personally, and spiritually. I re-built my reputation and excelled in this department with God's grace. I have since been led to teach a Bible Study in this department where the opportunity is given to minister the Word of God to many potential and new believers. Doors of ministry have opened and even my pursuit of professional ministry has been afforded all as part of God's plan for my life that I could not see back then. I allowed the bitter root of jealousy to keep me from experiencing what God was doing and His peace. I'm still learning and growing – We all are.

God has made and is making provision for the future – for each one of us. We don't need to keep jealousy growing in our spiritual garden. We can weed it out today. It may take a while for the process to be completed in each of us, but we can begin the process right now and the Holy Spirit is here to help each of us get started. I may be like peppermint plants, in our garden. My dad brought us peppermint about 20 years ago. Every year we rip it out, and every year it comes back. You just can't uproot the stuff. We will not be able to weed out the root of jealousy in our lives in our own strength. We need the Holy Spirit and God's intervention. If we understand that God is in complete control, we can let bad reports pass by without them affecting us deeply. If we recognize favoritism in our midst, we can release that observance to God and trust him to bring us past those feelings that would otherwise drag us down. It won't matter if the favoritism is real or imagined. God is able to bring us through His plan, and we will be exactly where He desires us to be. If there is legitimate revelatory knowledge, it should be taken with the understanding that it will happen exactly as it has been revealed, and it will be exactly what we need. We will fit right into God's plan for that appointed time and experience God's peace in it. How would God desire us to act?

For many years Sir Walter Scott was the leading literary figure in the British Empire. No one could write as well as he. Then the works of Lord Byron began to appear, and their greatness was immediately evident. Soon an anonymous critic praised his poems in a London Paper. He declared that in the presence of these brilliant works of poetic genius, Scott could no longer be considered the leading poet of England. It was later discovered that the unnamed reviewer had been none other than Sir Walter Scott himself!

God wants to weed out the bitter root of jealousy in our lives. Will you let Him deal with this issue today? Right Now? As always, the choice is up to you. What would hold you back from rolling up your sleeves and doing a little gardening right now?

Steven Curtis Chapman wrote a song called "God is God." The words of the chorus speak volumes. *"God is God and I am not. I can only see a part of the picture He's painting. God is God and I am man, so I'll never understand it all, for only God is God."*

Let's pray together ... I want you to look up at me for a minute. See? My hand is the first one raised. Remember that image. I would like us all to bow our heads and close our eyes. I want to challenge you today to allow the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart about the bitter root of jealousy. Won't you give God permission to weed it out for good? I am going to give you just a few minutes to wait on the Holy Spirit as He speaks to our hearts.