

The term hatchet man has become commonplace for anyone who is tasked with conducting distasteful, illegal, or unfair "dirty work" to protect the reputation or power of their employer, or to tear down the enemy. Richard Nixon had a hatchet man and in the context of the Watergate scandal, the term hatchet man was used to refer to a trusted person tasked by his employer with destroying a political opponent by any means necessary. Charles Colson was known as the hatchet man for President Richard Nixon. But, that is not how Chuck Colson is remembered.

Chuck Colson was saved in 1973. "If Mr. Colson can repent of his sins," the Boston Globe wrote in a 1973 commentary, "there just has to be hope for everybody." In 1974, he pled guilty to obstruction of justice, and as a new believer, went to federal prison for a 1 to 3 year sentence. He ended up serving 7 months, and he left prison with a passion for mobilizing the church to reach prisoners with the gospel. Chuck Colson passed away 4 years ago known as an author, founder of prison ministries, and advocate for prisoners' rights.

Summary and catch-up to where we are in the story:

Jonathan preached on Genesis chapter 12. In Genesis 12 God chooses Abram out of all the people of the world to make for himself a people; the people of Israel. It is through Abram, through these people, God will bring the Savior of the world. The promise is in 12:2-3 where it says, "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Anthony preached on Genesis 13 and 14 where Abram and Lot separate and Abram then rescues Lot.

For Genesis 15, Terry Shanahan preached, and like Jonathan I was away on vacation that week. In Genesis 15, God makes a formal covenant with Abram. This is a very unusual thing, for the greater party to make the covenant and walk through the animals that were cut in two. God walked between the animals basically saying let what happened to these animals happen to me if I don't keep my promise to you Abram. There is something else unusual about the covenant. It probably wasn't the focus of that sermon a couple weeks ago, but it is important as we continue in the story. Genesis 15:13-14 says, then the Lord said to him, "Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.

Wait a minute God. What about making me a great nation, what about blessing me, what about making my name great. Why do my descendants have to spend 400 years enslaved and mistreated? Doesn't seem like a strange way to begin a covenant relationship with your people – 400 years of turmoil. God's ways are certainly not our ways! Remember this as it is important and we will get back to it.

We didn't talk preach on Genesis 16, but this is where Abram takes matters into his own hands. Sarai, Abram's wife had not become pregnant, the promise seemed to be in jeopardy, so Sarai recommended, and Abram agreed, and Abram had a son with Sarai's servant Hagar. His name was Ishmael. Abram was 86.

Jonathan preached on Genesis 17 and this is where Abram and Sarai become Abraham and Sarah. God makes another covenant and gives Abraham the sign of circumcision. Jonathan noted Abraham's immediate obedience to this seemingly difficult request. God makes it clear to Abraham that his promise and his chosen people will not be

carried out through Ishmael. Abraham and Sarah will have a son and they will call him Isaac. God also promises to make Ishmael's descendants into a great nation, but the covenant people will come through Isaac.

Our next sermon, last week in fact, was on Genesis chapter 22. In Genesis 18-21, Abraham is visited by the Lord, Abraham pleads for Sodom and Gomorrah, Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed, Isaac is born, and Hagar and Ismael are sent away. In chapter 22, God tests Abraham. Remember he asks him to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham passes the test, and God provides a ram in Isaac's place.

In chapters 23 through 36, a lot happens that we are skipping over to get to today's text. Sarah dies and Abraham buys a field and cave for burial of Sarah and his descendants. Abraham then arranges, through his master servant, a plan for getting Isaac a wife from among his people rather than the foreigners among whom they were living. Isaac marries Rebekah. We then learn that Abraham had taken another wife who bore him 6 more sons. He sent each of them away from Isaac to the east with gifts, but it says that when he died, he left everything to Isaac. Abraham dies at 175 and we see that Isaac, who is now 75, and Ishmael, who is now 89 come together to bury their father next to Sarah. We learn that Ishmael indeed had 12 sons who became 12 tribes living near the eastern border of Egypt.

The story turns to Isaac's sons. Isaac had twin boys, Jacob and Esau. God told Rebekah that she had two nations in her womb and that the older would serve the younger. Esau, who was older, ends up selling his birthright to Jacob for some stew. In a repeat of what Abraham did with Sarah, Isaac tells King Abimelek that Rebekah is his sister. Remember in Genesis 20 Abraham did the same thing. Both Abraham and Isaac it says were worried about being killed so that they could take their wife

because she was so beautiful. In both stories, the king finds out, is unhappy, but protects them and allows them to stay. Esau intermarries with the foreigners they are living among and we see Jacob and Rebekah work together to trick Isaac into blessing Jacob before he dies.

Esau is rightfully angry and plans to kill Jacob. So, Rebekah send Jacob to live with her brother, Laban. Before he leaves, Isaac blesses him again and instructs him not to marry a foreigner, but to marry from among their own people. During Jacob's travel to stay with Laban he has a vision and God promises him the land on which he is resting, to make his descendants numerous, and to bless all people through him. Jacob stays with Laban for 14 years and marries both of his daughters. He wanted to marry Rachel, but he was deceived by Laban into marrying Leah first. After the 14 years of service, 7 for each wife, Jacob stays another 20 years with Laban.

Jacob begins to have children. With Leah he had Rueben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. Rachel, like Sarah, could not conceive so, also like Sarah, gave her husband her servant to have kids with. Bilhah bore Dan and Naphtali. Leah had stopped conceiving after four sons, so she gave Jacob her servant to continue to have children with. Zilpah bore Gad and Asher. Leah then bore two more sons, Issachar and Zebulun. Rachel then again bore another son, Joseph. After 11 sons being born Jacob prepares to leave Laban. This is an interesting and messy split that you should read, but I will say that it involves more lying and deceit, and trickery.

As Jacob is heading back, he prepares to meet Esau again. This meeting goes much better than expected. Jacob settles in Canaan. Jacob's daughter Dinah is defiled by one of the local men, and Simeon and Levi trick the men of the city into being circumcised and then kill them all while they are in pain and take back their sister, Dinah. Jacob is not

happy about what they have done, because he is fearful there will be retribution. God then tells Jacob to go and settle in Bethel, the place where he had the vision on the way to Laban many years ago. Jacob cleanses the household of all foreign gods and sets off for Bethel where he builds an altar. Rachel gives birth to a second son, Jacob's 12th, named Benjamin. But, Rachel dies in childbirth. So, the wife Jacob loved bore Joseph and Benjamin.

Jacob visits his father Isaac. Isaac dies, and Jacob and Esau bury him together. We also see Jacob being called Israel for the first time. We see Abraham's descendants being formed into a nation.

Chapter 36 is a list of all of Esau's descendants, and that brings us to the text for today.

Why was it important to recap the story? I want to make sure we don't miss a few themes here. Remember that as Christians, we are the descendants of Abraham, grafted in through Christ. This is our story. We are God's chosen people. Paul says in Galatians 3:29, If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. These are not just stories, but they mean something. They reveal the character of God. They teach us about our relationship with Him.

When I studied the Abrahamic covenant in school I had to write a research paper on the subject. I didn't know what I would find, and I determined that what we could learn most from studying this covenant is that we could learn things about God's character. I listed five attributes of God that we can see. God is A Relational God, A Self-Sufficient God, A Faithful and Trustworthy God, An Unconditional God, and An On-Time God.

Relational: God talks with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob throughout the story. Abraham even carries on conversations with God. We see this all the way back in the Garden of Eden and in the story of Cain and Abel.

Self-sufficient: One example is that God waited 25 years to give Abraham his promised son, it was clear to all who witnessed this birth that God alone had made this happen. “The birth of a child to a barren woman of advanced years shows them (and us) that this special child is a gift of God.”¹

Faithful and Trustworthy: No fewer than six times God reiterates his promises to Abraham. He promises tangible things in the near term as in addition to the long-term and intangible. Each time God comes through the trust is deepened breaking the pattern of distrust that Adam and Eve had in the Fall.

Unconditional: God does not need our help. He is the one who walked between the animals. God’s promises endure despite our attempts not because of them.

On-time: God acts in his time. Isaac wasn’t late, there was a reason. God was on-time with the Ram when Isaac was set to be sacrificed.

However, when I am thinking about a sermon rather than academic knowledge, what are the main truths that will help us. I see Genesis as extremely encouraging.

Did you see all of the sin, deceit, trickery, and violence in the recap?

God’s people are not perfect, and God’s promises are not dependent on people, they are dependent on God.

¹ Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 134.

Did you notice that God routinely choose people to continue his covenant that maybe people would not have chosen.

Let's look at Genesis 37. Thank you for reading it. The story picks up with Joseph at age 17. There are different theories on the ages of Joseph's older brothers. They could range from 43 to 21 or they could all be between Joseph's age of 17 and about 24. His younger brother, Benjamin is thought to be between 1 and 10 at the time. Joseph is the first born of Rachel, whom Jacob loved, and it is clear he is the favorite son. It says this in the passage. Jacob made him a special coat and favored him. It says his brothers hated him because of this.

Well, Joseph probably doesn't help the situation at all when he announces that he has had some dreams. In the first dream, Joseph says that he and his brothers were all in the field binding grain when his sheave stood up and the 11 other sheaves bowed down to his sheave. His brothers asked if he intended to rule over them and it says that his brothers hated him all the more.

His second dream had the sun, the moon, and 11 stars bowing down to him. Jacob asked if he, his mother, and his brothers would all bow down to him. It says that his brothers were jealous, but Jacob kept this in mind.

This is just the start of Joseph's interaction with dreams and interpreting dreams as we will see in the coming weeks.

Sometime later Jacob sends Joseph out to the fields to check on his brothers and bring word back. Well, Joseph's brothers saw him coming and plotted to kill him. Reuben, the oldest, convinces them not to kill Joseph but to throw him in a cistern instead. Reuben was planning to rescue Joseph later. Well, apparently Reuben was not around and when some Ishmaelites come by, Judah has the idea to sell him as a slave

rather than let him die, since he is their brother after all. Notice that these people are there 2nd cousins. Descendants of Ishmael. They take Joseph to Egypt. It says later that he is sold to Potiphar, and Egyptian, One of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard. Remember the covenant God made with Abraham when he started by promising the 400 years in captivity. Well this sets that into motion. The 400 years happens due to sin. The sin of selling Joseph.

Reuben comes back and is distraught over the empty cistern. He doesn't know what to tell Jacob. The brother kill a goat, put the blood on Joseph's coat and tell Jacob that they found it. Jacob assumes Joseph is dead, and he is inconsolable.

In the coming weeks we will preach through many of the highlights of the story of Joseph, so I don't want to ruin the story or the points of those, but to flesh out what we are learning in Genesis 37, we need to look at a couple of pieces.

You see, Joseph's brothers thought that they were putting an end to his dreams through their actions. They had no idea that they were not only fulfilling his dreams, but a prophecy and promise given to their great-grandfather Abraham that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there.

As you probably know, Joseph goes through many hard times, but eventually rises to a position of power, saves many people, including his own family, and his brothers do indeed bow down to him.

Joseph had a godly perspective on his suffering and the sin of his brothers. Genesis 45:5-7 do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the

land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

And in Genesis 50:20-21 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

And the Psalmist goes even one more step forward. Psalm 105:16-22 He called down famine on the land and destroyed all their supplies of food; and he sent a man before them—Joseph, sold as a slave.

They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons, till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the Lord proved him true.

The king sent and released him, the ruler of peoples set him free.

He made him master of his household, ruler over all he possessed, to instruct his princes as he pleased and teach his elders wisdom.

David, does not see this as an accident. God ordained the selling, God ordained the slavery, God ordained the famine, God used it all for His glory.

This is the view Christians should have of suffering.

Here is the main point of the sermon, encouragement:

If you are stuck in a pattern of sin, God's promises are still true. If you are stuck in a pattern of sin, God still loves you. If you are stuck in a pattern of sin, God can still use you. God's chosen people are not set apart by being free from sin, but by His faithfulness. Look at the story of God's people from Genesis 12 through Genesis 37. I don't have time to enumerate all the lies, deceit, violence, distrust of God. Or, look to the

future of God's people and all the sin after he led them out of Egypt. Remember that in Deuteronomy 9:4-6 it says:

After the Lord your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, "The Lord has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness." No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is going to drive them out before you. It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the Lord your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.

It is not about our righteousness, it is about God's righteousness, and the righteousness of Jesus in which we share.

If you feel you are not good enough, you are. 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 says:

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."

Remember what Paul was saved from, remember that he was killing Christians before he met Jesus. Then remember that as a missionary, Paul routinely mentioned the thorn in his flesh. He suffered and felt inadequate at times. Remember the shipwrecks and the imprisonment.

And, what do we see in the story. God chooses Isaac, not the first born, Ishmael. God chooses Jacob, not the first born, Esau. God used the 11th born Joseph for great things, and carried his line to Jesus through Judah, not Reuben. The line to Jesus included a prostitute named Rahab. It included a King named David who was the youngest and smallest of Jesse's sons.

The disciples of Jesus included a tax collector.

If you, like Joseph must have felt, feel like you are stuck in a pit, nothing is going right, and God has abandoned you; He hasn't. If you, like Joseph (as we will see in the coming chapters) continue to do the right thing only to have bad things happen; God is still working. Romans 8:26-30, which we read earlier, says:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

In 1725, John was born in Wapping, a district in London near the Thames. His father was a shipping merchant, and his mother was a devout Christian, but she died of tuberculosis when he was six years old. For the next few years, John was raised by his emotionally distant stepmother while his father was at sea. He spent some time at a boarding school where he was mistreated and rebelled. At the age of eleven, he joined his father on a ship as an apprentice; his seagoing career would be marked by headstrong disobedience.

As a youth, John began a pattern of coming very close to death, examining his relationship with God, then relapsing into bad habits. As a sailor, he denounced his faith after being influenced by a shipmate. In a series of letters he later wrote, "Like an unwary sailor who quits his port just before a rising storm, I renounced the hopes and comforts of the Gospel at the very time when every other comfort was about to fail me." His disobedience caused him to be pressed into the Royal Navy, and he took advantage of opportunities to overstay his leave and finally deserted to visit a family friend with whom he had fallen in love. After enduring humiliation for deserting, he managed to get himself traded to a slave ship where he began a career in slave trading.

John often openly mocked the captain by creating obscene poems and songs about him that became so popular the crew began to join in. He entered into disagreements with several colleagues that resulted in his being starved almost to death, imprisoned while at sea and chained like the slaves they carried, then outright enslaved and forced to work on a plantation in Sierra Leone. After several months he came to think of Sierra Leone as his home, but his father intervened after John sent him a letter describing his circumstances, and a ship found him by coincidence. John claimed the only reason he left was because of that family friend he loved.

While aboard the ship Greyhound, John gained notoriety for being one of the most profane men the captain had ever met. In a culture where sailors commonly used oaths and swore, John was admonished several times for not only using the worst words the captain had ever heard, but creating new ones to exceed the limits of verbal debauchery. In March 1748, while the Greyhound was in the North Atlantic, a violent storm came upon the ship that was so rough it swept overboard a crew member who was standing where John had been moments before. After hours of the crew emptying water from the ship and expecting to be capsized, John and another mate tied themselves to the ship's pump to keep from being washed overboard, working for several hours. After proposing the measure to the captain, John had turned and said, "If this will not do, then Lord have mercy upon us!"

About two weeks later, the battered ship and starving crew landed in Lough Swilly, Ireland. For several weeks before the storm, John had been reading *The Christian's Pattern*, a summary of the 15th-century *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis. The memory of his own "Lord have mercy upon us!" uttered during a moment of desperation in the storm did not leave him; he began to ask if he was worthy of God's mercy or in any way redeemable as he had not only neglected his faith but directly opposed it, mocking others who showed theirs, deriding and denouncing God as a myth. He came to believe that God had sent him a profound message and had begun to work through him.

John's conversion did not change his entire life immediately, but he contacted the family of the woman he loved and announced his intentions to marry her. Her parents were hesitant as he was known to be unreliable and impetuous. They knew he was profane, but they allowed him to write to Polly, and he set to begin to submit to authority

for her sake. He sought a place on a slave ship bound for Africa, and John and his crewmates participated in most of the same activities he had written about before; the only immorality from which he was able to free himself was profanity. After a severe illness his resolve was renewed, yet he retained the same attitude towards slavery as was held by his contemporaries. John continued in the slave trade through several voyages where he sailed up rivers in Africa – now as a captain – procured slaves being offered for sale in larger ports, and subsequently transported them to North America. In between voyages, he married Polly in 1750 and he found it more difficult to leave her at the beginning of each trip. After three shipping experiences in the slave trade, John was promised a position as ship's captain with cargo unrelated to slavery when, at the age of thirty, he collapsed and never sailed again.

When he ended his seafaring life, John began studying theology, became opposed to slavery, and was ordained in the Church of England. It is said that everywhere he preached, they had to add on to the building because there was not enough room for all the people that came. The John we are talking about is John Newton, and he wrote Amazing Grace to summarize his life. Ironically, Amazing Grace never became particularly popular until it took hold as a spiritual sung in the United States by the very slaves he once traded.

If you are stuck in a pattern of sin, God's promises are still true. If you are stuck in a pattern of sin, God still loves you. If you are stuck in a pattern of sin, God can still use you.

If you feel you are not good enough, in Christ you are.

If you, like Joseph must have felt, feel like you are stuck in a pit, nothing is going right, and God has abandoned you; He hasn't.

Benediction – Romans 11:33-36

33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

34 “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his
counselor?”

35 “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?”

36 For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be
the glory forever! Amen.