

God's Presence in the Pit (2)

The Life of Joseph

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Bible Text: Genesis 37:12-36
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We take God's word this morning to Genesis 37. The text this morning will be verses 12 through 36 of the chapter, those are the verses that we will read this morning. Remember, no doubt what happened at the beginning verses of the chapter where Joseph was given that coat of many colors and showed favoritism by his father, Jacob. Joseph also had a couple of dreams that made his brothers very angry, that filled them with hatred and envy against him and now we read what happens in the history that follows. Beginning at verse 12, Genesis 37,

12 And his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. 13 And Israel said unto Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem? come, and I will send thee unto them. And he said to him, Here am I. 14 And he said to him, Go, I pray thee, see whether it be well with thy brethren, and well with the flocks; and bring me word again. So he sent him out of the vale of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. 15 And a certain man found him, and, behold, he was wandering in the field: and the man asked him, saying, What seekest thou? 16 And he said, I seek my brethren: tell me, I pray thee, where they feed their flocks. 17 And the man said, They are departed hence; for I heard them say, Let us go to Dothan. And Joseph went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan. 18 And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. 19 And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. 20 Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams. 21 And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him. 22 And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again. 23 And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours that was on him; 24 And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it. 25 And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels

bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt. 26 And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? 27 Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content. 28 Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt. 29 And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes. 30 And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child is not; and I, whither shall I go? 31 And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood; 32 And they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no. 33 And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. 34 And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. 35 And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him. 36 And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard.

Thus far we read God's word. Let's ask God's blessing on the preaching and prayer.

Father in heaven, as we continue to look at the suffering of thy servant Joseph, we pray, Father, that thou will give to us understanding of this passage, we pray that thou will give to us understanding of our own suffering and of thy presence with us, and the sufferings that we go through in this life. And so we pray that in this way that we may be strengthened, that our faith may be strengthened, and that we may learn to look unto thee, and see thy sovereignty, and see thy love, and see thy great power. Wilt thou give strength to thy servant as he proclaims this word to us that he may proclaim it in truth as a servant of Jesus Christ? All this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

We have to understand something about perspective this morning as we look at this passage. Our perspective is that we know the whole story. We know what happened to Joseph through this suffering in his life. We know the end. We know how God worked this for good in Joseph's life and how God used this for the good of his people because he brought his people down into Egypt to show a great and power deliverance in bringing them out of Egypt and bringing them into the Promised Land, how that pointed God's people in the Old Testament to Jesus Christ and how it points us to Jesus Christ as well. That's our perspective on it, but we do have to understand that as Joseph is going through this suffering, as he is hated by his brothers, and now he read in this passage he's even sold by his brothers to be a slave in Egypt, Joseph does not know the end. Joseph is living in the midst of this. Jacob is living in the midst of this. Joseph's brothers are in the middle of this as well. They don't know the end. And we have to remember that as we look at the passage because the same thing is true for us in our lives right now. We know the

promises of God, but we don't know exactly how they're going to be carried out in our lives. We know that God has promised to work all things for our good, but in the middle of our suffering, especially when that suffering is very dark and it's very deep when we're down in that pit of suffering, it's hard for us to see anything else but the suffering that's before our eyes at that very moment. We live our lives like Joseph lived his, not knowing the future but there's a purpose for that and a reason for that, and that is that we would learn to trust in God.

Joseph was learning to trust in God and the sufferings in our life, we are learning to trust in God and that's the important question we look at when we look at this passage and the suffering of Joseph in his life. We look at this question: where is God in all of this? Where is God? That's striking. We're going to see that as you read the passage, you don't really read about God in this passage. You don't read here about his sovereignty, that doctrine is not set before you here. You don't read about God's love specifically, that doctrine of God is not said before us here. And so that's the question, where is God in all of this, and we want to understand the truth of who God is and how that comes to bear upon this part of the life of Joseph, especially the suffering that he was going through. God is here. God has a purpose for this suffering in Joseph's life, and God's purpose is this: it's to conform him to the image of his Son, and that's God's purpose with all of our suffering too, it's to conform us to the image of his Son. And the sufferings that we go through in this life, at times it feels like God's beating upon us, that his heavy hand is upon us, and it's true that he is, and it's painful, but the beating has a purpose. He's molding us, he's shaping us with that beating to look more and more like Jesus Christ.

That's what's happening in this history that we look at this morning. That's what's happening in the life of Joseph. We see God beating upon him here but with a purpose, a good purpose, a beautiful purpose. And so as we look at the text, we want to see it in the light of that, God's presence in the pit. When I talk about the pit here in the theme of the sermon, I'm not saying that the the pit here is symbolic, but I'm using the pit here in the text to speak to all of the suffering that Joseph was going through. His brothers threw him in the pit, and also this includes now his being down in that pit, but his brothers selling him as a slave into Egypt. The hatred of the brothers for him, his separation from his family, the pit points us to all of that suffering but we want to see in it God's presence. God was present here. He was working sovereignly to accomplish his purpose.

So we consider this morning this text using the theme "God's Presence in the Pit." We notice, first, the dark hatred, the darkness of that pit that Joseph was going through is the hatred of his brothers, first of all, and how that's shown. Secondly, the dangerous separation. Joseph was separated from his family. That put him in a dangerous position spiritually. And finally, we want to see, then, the divine presence. As I said, the pit represents the evil acts and the crimes that were committed against Joseph by his brothers. The pit here does not simply speak to the physical pit that Joseph was in, but I'm speaking here as well of his brothers selling him as a slave into Egypt, and we want to see what led up to that, first of all, because these are striking events too.

Joseph's brothers led the flocks to Shechem to find a grazing land for those flocks, and that's because these shepherds didn't own any land in the land of Canaan, so they went from place to place looking for good pasture for their flocks. On this particular journey, the brothers take the flocks to Shechem and they told their father that that was where they were going to go. Striking it is, too, that they went to Shechem, the place where they had killed Shechem and Hamor and killed the men of that city as well. Now they go into that area.

Jacob, after not hearing from his sons for quite some time, decides to send his son on a dangerous journey. That's what's striking about this, too, it was a dangerous journey. First of all, Jacob's going to send his 17-year-old son all by himself to Shechem, which is at least 60, if not 70 miles away from Hebron where Jacob is living and his family is living. So he sends his 17-year-old son all by himself. Not only that, but it's a dangerous journey because heading towards Shechem, the reputation of Jacob and his sons was not very good. Jacob speaks of that in Genesis 34 because of what his sons had done. Now he sends his favorite son into the wilderness all by himself, there could be beasts, and not only that but there are enemies of Jacob and his family there, and that's maybe why he's worried about his sons and his flocks as well. He wants to know how they're doing. They're in enemy territory. Are they safe? Are they okay? He hasn't heard from them for quite a while. It was a dangerous journey because of that, but it's also a dangerous journey because Jacob knows what his sons think of Joseph. He knows that they hate Joseph. In fact, it's somewhat surprising that Jacob would even send Joseph to check on his brothers when Jacob knows it. There's no explanation for that in the text. We don't know exactly what he was thinking. Why didn't he send servants at this time? We don't know, but he sends his son Joseph.

When Joseph arrives in Shechem, he's willing to go, and now Joseph goes and when he arrives in Shechem he cannot find his brothers. He's looking around for them. He's wandering around. But by the providence of God, a man notices this and he comes to Joseph and says, "Well, who are you looking for? What are you looking for?" Joseph then describes his brothers and the herd that they are watching over as well, and the man says, "Oh yeah, I saw them and I heard them say that they were going to go on to Dothan." So now Joseph has to travel another 20-25 miles north to Dothan. This is a long journey that Joseph is on; you can think that probably this would take him about a week to walk this distance all the way from Hebron to Shechem, which is 50-60 miles or 60-70 miles, I said, and then another 20-25 miles to Dothan.

As the brothers see Joseph approaching, they hatch a plan to kill Joseph and get rid of him by throwing his body then down into a pit. When they see Joseph coming, we know what they've been talking about. They've been talking about their hatred of Joseph. They've been talking what they're going to do about Joseph, and now they see their opportunity. Here comes their brother. They can see him far off. And so they hatch a plan. Their plan is to kill him, and that's not out of character for these brothers, is it? We saw that last week. They're cold-blooded killers. They killed Hamor and Shechem and all the men who were living in that city as well after lying to them that they were just circumcised and they would allow Shechem to marry their sister. They're cold-blooded

killers, liars, and all the rest, so it's not out of character for them even to consider killing their own brother. And they say that after killing him, we'll just throw his body into a pit, one of these old wells in the area that's dried up, and his body can decompose there in that pit. They don't even have to dig a grave for him. And then they would lie to Jacob and tell him that a wild beast, maybe a lion or bear must have come along and killed him. That's their plan.

What provoked them to this extreme measure and to this plan that they had? What made them so angry as they see Joseph coming? Well, it's this, what makes them so angry, what fills them with hatred and envy is Joseph's position of authority. Joseph's position of authority that comes out in two ways. First of all, in the coat. When they see Joseph coming far off, how did they know it was Joseph far off? They spotted the coat, the coat that their father had given to him, the coat of favoritism. That coat, remember, symbolized the promotion that Joseph got above all of his older brothers, and that's evident from the fact, too, that he wasn't out with them taking care of the flocks, he was back home with his father. That's all part of that promotion and they were still angry about it. They're seething because of that promotion. That fills them with hatred at this time. But second, it was the dreams. Verse 19, "Behold, this dreamer cometh." That's their nickname for him, and probably heard that before from them. They called him the dreamer. And then at the end of verse 20 they say, "This is the reason we will do that, and we shall see what will become of his dreams. That's why they're going to kill him. We'll see what becomes of those dreams." They hated him because of those dreams. They hated him because God said, God said that they would bow down to Joseph one day, and they're saying, "No way are we going to bow down to him." So they're killing the dream by killing the dreamer. There will be no more promotion for Joseph. They will never bow down to him, "We'll kill him and then none of these things will come to pass."

Again, remember, none of this is out of character for these brothers, but the plan does change. The plan changes. What got them thinking about a change in their plan is their brother Reuben, the oldest brother, and he says to his brothers, "Let's not kill Joseph, our brother, but instead let's throw him in a pit and we'll just let him die there. We won't have to do the deed ourselves, we'll just throw him in the pit and he'll die there." But Reuben's intention was later to come along to that pit and deliver Joseph out of that pit and bring him back to his father.

Now we might think as we read about that here in the text, well, finally someone's talking some sense. Maybe one of these brothers is a believer and converted and saved. After all, this Reuben seems to make sense here and he seems to love his brother. But that's not what is motivating Reuben in what he does. Instead, we know that Reuben was in trouble with his father because he had sexual relations with one of Jacob's wives. Reuben is in trouble with his father. His father's angry with him, and so Reuben is hoping to win his way into the good graces of his father by saving Joseph. So he wasn't motivated by the right reason, Reuben was motivated by saving his own tail, he is motivated by himself and what he wanted, his own selfishness. But the brothers agree with Reuben's counsel and they think about it, well, it's quite something to kill their own brother, so they go along with that plan of Reuben.

Just imagine for a minute what that was like when Joseph comes to his brothers. He's happy to finally have found them. Maybe he comes even with a smile on his face. "I've been looking all over for you guys. I ran into this guy." And then he stops probably mid-sentence because he can see the hatred in the eyes and the faces of his brothers. And they rush after him and they grab him violently, and they rip his coat off of him. First thing they do, rip his coat off of him and they throw him down into this pit, this old dried out well.

You can imagine the struggle. First, maybe Joseph is shocked, then he's probably struggling trying to get away, but no way he can get away from his brothers. They throw him down in that pit and then you can hear Joseph begging out for mercy, "Get me outta here! You guys, come on, don't leave me here! Show some mercy to me!" But they will not show any mercy to their brother. They're unfazed by it all, so much so the text says that after they throw him down in the pit and their plan is to leave them there to die, what do they do? They pull out their lunch and they eat. It's as if they don't have a conscience in what they're doing. They're not fazed at all by what they're doing. They're hardened in their own hearts that shows the depth of their selfishness and depravity.

But now as they're eating their lunch, a new plan is hatched because along come these Ishmaelite traders on the road to Egypt heading South. They're bringing their wares there to Egypt to trade, and so instead of killing their brother, they decide that they'll sell their brother to these traders, make a little money, make a little profit off of it, and then they don't have to bear that in their own consciences that they had killed their own brother, their flesh and blood. In essence, this will accomplish the same thing, they're thinking. It'll get rid of their brother. They won't have to deal with him anymore. We see again their hatred and their envy. They simply want Joseph out of the way.

So this is what they do, they sell their brother to be a slave in Egypt where these Ishmaelite traders are going. This is an awful sin of hatred and envy that we see in these brothers of Joseph, but there are two things about this that we want to see and apply to ourselves this morning. First of all, when we look at the pit here and all that's included with that pit, the selling of Joseph as slave into Egypt, their original plan of killing their brother Joseph, we see here that pit points us to the hatred and envy of his brothers. We've noticed that along the way. We noticed that last week. But now we have to look specifically at that for a moment, and the question for us is do we have this in our hearts? Hatred and envy, this hatred and envy that the brothers had for Joseph, do we have this in our hearts? It would be easy for us to look at this history and say, "No, never. I would never think about killing my brother or sister. I would never think about leaving him down in a pit to die. I would never sell my brother or my sister to be a slave somewhere and get rid of them out of my lives." But we have to look a little deeper than that. We have to remember what Jesus said in Matthew 5 when he addresses murder and killing there, Matthew 5:21 and 22 where Jesus said, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger

of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." Now the question is for us again, is this sin of hatred and envy found in our hearts? Have we been angry without a cause with husband, wife, child, parent, friend? We'll then we've committed this sin of murder.

Hatred often arises out of envy; we don't like what others have and we want what they have for ourselves. We can look at it from the perspective of physical things but it's not just that. It's not just they have a toy or a child, or they have a boat, or they have more money than I do and I'm envious of that. That leads to hatred towards that person, it's true, but it can be more than that. They have certain gifts that I would like. They have popularity in this world. They have a certain position that I would want. That can happen in families. That can happen among brothers and sisters, that brothers and sisters are jealous of the others and the gifts and abilities that they have, especially when we're young but it can happen when older as well, and we see that certain ones get attention because of their gifts and abilities and we don't get that same kind of attention. We want that for ourselves, and so we take that out on them. We try to push them down so that we can be higher. We can do that in families. We can do that in marriages too, instead of seeing the gifts and abilities in the other. And we feel insecure about that. What we do then, we feel insecure because of the things we don't have and we try to push them down to elevate ourselves. That's motivated by envy and hatred and we have to heed what the word of God says about that. Jesus says you'll be in danger of the judgment. You're in danger of hell itself if we continue to live in that hatred and anger. Do we have that in our hearts? We need to examine ourselves.

Along with that, we should read what Solomon says about that in Proverbs 14:30. He says there, "A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones." What it says there is that envy and hatred will destroy us. You live in envy and hatred towards others, it's going to destroy you because it will overcome you like it did the brothers of Joseph. We must put that away in our own lives, instead what we ought to do is delight in the gifts and the good things that God gives to others. You see, often we take God out of the picture. It's God who gives good things to others. He gives gifts to them which enable them to do certain things.

Just think how different it would have been in the home of Jacob if the brothers would have seen the gifts in Joseph and recognized that it was God who was going to put him in a position over them, and they would have delighted in that. What a different home, the home of Jacob and Joseph would have been, and that's our calling to delight in the good gifts that God gives to others, and to give thanks for them, and to encourage them in one another. There is the positive that we ought to see, but there's a second thing that we ought to look at this morning. It may be that we are in the receiving end of this hatred and be like Joseph was. It may be that we find ourselves in this particular pit in our own lives. All of us, I would dare say, at one time or another have been on the receiving end of this envy and hatred. Maybe not to the degree that Joseph has, but we've received it. We know what this looks like. Joseph really was abused by his brothers. He was abused verbally, he was abused physically by his brothers. We can understand what that is to be hurt in such a way, to be despised by someone else. Maybe we've had it in school with

classmates. Maybe we've had it with a brother or sister in our own family. Maybe, ought not to be, but maybe some of this goes on in marriages. Maybe this is something that has gone on for a long time. Maybe it's something that you look back on in the past, it's not continuing right now, but it went on for a long time in the past and there are scars that you still experience in your life because of it. For others of us, maybe it's just momentary, it's little bits at a time that this suffering comes upon us. We face this in our lives.

The life of Joseph is here to teach us about the reality of this particular pit, the pit of being hated by others, despised by others, abused even by others. It's awful suffering. You see that here how awful it would be to be Joseph here, but we also see that God is present here. We have to learn that this morning. It's awful suffering but God is present and we'll come to see and know that too. But there's another aspect to this pit, the suffering that Joseph endured that we ought to see here in the passage. It's this: through the pit and being sold into slavery, Joseph was separated from his family and the church, and this was an extremely dangerous place for Joseph to be as he goes to the land of Egypt. Think about it, a 17-year-old boy, a young man who's still maturing and developing now completely separated from his family and not because he wants to be. Now we read the stories, there are children, young people today, who are sold into slavery in a similar way. It happens still in the world today. How awful that is, but here we want to see the spiritual significance of this. This has been forced upon Joseph. And from one perspective we might say, well, maybe what a relief. He doesn't have to deal with these other brothers anymore. They're a constant thorn in his side and now he doesn't have to deal with their hatred and their envy anymore. I don't think Joseph was looking at it from that perspective, but there's something else we ought to see here, it's not a good thing for Joseph to be separated from his family because he's also being separated from his father.

Now we know, we saw last week that Joseph and Jacob were very close in their relationship. They loved one another. They fellowshiped with one another. Jacob was giving instruction to his son, Joseph, and that's what we have to see here. Now Joseph is separated from that. He's separated from the instruction that his father would give to him. He's separated from his spiritual support. He's separated from the one to whom he is accountable in all of his life. But in being separated from his family, we also ought to see, then, that Joseph is separated from the church because they're one and the same thing. In the Old Testament here at this time in Old Testament history, in the line of generations, family and church are the same. Joseph is separated from family worship, that was church worship.

Now we know that the sacrifices and the tabernacle worship and all of that had not yet been formally instituted by God, but yet we read at the end of Genesis 4 that men began to call upon the name of the Lord. Families worshiped together. They sacrificed together. They prayed together. They glorified and worshiped God together and now Joseph is separated from that. It would be like being separated from the preaching of the gospel that we receive here each week. It would be like being separated from all accountability. Joseph is going to face all kinds of temptations in this pagan land of Egypt, all kinds of temptations, without the church, without the preaching, without instruction, without his

father there and accountability. That's a dangerous place to be. It would be like a 17-year-old boy being given freedom to go to Las Vegas all by himself and being told what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. That's what was happening to Joseph at this time in his life. Now I understand, he was a slave and all the rest, but we learn later on the temptations that he faced and the only thing that could preserve him is the grace of God. It would be like a young man being given free rein on the Internet. Look at whatever you want. Do whatever you want. There will be no accountability at all for you. That's what Joseph now had in his own life. You see Satan working in this. Satan was working to separate Joseph not only from his family but from the church so that Joseph, Satan is thinking, will turn away from God, won't trust in God, will live in disobedience. By the way, because Joseph is the son of Jacob that is God fearing, the others are walking in sin, Satan doesn't worry about them. It's Joseph that he wants.

So he seeks to divide and conquer. There is an important point that we must see here. The important point is how dangerous it is to be separated from the church of Christ. It's dangerous spiritually for us in this world if we are separated from the church of Christ. Isolation is so dangerous. It's dangerous to be separated from the preaching of the word and dangerous to be separated from the fellowship of believers here in the church as well. It's an important truth not because we would envision ways in which we are forced to be separated from the church or from our families, but there are those today who are overcome by the power of sin in their lives, and they think the best place for them is away from the church. And so they run from the church. They run from the leadership of the church. They run from the elders of the church who are concerned about them and their souls as they are called to be. Separation from the church usually takes place because of other sins in one's own life but they don't see those sins, they don't think those sins are so dangerous, and so they separate themselves from the church. But we have to see and understand that's not a good place to be. They say, "I don't want to be there. I don't want to face others. I don't want to hear what God has to say to me." They're like Jonah who's running away from God because he doesn't want to hear the word of God and be reminded constantly that he's walking in disobedience to the word of God. But we have to see and understand sometimes we can believe that lie, but it is the lie of Satan. That's what Satan wants to do, he wants to separate each one of us from the church of Christ. He wants to begin there, let sin take over in one's life, slowly separate that person from the church. It takes place over time, not all at once. And they think that they're okay in that separation from the church, that is even what God wants them to do, but it's the lie of Satan that a good place to be is separate from the church. We have to see and understand that's where Satan wants us to be, away from the preaching, away from accountability in the church. Although this was forced on Joseph, we must see the great danger of being separated from the church.

We saw this in our Belgic Confession class last week, the importance of church membership. Why must we be members in the church? And the Belgic Confession says, well, there's no salvation outside of the church. Why is that? Well, it's because in the church that we receive the preaching of the gospel. It's the chief means of grace. We need the accountability of answering to the office-bearers of the church, really to Christ himself through his servants. We need to be committed to this. We need this. We need

preaching. We need the sacraments. We need this accountability. Let's see and understand how much we need the church and not run away from the church when we're going through hardship and difficulty in our lives.

As we look at Joseph being separated from family and church, we ought to see, along with that, the way, the specific way in which this took place. We go back to this history here. We go back to the story. We find that Reuben returns to that pit that Joseph was thrown into. He returns to the pit and he doesn't find Joseph. That means that when the Ishmaelite traders came there, Reuben must have been absent. We don't know where Reuben was. Maybe he was out looking at the flock somewhere. His other brothers had decided to sell Joseph to these Ishmaelite traders. Well, Reuben returns to the pit with the intention of rescuing Joseph, remember, to save his own tail, to preserve his own reputation with his father, Jacob, but when he gets there, the pit is empty. That's because his brothers had sold him.

Now question for Reuben is, "Now what are we going to tell father?" Well, the brothers say, "We have a plan. We're gonna go back to the original plan. We're gonna do what we planned to do before even if we had killed him, we're going to deceive our father. We're gonna tell father that a wild beast had killed him." So they took that coat of Joseph, they killed one of the goats there in the flock, and they dipped that coat in the blood, let it dry, and now they take it back on the long journey back to Hebron. And when they found their way home, they brought that coat of Joseph to their father and they deceive him with the power of suggestion. They say, "Father, do you recognize this coat?" And Joseph comes to the conclusion or Jacob comes to the conclusion that his sons want him to come to. Joseph is dead because some wild beast has devoured him and he's not going to come back.

We read here that Jacob mourns, mourns for many days. He's inconsolable in his grief. And when we look at this grief of Jacob, there is something sinful about this grief of Jacob. It may be, in part, that he's filled with guilt that he had sent Joseph off to find his brothers and he thinks that he shouldn't have done that. He's taking this so hard because of his favoritism, favoritism comes out again that still had to anger the brothers of Joseph at this point. He weeps and he weeps on and on for days and days, not speaking to his brothers either, not showing concern and care for them. That had to bother them. So we see here that Jacob in his sorrow and mourning is not focused on the deliverance that was given, well, it could have been given to Joseph if Joseph had really died, but that's not the focus of Jacob in his sorrow.

But what we have to notice about this is, again, the hatred of Jacob's sons for Jacob 2. Think about that. They watch as their father mourns and grieves. They see his heart broken because he thinks Joseph is dead and their hearts are unmoved. Again, they're unfazed by this. We read nothing in the text that indicates that they have a conscience even that they're putting their father through such intense and great suffering. In fact, they even rise up to comfort him. They try to comfort and console him and tell him it's going to be okay. They knew the truth. They could have told him the truth, "Joseph's not dead.

He's alive." They seem to be nice in this, but it's all part of the deception what wicked and cruel men these sons of Jacob are.

We learn something from this too, how awful the sin of lying is. It's often the way it goes, one sin leads to another, and often to cover up our sins, we lie. That's what the brothers were doing here. One sin leads to another, and this leads to the sin of lying to their father. And we must not do this. We must see how awful that is, how lies can hurt other people. Children and young people, you're reminded here, don't set yourself on a pathway of lying to your parents because one lie leads to another lie, leads to another lie, that leads to habitual sin that will control and dominate your lives, and what happens is that we tell so many lies over time we can't tell the difference any longer between what is truth and what is the lie. God hates lying. He despises lying, and in the end those lies are found out. We know that's true when we see the big picture of Joseph's life, too, the lives of these brothers were found out.

But the question we have to face in all of this, this suffering of Joseph, he's hated by his brothers, he's sold as a slave, he's going now to the land of Egypt, he'll will be sold as a slave into Potiphar's house, along with that is being separated from family and then from church. Remember the question we want to face in all of this: where is God? Where is God in all of this abuse and suffering that Joseph went through? Awful things are happening to him. You and I really can't imagine the awful things that happened to Joseph here by experience, being separated from church and family unwillingly, being so hated by his brothers that they wanted him dead. They're eating lunch while he's crying out from the bottom of that pit for mercy, even as their plan was simply to let him die in the bottom of that pit. As the Ishamelite traders are hauling him away and he is crying out to his brothers for mercy that they would give the money back and that they would take him back, telling them that he would do anything maybe to get that done. But where is God in all of this? He lets this happen. He's in control of these things, we know. Is he just? Why does God allow this to happen? We might ask the same thing in our suffering. When we are hurt by others and it seems to go unseen, nothing is done about it, where's God in all of this? How does a loving God allow this to happen? Where is God in the abuse that I've gone through, and the suffering that I've gone through?

We have to take the truth of who God is and see all the suffering of Joseph in the light of that in our own suffering in the light of that. Maybe sometimes we don't even ask the question. We're confused by it all. God's sovereign, we know that, God's loving, we know that, and then there's awful suffering, how does that all fit together? That's what we want to see and understand this morning. First of all, we see this, where is God in all of this? Well, God is guiding all things for a purpose. God sovereignly is controlling everything that happens here in the life of Joseph, and that's striking too. Think of that. Remember, if we're living in this moment, we might say, well, what if this had happened? Or what if that had happened? What if Jacob didn't send Joseph but he sent some of his servants instead to find his brothers? Then Joseph wouldn't be in this situation. In fact, it doesn't make sense that Jacob would send Joseph and not some of his servants because of the dangerous journey, as we saw that he went on. And then what about this: who brings this man to find Joseph in Shechem and tell him that his brothers went to Dothan? Well, it

was God who did that. God brought that man providentially and he told Joseph that his brothers were there in Dothan. What if that man hadn't come and told Joseph that? And then the brothers are having lunch, who brought these Ishmaelite traders there? Well, God brought those Ishmaelite traders there at that particular time when Reuben was gone and the brothers decide to sell Joseph as a slave into Egypt, and that kept Reuben from rescuing his brother and bringing him back home to his father. What if the Ishmaelites traders hadn't...? We have to stop with those questions. There are no "what ifs" with God. You see and understand God was in control of everything that happened in the past in this history. God was in control. God is guiding everything that happens here.

The same thing is true in our lives. Where have you been hurt? What scars do you bear because of that? What hardship and struggle have you faced in your life? Well, the text is saying to you God's brought it. God's sovereign. God is in the heavens. He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased, Psalm 115:3 tells us. The scriptures teach us that God is a holy God. There's no one like him. As the Holy God he does all that he pleases for the glory of his name. He's in control of all of this suffering. He's present there. He's not just watching. He doesn't just sit there and watch the suffering we go through, he's present. Okay, he's present and he's guiding all of these things, but what about this, is God just? And the answer to that is, yes, God is just. He hates the crimes committed against his people. He hated what Joseph's brothers did to Joseph. God's sovereignty doesn't negate that he hates that sin. Scripture is clear on that as well, God hates that sin. We read in Romans 12 that, "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord." But remember what that means for us. What that means for us is that often when we're hurt by others, we want vengeance. We want justice and we want it now. No delayed justice. It has to be now. That's our own minds, often the way that we think. But we have to hear what Romans 12 says to us in our suffering when we're hurt and abused by others. Verse 17 and following, "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." And part of that is he will repay when the time is right. He is just. He hates that sin. He will take care of it when the time is right. But now here's the instruction for us: don't repay, don't seek vengeance, do this, "if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Overcome evil with good.

That's the proper response to suffering in our lives where we know God's sovereign, and he's just, and he hates that sin, and vengeance is his because we understand it's his, then we love and we serve even the enemies that we face. And then we see along with this, not only is God just but he is a God of love who works all things for our good. We know that in the cross of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This history points that out to us, the big picture of what's happening here. God was using this for the good of his church, using this for the good of his church and that he's bringing, in the big picture, his people down to Egypt to deliver them out of the bondage of Egypt to bring them to the Promised Land of Canaan, giving them these beautiful pictures of the salvation that is theirs and the promised Savior to come, but also using all of these events in the line of generations to preserve his people and the line of generations to bring the coming of the Messiah, our

Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who came to this earth to pay for our sins. We see that God is using this history for good, for our salvation, in fact. Joseph, in his life and the suffering he went through, was used for the salvation of the church. What's better, what's higher than that?

So we see the big picture this morning. The same is true for us. God's using it for our salvation and salvation of the church, all the suffering we go through. He's conforming Joseph to his image and God through our suffering is conforming us to his image. On the one hand, it's something to be beat on and hurt by people, their words, their actions and so on, but the struggle for us is to see God in that, make sense of God in that and we have to hear what God says. This is truth. The truth about God. The truth about the way he sees these things. The truth about what he's doing in the suffering in our lives. Do we believe in the greatness of God? Well, we must even in the worst of our suffering in this life. God is great. He's accomplishing his purpose for the glory of his name. May we be comforted in that precious knowledge. Amen.

Let's pray.

Our Father in heaven, there is suffering and hardship for us in this life. We have it to different degrees but we pray that we would not be separated from the truth of thy word, that we would not separate ourselves from it, but instead that we would see and understand the truth of who thou art, and the great things that thou hast done, that thou has worked it for our good. Help us, Father, in the sufferings we have whether it's been long ago or suffering we go through presently, that we would see it in the light of truth so that we would then be able to praise thee and glorify thee because we know thou art working all things and we're good. Comfort us in this precious knowledge and now hear and answer our prayer for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Introduction

- I. Although we know the end of Joseph's story, as Joseph lives it he does not know the end.
- II. The question in all of our painful circumstances is, Where is God in all of this?

The Life of Joseph
2. God's Presence in the Pit

I. The Dark Hatred

- A. The pit represents the evil acts and crimes committed against Joseph.

B. In this pit of Joseph's sufferings we learn about our suffering and our hatred.

II. The Dangerous Separation

- A. Through the pit and being sold into slavery, Joseph was in the dangerous place of being separated from his family and the church.

B. This dangerous separation took place not only through the sale of Joseph to the Ishmeelite traders, but also through the lie they told their father.

III. The Divine Presence

- A. The question in all of this is where is God?

B. We see the presence of God in all of this. God is guiding all things for a purpose.

1. God sovereignly controls all things that happen in the text.

2. We must believe also that God is just and good.