

Sermon: "A Wild, Savage Hatred"

Texts: Gen. 34:25-31; Matt. 21:33-46 ; Isaiah 10:1-11; Isaiah 5:1-7

June 21, 2020

What Simon and Levi perpetrate on the third day, the massacre of all the males in the city of Shechem is so wicked—so cruel and malicious!—that you have to wonder where that violent hatred came from. They acted like *savages*, a pack of wild dogs. Where did that come from? And how is it possible to square this atrocity [savagery] with either the purposes of God (**righteousness and mercy**) or the divine promises (**through you descendants all the nations of the world will be blessed**)? It isn't. So where did they learn to hate? This is what the *holy nation*, the *priesthood* of believers has to offer?! What is this "*heart of darkness*"¹ displayed before us? Is the whole of Genesis 34 a "horror story?" And what if we, in addition to seeing redemption as deliverance from bondage, if we were to also view it as a rescue from the horrors of godlessness? I think it is not possible to overstate the heinousness of what these brothers did to their father and brother or to the city of Shechem—nothing justifies savagery or hatred in the human heart. ***We must never lose sight of the horror of human sin, particularly murder.*** Murdering in response to murder is doubly wrong.

The short answer to *what's the source of this hatred* is this: it came from Jacob himself—his sinful depravity. Simon and Levi, as it were, play out, on the big screen (of life, or regional events) what they had gleaned/learned from their father's practices/family life. *And this is the concerning bit: it's not overt instruction in*

¹ Culture matters: This is an allusion to Joseph Conrad's novella, "The Heart of Darkness." Published in 1902 as a horror story—and so it is! It exposed the underbelly of colonialism/Western imperialism for what it was: arrogant depravity. Theories of "racial superiority" which legitimated the suppression of Africans, say, exposed the linkage of philosophy to racism and torpedoed the ethos of "manifest destiny." Frank Peretti's This Present Darkness had a similar impact amongst its Christian readership—its thoroughly modern depiction of Satanic warfare sent shock waves through liberal Christianity which espoused the unreality of all that demonic stuff. Both works stimulated thoughtfulness—very akin to the impact of Ovid's Metamorphoses in the near east, during Paul's missionary journeys. Ovid wrote between 8 and AD 17 in Tomis on the Black Sea (northern Galatia!). He was local talent, a poet banished by Caesar Augustus.

Kurtz, the madman central to the story in "Heart of Darkness," scribbles a postscript in his journal which read "Kill the brutes, kill all of them." This linkage of hatred to murder is very pertinent to Genesis 34! Treating others as less than human is but the first step!

Killing? Sing louder. I was horrified to learn of a small German congregation which was situated near the railroad tracks and every morning as the cattle cars rolled by, filled with Jews being transported to the death camps, they heard the terrified screams of the victims. So they would sing louder. They drowned out these cries for mercies by singing louder! The sad Christian who shared this memory still hears those cries! Today as cries for mercy go out, I pray that we will respond with something better than singing louder.

*hatefulness, meaning it is more caught than taught!*² The **dark, envious, greedy hatefulness** that Jacob evidenced towards his own father, and his brother Esau—the same dynamics the family experienced from Jacob’s father-in-law! (“What goes around, comes around.”) is what they internalized growing up. The sacking of Shechem was a graduation exercise, of sorts; a demonstration of their mastery of evil—it came out of a *heart of darkness*. It may have *dismayed* Jacob to see this played out in bold-faced aggression and hostility but it was nothing more or less than the sins of the father being visited upon his sons—and others. **And it failed to move him to horror.** Jacob did not react with public remorse; he did not **tear his garments** in grief at this! He did not rise to the occasion. It is a great moral failing that Jacob did not call out his sons for their iniquity—or warn them of the wrath of God, or urge them to get right with God through repentance and sacrifice, or to reconcile with their neighbors. Hatred is to peace, what pig weed is to a garden! It must be weeded out or it will take everything over.

To see just how *vicious* these sons, these “animals” were obliges us to reach ahead of ourselves in Genesis—turning now to Gen. 37:12-33, we see a scenario of hatred which explains the earlier viciousness:

12 Then his brothers went to pasture their father’s flock in Shechem. 13 Israel said to Joseph, “Are not your brothers pasturing the flock in Shechem? Come, and I will send you to them.” And he said to him, “[a]I will go.” 14 Then he said to him, “Go now and see about *the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock*, and bring word back to me.” So he sent him from the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. 15 A man found him, and behold, he was wandering in the field; and the man asked him, “[b]What are you looking for?” 16 He said, “I am looking for my brothers; please tell me where they are pasturing the flock.” 17 Then the man said, “They have moved from here; for I heard them say, ‘Let us go to Dothan.’” So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

Checking on their “welfare,” becomes the occasion of his betrayal at the hands of those who hate him! How ironic!

18 [c]When they saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, *they plotted against him to put him to death.* 19 They said to one another, “[d]Here comes this dreamer! 20 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!*”

“The ungoverned imagination is a wild and raging thing.”

² Social attitudes, opinions shaped by bias, family “chatter”—the monkey see, monkey do dynamic of living together applies here. See my message “The Temptation to Scorn” because a lack of mercy, or of kindness manifest in strongly held opinions can be miseducating the family.

Verses 18-20 demonstrate the link between hatred and murder—regardless of origin, in jealousy, envy, fatherly neglect, or birth order contention, Joseph is walking into a hostile and dangerous place! Remember Esau hated Jacob for his connivance with their mother to steal his birthright and first-born blessing. In essence he said, “After Dad’s funeral, I will kill Jacob.” (Gen. 27:24) The infuriated Laban sought to harm (if not kill Jacob and take back his goods, wealth and daughters—like “plunder”) for leaving Paddan-aram (**It is in my power to do you harm**—Gen. 31:29) Ah, the joys of family life in the patriarchal age!

21 But Reuben heard this and rescued him out of their hands and said, “Let us not [e]take his life.” 22 Reuben further said to them, “Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hands, to restore him to his father.

Reuben the first-born seeks to intervene—to prevent “murder.” Just as the Black Lives Protester, Patrick Hutchinson did, a black, who carried an injured white man through the angry mob to safety! You should see the grim resoluteness on his face as he carries his “racist enemy,” with the help of four black brother, through the violent mob—still hitting the injured man! It reminded me of the scripture saying from Isaiah 50:

**The Lord God has given Me the tongue of disciples,
That I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word.
He awakens Me morning by morning,
He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.
5 The Lord God has opened My ear;
*And I was not disobedient
Nor did I turn back.*
6 I gave My back to those who strike Me,
And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard;
I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting.
7 For the Lord God helps Me,
Therefore, I am not disgraced;
Therefore, I have set My face like flint,
And I know that I will not be ashamed.
8 He who vindicates Me is near;
Who will contend with Me?
Let us stand up to each other;
Who has a case against Me?
Let him draw near to Me.
9 Behold, the Lord God helps Me;
Who is he who condemns Me?
Behold, they will all wear out like a garment;
The moth will eat them. NASB**

Who can apply these verses to our current lives? See Luke 9:51-3:

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of Samaritans, to make preparation for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set for Jerusalem.

I saw in Patrick's face, the face of Jesus—you should look, perhaps you can see it, too! Patrick did what the other officers in the George Floyd death failed to do. He stood up! No hatefulness there. Reuben's good intentions were to no avail because the nine other brothers; while he was absent, sold their "brother" into slavery (plenty of hate there!). He did not throw Joseph over his shoulder and head for the safety of home! He was all plans and no action. The march to safety is the march of mercy.

Then they all devised a wicked story that would torture, hurt and irrevocably grieve their father who, in this way, bore the brunt of their seething hatred for brother and father both. For savagery, for malice, these acts can hardly be surpassed and then they sat down to enjoy their celebratory meal together! I wonder if they prayed a grace over their meal, for their hearts were as empty as cold-blooded murder could make them.

23 So it came about, when Joseph [f]reached his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his [g]tunic, the varicolored tunic that was on him; 24 and they took him and threw him into the pit³. Now the pit was empty, without any water in it.

This was brutal, attempted murder. Premeditated and vicious. The ***dark, envious, greedy hatefulness*** that Jacob evidenced towards his own father, and toward his brother Esau, had come home to roost. A perfect, bloodless crime! Perhaps the clay news tablet in some nearby village would record: "Poor, naked young man found dead in local dry well. Foul play suspected. We really need to cover these cisterns." It was then that a lesser crime opportunity presented itself (as crimes often do). Why kill Joseph when we could make a few dollars off his sale—he'd make a handsome slave in Egypt and perhaps his owner will dispose of Joseph for us. That won't be our fault. Let him fend for himself. ***All meant to maximize pain***, twist the blade, optimize their betrayal: ***their savage, wild hatred of their father!*** Perhaps, Joseph was merely collateral damage.

25 Then they sat down to eat [h]a meal. And as they raised their eyes and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing [i]aromatic gum and [j]balm and [k]myrrh, [l]on their way to bring them down to Egypt. 26 Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood? 27 Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him. 28 Then

³ This is both persecution and affliction. Joseph is transformed by what he suffers, shaped by God, above and beyond the murderous intentions of his brothers. This doesn't exonerate the brothers, but it does vindicate the ways of God to man.

some Midianite traders passed by, so they pulled him up and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold [m]him to the Ishmaelites⁴ for twenty shekels of silver. Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt.

Trade routes: selling our brother! What a plan! [Chattel-slavery versus debt-slavery.] God is merely arranging public transportation to Egypt(!). Witness relocation plan? These cousins just happen along?!

A new phase to their premeditation:⁵ “Hatred darkening to murder is bad enough; but hatred which has also an eye to business, to make a profit out of a brother(!)” (Or a sister—Tamar exploited), “It is a shade or two **blacker** because it means **cold-blooded calculation and selfish advantage** instead of raging passion.” Cynical exploitation of any situation avows *the real motive (after cost analysis!)*. “He prefers the paltry gain from selling Joseph to the unprofitable luxury of killing his brother.” (Maclaren) They prescribe humiliation and degradation for Joseph—and suddenly murder looks a little merciful! These are the **savages**—these “wild sons” are worse than wild beasts because nobler in creation.

29 Now Reuben returned to the pit, and behold, Joseph was not in the pit; so he tore his garments. 30 He returned to his brothers and said, “The boy is not there; as for me, where am I to go?”

“Tearing of garments” occurs here over a false perception—Joseph’s absence from the well is seen by him as Joseph’s demise. It wasn’t. Shortly thereafter, Jacob will “rent his garments” under another false perception. Jacob thought his son deceased, killed by ferocious beasts. It was not true. But when Jacob heard of the slaughter of the city of Shechem he did not **tear his garments**, or grieve. He obsessed over his own reputation and how his “wild sons” had damaged that! He did not react to *the horror* of slaughter.

- You have made me **a stench**
- You have put us at risk of retaliation
- **I shall be destroyed, both I and my household** (Gen. 34:30)

⁴ Ishmaelites were cousins to the family of Jacob! Stating the obvious, there are two parts to slave trade—and the second part, trade, seems to be the silent partner. Trade is an economic term, it’s a for profit enterprise. It was trade, the financial and economic interests of the north, which sought to reduce all workers for to wage earners (so as to manage and exploit them better) that brought about the war between the states. The states stood between the greed of business and their citizens—kind of a consumer protection plan. *They did not go to war because of racial hatred, or because they cherished slavery! [The huge debates about abolition give the lie to this over-simplistic view of things! And Americans were on both sides of that debate.]* Trade has inherently imperialistic/or monopolistic strands to it—that must be constrained/regulated. If government is in the pocket of special interests, and it appears to be so, who is there to keep public safety?

⁵ What if viewing pornography is defined as “premeditated adultery,” or rape even? Tantalizing oneself with fantasy sex, like fantasy football, is not about real sex at all but its perversion.

His reputation mattered more to him than the misbehavior of his sons' before God! Does murder, not matter? What the sons did in anger was unjustified. It was evil. Jacob doesn't deal with their crimes. He simply moves away. How much better if he had covered his head in ashes, torn his garments and rushed to confront his sons: "What have you done? You have murdered innocent people, you planned it and you executed it. *This is yet another parallel between the massacre and the selling of Joseph.* Or, even better, what if Jacob had torn his garments and lamented at the rape of his daughter before all the violence began? Why didn't he remonstrate with Shechem? Point out his offense? And then call a meeting between families to discuss the crime, the offense and the injury: "Brothers, what are we do do about this rape?" That would have forestalled, and perhaps prevented the atrocity. The last concern of Jacob demonstrates how fearful he remained despite God's faithfulness to preserve him and bring him home safely! Even that would argue for engagement with the transgressor, Shechem, in place of "honor killing"⁶ ' . . . **before more horror began.**

There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Reuben's cry of despair. And, no doubt, some self-incrimination followed: Reuben had not stood his ground, he had not acted on his impulse to save life with resolve—a damning lack of resoluteness. Sticking to our guns. Reuben tries to deflect harm from Joseph—"do nothing to him." (Remember, the similar warning to Laban?!) But **they would not hear.** He makes two efforts to deliver Joseph: 1. shield from harm and then the half-and-half measure they took, 2. stick him in a dry well. Then he is absent from the brainstorming session!! He missed the cruel merriment of the feast (Joseph's last supper!) and doesn't know where to turn. The problem with some good men is that they are not good enough!

Joseph in Gen. 37 was probably seen as Reuben's successor! So Reuben is self-sacrificing in his attempt to be kind to his father Jacob. ***But he was too timid to stand, to take an uncompromising position:*** prevent the crime entirely. Meaning, not go along to prevent the worst like **beat them and let them go** which is how the Jewish persecutors of the apostles acted! (No they didn't heed the counsel of Gamaliel.). Do not even touch Joseph to hurt or to harm him! Do not give up the right to remonstrance, or to intervention if necessary. Stand up to evil preemptively—before anger escalates to murder.

If God had not taken this up as part of his plan, *It is just the heartlessness of the whole heartless business, we would be left with. The horror of it.*

31 So they took Joseph's tunic, and slaughtered a male goat and dipped the tunic in the blood; 32 and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father and said, "We found this; please [n]examine it to see whether it is your son's tunic or not." 33 Then he [o]examined it and said,

⁶ I can't help but think about the mourning rituals disrupted by Jesus 1. by the raising of Jairus's daughter and 2. by the raising of Lazarus. How did it feel to wash off the ashes, mend the clothes, and put away the instruments of mourning? Did they wonder, "What was that all about?"

“It is my son’s tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!”⁷

The sons’ ferocious cruelty towards their father is enough to make one swoon. It is as near insult as one could get; it was maliciously “mean.”

- Take the snarl about the coat
- Hear the studied use of “thy son” (disowning brotherhood)
- note the harshness of how they tell their lie

All meant to maximize pain, twist the blade, optimize their betrayal: ***their savage, wild hatred of their father*** (so like the flattering Goneril and Regan with King Lear— such “love”) Alas for those who hate their parents.

“Joseph was slain by **fierce wild beasts**” (**Jacob’s surmise**) . . . yes, his own brothers! Reuben, not daring to speak, became complicit. All his good intentions went awry because he chose to stand down, in the end.

How costly are the lies we spew . . . as costly as the evil that we do.

The damages are immense, incalculable.

“The only road which is safe, in view of the uncertainties of the future, to take, is the plain road of resistance to evil and non-fellowship with its doers.” (Maclaren)

Pres. Lincoln stood too alone when he said “With malice towards none and charity to all.” Perhaps this is his paraphrase of “Love one another.” It is very clear why Satan sent his assassin’s in . . . the one whose malice is total and entire. Hit men are a dime a dozen, but men like Patrick Hutchinson are priceless. His courage did more for peace than a thousand angry protests.

+++

⁷ Footnotes

- a. Genesis 37:13 Lit Behold me
- b. Genesis 37:15 Lit saying, “What...?”
- c. Genesis 37:18 Or And
- d. Genesis 37:19 Lit Behold, this master of dreams comes
- e. Genesis 37:21 Lit smite his soul
- f. Genesis 37:23 Lit came to
- g. Genesis 37:23 Or full-length robe
- h. Genesis 37:25 Lit bread
- i. Genesis 37:25 Or ladanum spice
- j. Genesis 37:25 Or mastic
- k. .Genesis 37:25 Or resinous bark
- l. Genesis 37:25 Lit going
- m. Genesis 37:28 Lit Joseph
- n. Genesis 37:32 Or recognize
- o. Genesis 37:33 Or recognized

Joseph had indeed been savaged by ferocious wild beasts, his own brothers!

Jacob's family is the Satanic arena in which the poisonous fruit of brotherly hatred, merciless and cold-blooded malice grows. The seed of the brothers' hatred of Joseph may have been the favoritism in the home—like in Abraham's home (Isaac was favored), in Isaac's home (Jacob was favored by Rebecca/Esau by Isaac—there's strife added to envy!) and now in Jacob's home, Joseph was favored). The long sleeved varicolored robe that Jacob gave Joseph signaled their father's intent to convey to Joseph the rights of the first-born. Joseph, that last born but one (Benjamin), was tellingly, the first-born of the *avored wife* (Rachael). The presence of jealousy and hatred was not baseless! Partiality is vile! Hatred was intergenerational and seeded in unfair partiality. Perhaps the brothers vainly imagined that murder would solve their problems, slake their hatred—it did not. Their attempted murder simply moved the game pieces forward! When God moved Joseph to Egypt, he was preparing to judge that nation. *No one saw that coming, which is why we have revelation!* While they were avenging themselves on their father by killing Joseph, God was ruling over the nations!

Every one of Jacob's sons wanted Jacob for their father—but Joseph was “the special one,” only he had a Dad! That is so painful!

Seen In this light, Joseph's dreams of dominion [dominion and empire!] that Joseph related to his brothers (and family) may have been predicated on this position of favor in real life. They were the future! BUT that's what stirred up more envy, kick started the process, and surely didn't bode for happy feelings and contentment in the home in the meantime. Murder makes everyone miserable. *So, family is a key playing/battle field for Satanic opposition and our spiritual testings.*

However, above and beyond all this sibling rivalry, **malice and hatred**, remember, God reigns. God works his purposes out despite the intentions and the crimes of unconscious man. There is a plan—to rule the future, directing nations and *taking Israel through slavery and into emancipation to produce a people who would not endure, or oppress others!* No one values freedom half so much as those who have sustained the loss of it! Those robbed resist thievery, and those abused should abuse no one—but why do they? They do so because the *wildness* within has not been wholly tamed—their savagery remains.

The godly life is rather like the formation of a coral reef! Coral, tiny sessile animals, attach themselves to a surface and, through their extended tentacles, harvest material from the ocean water to work their work, which is reef building! They do not know the grand scheme of things, don't care, or instinctually behave according to the plan. And from what they seize from the sea, they build a barrier to the sea—housing countless other organism and fish in the process. They take form, add color, and inhabit their colonies. They perform counter-work to the sea and build a barrier.

Coral is a metaphor for what God does with human crimes and sinful practices—our sin-ridden-ness!. Joseph captured this in his grand conclusion: **You intended it for evil, but God brought it about to good: that many should be saved.** The brothers were getting rid of a nuisances but God was implementing famine relief! In order for Joseph to govern Egypt, he had to be brought there—Ishmaelite traders, looking to make a profit off human trafficking, bought and sold Joseph. However, in order for that to happen Joseph's cold-blooded brothers had to initiate the transactions. They were very glad to harm Joseph because in their hatred of him—they wished him dead. Well did John note, **If you hate your brother, you are a murderer.** (1 John 3:15)

The enraged brothers perpetrated a crime against Joseph who they envied and hated with a passion. Jacob envied and hated Esau and Esau returned the malfeasance. Ishmael was hostile to Isaac—because hatred and hostility were normative in their home. Bitter enmity, just another page in the family album(!), found its roots in their home life of these “fathers of the nation Israel.” How swiftly can the inward sin of jealousy evolve, or escalate to murder. Cain's murder of Abel was just the first instance! God **disregarded his offering** (Gen.4:5) and Cain became **very angry**—envious of Abel. God asks Cain, in essence, the same question that he asks Jonah, centuries later, **Do you do well to be angry? Yes, he replies, angry enough to die!** (Jonah 4:4) Well, apparently someone had to die! The brothers of Joseph are angry, hateful, someone has to die. The seed thought of hatred needs but a brief hour of anger to bloom. (I warrant the same is true for lust, covetousness, adultery—whatever. Sin is opportunistic, like a steel trap waiting to be sprung. Amnon lusted and longed after his half-sister Tamar—all his planning and plotting flew under the cover of his sexual obsession with her . . . not her, mind you, just the sex act. When opportunity arrived, he took it. Envy is deeply diabolical as evil is opportunistic.

The abject moral condition of the “fathers of Israel” is a strong argument for the historicity of the account, I think, for who would invent such sordidness?! It's too awful to be untrue. AND it underscores a theological truth which is that **God's sovereign choice** of Israel is based on grace alone—not on the merit of these scoundrels, these villainous, hateful cutthroats who would murder their brother, or their father for a shekel, or two. I think it is not possible to overstate the heinousness of what these brothers did to their father and brother—nothing justifies savagery or hatred. Ephesians 4:31-5:15:

31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven [a]you.

5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved [b]you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God [c]as a fragrant aroma. 3 But immorality [d]or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among [e]saints; 4 and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this you know with

certainty, that no [f]immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light 9 (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), 10 [g]trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even [h]expose them; 12 for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things become visible when they are [i]exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. 14 For this reason [j]it says,

**“Awake, sleeper,
And arise from the dead, (Isaiah 9:2, 29:16)
And Christ will shine on you.”**

15 Therefore [k]be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16 [l]making the most of your time, because the days are evil.⁸

Amen.

⁸Footnotes

- a. Ephesians 4:32 Two early mss read us
- b. Ephesians 5:2 One early ms reads us
- c. Ephesians 5:2 Lit for an odor of fragrance
- d. Ephesians 5:3 Lit and all
- e. Ephesians 5:3 Or holy ones
- f. Ephesians 5:5 I.e. one who commits sexual immorality
- g. Ephesians 5:10 Lit proving what
- h. Ephesians 5:11 Or reprove
- i. Ephesians 5:13 Or reproved
- j. Ephesians 5:14 Or He
- k. Ephesians 5:15 Lit look carefully
- l. Ephesians 5:16 Lit redeeming the time