

**FATHERHOOD – Part Seven**  
**JACOB AND HIS SONS-Part 2**  
**“FEAR, ANGER AND GREED”**  
**Sermon 9/01/19**

Last week we looked at the family of Jacob and discovered that deception was a trait that ran throughout his family line. We saw seven specific deceptions occurring in the family line. These deceptions appear to arise out of fear, anger, and greed.

FEAR, ANGER, and GREED

Jacob’s grandfather Abraham was fearful that if the kings in whose land he was staying found out Sarah was really his wife and not his sister, they would kill him and take Sarah as their wife. But the very thing he hoped to avoid actually occurred because of his deception. They took Sarah into their palaces in hopes of making her their wife. It was only God’s intervention that opened the eyes of the kings to see the real truth about Sarah and return her to her husband before anything happened.

Jacob’s mother Rebekah was afraid that her favorite son Jacob, who was not favored by his father, would lose out on his father’s blessing; so she conspired with Jacob to deceive her husband in order to obtain the blessing for Jacob. Rebekah was also afraid of what Esau would do with the larger share of his father’s inheritance. She knew the disposition of her first-born son Esau, and she did not want the family wealth to be squandered by him and his pagan wives. So, she deceived her husband and used her favorite son to accomplish the deed.

Jacob’s uncle Laban was afraid if he gave his second-born daughter to Jacob that he would be stuck with his first-born, Leah, who was not as beautiful in appearance as her younger sister Rachel. By deceiving Jacob on his wedding night and giving him his daughter Leah instead of Rachel, he ensured that both of his daughters would be married and well cared for. There would be no need for him to find a wife for the lesser attractive one.

Greed was also a factor in Laban’s deception First, by withholding Rachel from Jacob on his wedding night, Laban knew he could gain an additional seven years of labor from Jacob. Second, by changing Jacob’s wages ten times during the course of his employment, Laban attempted to regain the wealth that he felt Jacob had made at his expense.

Fear is also what drove Jacob to deceive Laban when he left with his wives, his children, and all the livestock he had earned. Knowing the power and influence Laban held over his sons and daughters, Jacob was afraid that Laban would take his daughters from Jacob by force (Genesis 31:31). This was not an unwarranted fear. For when Jacob confronted Laban after he pursued them on their way back to the land of Canaan, Laban said,

**GENESIS 31:43**

*“The daughters are my daughters, and the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine.”*

Laban believed everything Jacob had belonged to him and he was determined to retrieve

it. Fortunately for Jacob, God came to Laban in a dream of the night and said to him, “*Be careful that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad*” (Genesis 31:24). Convicted by this dream, Laban came into Jacob’s camp with only one goal – to recover the idols which he said had been stolen from him. His search was unsuccessful but only because greed and fear drove Rachel to deceive her father Laban.

During his search of her tent, Rachel sat on the household idols which she had stolen from him and lied about her condition so she would not have to get off the saddle. Rachel was fearful, not only of what her father might do if he found out, but also of what Jacob might do when he discovered her guilt. She also had no intent of giving up what she had stolen. Relying on the tried and true family trait, she then deceived her father into thinking the idols were not in her tent.

Finding nothing Laban said, “*But what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne?*” Laban conceded his inability to change anything or to regain what he had lost. Jacob and Laban then made a covenant not to harm each other after which Laban returned home without his idols and Jacob continued on his journey to the land of Canaan.

Safe from the hand of Laban Jacob then reconciled with his brother Esau and moved to the area of Shechem where deceit would once again raise its ugly head. When his daughter Dinah was raped by Hamor’s son Shechem, fear caused Jacob to remain silent. As for his sons, I believe it was both anger and fear that drove them to deceive Hamor. When Hamor asked for the hand of Dinah in marriage to his son Shechem after she had been defiled by him, the sons of Jacob were livid and out for blood. Understanding the greed of those who ruled the land, the sons of Jacob deceived Hamor and the inhabitants of Shechem in order to exact revenge. Behind their deception was their plan to kill every last male inhabitant of Shechem as retribution for the defilement of their sister Dinah.

Even as his sons began to speak in a manner that Jacob recognized as deception, he remained silent. And in his silence Jacob gave credence to the deception. Though fear was certainly a factor, in his inaction Jacob was also following his father Isaac’s footsteps. Jacob deceived his own father yet we have no record of Isaac doing anything about it. In the same manner Jacob seemingly did nothing to prevent his own sons from carrying out their deception against the rulers of Shechem.

Why was this lack of action repeated? I can only guess, but sometimes when we as fathers are guilty of something from which we have not repented or sought to change, we cannot find the courage to confront our sons who do the same. Though Jacob, now known as Israel, had the ability to make his own choices, it seems he continued to walk in his father’s footsteps, perpetuating what he had learned in his father Isaac’s home. Jacob may have felt he had no room to talk since he was as guilty as they and had none nothing to change his ways.

You would think that seven deceptions in one family line would be enough, but we have one more recorded instance of deception occurring in the family line of Jacob, this one concerning his son Joseph. Scripture tells us that Jacob loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic, or a “coat of many colors” as we often call it. The Bible says that when Joseph’s brothers “*saw that their father loved him more than all*

*his brothers...they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms” (Genesis 37:4). The Bible also tells of Joseph having dreams in which he appeared to rule over his father and brothers. When he related the dreams to his brothers the Scripture says, “They hated him even more” (Genesis 37:5).*

As I have said many times in this series on fatherhood, the love of a father is a deep need for any child and when it is withheld or perceived to be withheld, the child suffers. Whether it be from a lack of love or a result of favoritism, a child who does not feel valued in the eyes of his father is a child who is constantly seeking elsewhere for the attention he is not receiving at home. This child will go to great lengths to get that which he feels he is lacking. You multiply this same feeling by 10, as in the case of Joseph’s brothers, and you also multiply the hurt. And so when this hurt had finally grown into something which could no longer be contained it was let loose one day out in the fields.

One day Joseph’s brothers went out to pasture their father’s flock and Jacob asked Joseph to go and see how his brothers and his flock were faring. As Joseph drew near, his brothers began to plot their deception. They said to one another, *“Here comes this dreamer! Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, ‘A wild beast devoured him.’ Then let us see what will become of his dreams.”* Luckily cooler heads prevailed. Reuben, the oldest, suggested they throw Joseph into the pit but not kill him outright. The other brothers agreed, so Reuben left to go back to his part of the field. Reuben’s intention was to come back later and rescue Joseph from the pit. But this was not to be.

After Reuben left, his brothers decided to sell Joseph as a slave to some Midianite traders who were passing by. They lifted Joseph out of the pit and sold him for 20 shekels of silver. The traders took Joseph with them to Egypt where he was sold in the slave market. The decision to sell their brother into slavery was certainly a more merciful plan than killing him, but the sons of Jacob still had to notify their father of the loss of Joseph without implicating themselves.

But what could they tell him? They couldn’t admit to selling their brother to the descendants of their uncle Ishmael. They had to come up with some sort of plan that, though guilty of the crime, would exonerate them in the eyes of their father. So, continuing the family tradition of deception, they devised a plan to conceal their part in the removal of Joseph from his family. We pick up the story in Genesis chapter 37 where it says,

GENESIS 37:31-36

*“They took Joseph’s tunic, and slaughtered a male goat and dipped the tunic in the blood; and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father and said, ‘We found this; please examine it to see whether it is your son’s tunic or not.’ Then Israel examined it and said, ‘It is my son’s tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!’ ...*

*“So Joseph tore his clothes, and put on sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, ‘Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son.’ So his father wept for him.”*

The deception was complete. Their father believed their lies and spent the remainder of his time in the land of Canaan mourning for his son. But deceptions do not remain hidden for long. Though it would take many years for this deception to be revealed and the revelation would take place in a foreign land during a time of great need for the family of Jacob, the secret that Joseph's brothers kept from their father would eventually come to light. By that time all his brothers regretted their actions toward Joseph and their father on that fateful day.

The Scripture says that we all reap what we sow. The guilt of their deed certainly played heavily on their hearts through the years especially seeing how their father continued to mourn over the loss which they knew they had caused. The story of Joseph has a happy ending of course. Joseph rose to prominence in Egypt eventually becoming the second most powerful man in Egypt. As a result, he became instrumental in saving the lives of his father and brothers as well as countless others when a severe famine struck the land. As Joseph himself said to his brothers, "*You meant it for harm but God meant it for good*" (Genesis 50:20). The brothers were eventually forgiven and they and their father were later reunited with Joseph in the land of Egypt.

Yes, God can make good out of evil, but that does not justify the deception. The art of deception ran deep through the line of both Abraham and Rebekah, manifesting itself in Jacob, the youngest son of Isaac and Rebekah. It showed up again in the uncle and wife of Jacob, who were his mother's brother and niece. It also passed through the children of Jacob, even appearing in Joseph when he hid his identity from his brothers in Egypt.

In this family, deception seemed to be an inherited trait passed down from one generation to the next. But the passing down of family traits is not unique to the families of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is something which we ourselves experience. For I believe we can all easily recognize the inherent traits of our own family members in ourselves and in our relatives. So we should ask ourselves, is it fear, anger, or greed which causes us to resort to deception in order to gain what we desire or avoid what we feel is unpleasant?

My intention in mentioning this is not to gather a list of faults passed down from your generation or my generation to our succeeding generations and publicly display them. Rather it is to ask the question, must they be passed down? Must we become victims of past sins or can we rise above them and overcome the defective traits passed down from generation to generation?

God once declared that the iniquity of the father who is guilty in His sight would be visited on his children and his children's children, to the third and the fourth generation (Exodus 34:7). But He also said this in Ezekiel:

EZEKIEL 18:19-20

*"...you say, 'Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of the father?' When the son has done what is just and right, and has been careful to observe all my statutes, he shall surely live. The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself."*

What God is saying in both these passages is that the sins of the family are passed down from one generation to the next, down to the third and fourth generation. But this cycle can be broken by righteousness. If somewhere in the family line its members turn to God for the removal of their sin and seek His face in order to live righteous lives, then the sins of previous generations will not be passed down through them to their succeeding generations. By their turning from the sins of their fathers they have placed a stopper in the guilty works of their ancestors. They will also open up a channel for righteousness to flow through them to their children and their children's children with the hope of fulfilling God's promise to show lovingkindness to a thousand generations of those who love Him (Exodus 20:6).

As we have seen in the family of Jacob, those who deceive can be deceived themselves and can easily pass down the trait of deception to future generations. Unless someone makes the decision to stop the flow, the defect in the family line will continue to be passed down from one generation to another. It does not appear that Jacob or his father Isaac did anything to stop this flow from continuing to run unhindered in their families. Nor does it appear that their children did either. No matter the harm or hurt caused by their deception, the flow of deceit was not arrested at its source. And so it continued to run rampant through the descendants of Abraham.

Anyone who has children and grandchildren is well aware that their offspring were not born sinless. The inherited sin of Adam did not skip their generation. But as those who are responsible for their care, we try to train them to overcome these defects. For instance, our seven-year-old granddaughter is a very caring person. Those she loves, she loves deeply. But at an early age she showed a tendency to be bossy and forceful in getting her way. Through the years her parents have worked with her and she has softened considerably. This child will probably grow up to be a leader because she cares deeply, has strong opinions, and is very observant. However, no one will follow her if she continues to be bossy and pushy. But if she embraces the training of her parents to temper these negatives and to nourish the positives, people will ultimately be drawn to her and she will make a great leader.

The same is true of the sin in our own lives. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we can temper our negatives and nourish our positives. We can learn to control our propensity to sin by looking for that way of escape from temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13) and allowing the Spirit rather than the flesh to be the source of our joy (Galatians 5:19-23). If you are aware of any negative family trait being passed down from generation to generation in your family line, there is hope. You can decide to first place a dam in front of the flow of evil by refusing to allow the flow to pass downstream to you and your future family line. Second, you can begin to drain the river created as a result of past family sins by living a life powered by the Holy Spirit so that the deeds of the flesh, both your own and those passed down to you, are stopped and put to death.

This is not an easy task. It requires dying to self through the power of the Holy Spirit and repenting when the old family habits bleed through. But it can be done because all things are possible through Christ who gives us strength (Philippians 4:13). This is His promise to us and His promise does not fail. Some call the passing down of negative family traits as the family curse. But Jesus had an answer for that as well. The Scripture says that "*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us - for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'*" (Galatians 3:13). As I have said earlier, regarding the family of Ham and Canaan, Jesus

has broken the curse. The only thing required of us is to believe that and act upon it.

The Law of sin and death says that the sins of the father would be passed down to future generations, but the Law of mercy and grace says it does not have to be that way. And this is where the rubber meets the road. This is where we work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). The sins of our fathers can be overcome by the blood of the Lamb if we are willing to cling to the promises of God. We do not have to remain victims of our earthly family heritage. We can grow into the inheritance that was given to us through faith in Christ.

This was true for me. The sins of my father were not passed down to my children because I made the conscious decision to arrest them at the source. As his child, I had the ability and propensity to continue the sins of my father. But when I gave my life to Christ, I found the strength and power to prevent this transfer of family traits.

Some of you here may be unaware of passing down negative family traits because these propensities are so familiar to you. You saw them in your grandparents, your parents, your aunts and uncles, your cousins, and in your own children. But no matter your age, it is not too late to correct your trajectory and the trajectory of those you love. Even in our declining years we can still change course and provide a new example of how to live a life controlled by the Spirit. Just as we are willing to train our grandchildren to overcome their faults, the Spirit too is willing to train us to temper ours. Even if our children are grown; even if our grand children are grown, we can still live out the truth of what Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians.

#### 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

*“If anyone is in Christ he is a new creature; the old things have passed away, new things have come.”*

The old family traits of sin have disappeared, and the new traits of righteousness have been inherited by those who believe in Christ. We are no longer citizens of the kingdom of darkness and subject to its sinful ways. Through faith in Christ we have become citizens of the kingdom of light and have the ability to overcome the ways of our ancestors. Unlike Jacob and his sons we are not destined to repeat the mistakes of the past. We can rise above them.

Like Jacob we may have married someone who is very much like our father or mother and have continued to perpetuate the sinful traits which they possessed. But with the power of God working within us and faith in the promises of God propelling us forward we can overcome them. We can change the course of our family’s history and redirect it toward the light. Each generation will have to decide this for themselves, for none of us are without sin. We have all inherited the sin caused by Adam’s rebellion and each generation must seek their own covering for their own sin. But a life of righteousness is possible by faith in Christ. And a life of righteousness curbs the passing down of generational sins. So let us seek that life for ourselves and for the sake of our future generations. With God these things are possible. Amen.

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