

It's good to see everyone. We're halfway through a short little series that Neil asked me to do. six of them, and this is number four, on the life of Joseph. And we're having to, the life of Joseph is a 10-part series, 12-part series, but I'm having to condense it into a six-part series. And today, we're in chapter 42. And we've got a long reading, so let's pay attention. You can find it in your bulletin, Genesis 42. When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, why do you look at one another? And he said, behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die. So 10 of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, The others, of course, were half-brothers. This is the son Benjamin, this is the son of Rachel, and the other sons are the sons of Leah. Where are we? Verse 4, but Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him. The whole favoritism thing is still there, right? Some sins are just hard to repent of. Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came for the famine was in the land of Canaan. Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land and Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him and their faces to the ground. Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. Where do you come from? He said. They said, from the land of Canaan, to buy food. And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. And he said to them, you are spies. You have come to see the nakedness of the land. They said to him, no, my lord, your servants have come to buy food. We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies. He said to them, no, it is the nakedness of the land that you have come to see. And they said, we, your servants, are 12 brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan. Behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more. But Joseph said to them, it is, as I said to you, you are spies. By this, you shall be treated. By the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of you and let him bring your brother while you remain confined that your words may be tested whether there is truth in you or else by the life of Pharaoh surely you are spies. And he put them all together in custody for three days. On the third day Joseph said to them, do this and you will live for I fear God. If you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain confined where you are in custody, and let the rest go and carry grain for the famine of your households, and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words will be verified and you shall not die.' And they did so. Then they said to one another, in truth, we are guilty concerning our brother. in that we saw the distress of his soul when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us. And Reuben answered them, did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood. They did not know that Joseph understood them, for they were as an interpreter between them. Then he turned away from them and wept and he returned to them and spoke to them and he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes and Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain and to replace every man's money in his sack and to give them provisions for the journey. This was done for them. Then they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed. And as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money in the mouth of his sack. And he said to his brothers, my money has been put back. Here it is in the mouth of my sack. At this

their hearts failed them and they turned trembling to one another saying, what is this that God has done to us? When they came to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, the man, the lord of the land, spoke roughly to us and took us to be spies of the land. But we said to him, we are honest men. We have never been spies. We are 12 brothers, sons of our father. One is no more, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan. Then the man, the lord of the land, said to us, by this I shall know that you are honest men. Leave one of your brothers with me and take grain for the famine of your households and go your way. Bring your youngest brother to me that I shall know that you are not spies but honest men. And I will deliver your brother to you and you shall trade in the land. As they emptied their sacks, Behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack. And when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were afraid. And Jacob, their father, said to them, you have bereaved me of my children. Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me. Then Reuben said to his father, kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you. But he said, my son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol." Well, so far, the word of God. Now, at the end of Genesis 41, famine has overtaken the ancient Near East. And we're talking about the Levant. We're talking about North Africa, Egypt. It's a widespread famine. It's not the only one. There was a famine, you remember, in the time of Naomi. and Elimelech that forced her to leave the land to live among the Moabites. There was a famine in the reign of David. There was a famine in the time of Elijah and Elisha. There was a famine in the time of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah at the fall of Jerusalem. And that one is recorded in scripture in some detail where Israel resorted astonishingly, and we read of cannibalism, and one can only imagine just how bad things were if they were to resort to that, and famine in the land. And you remember that Joseph had already had a dream about it, the five fat cows and the five thin cows and the five sheaves of grain, fat grain and thin grain and so on. Five years, seven, did I say five? Seven. Seven years of plenty and seven years of want. Seven years of plenty and seven years of want. And Joseph has come out as a dream interpreter, and he's interpreted Pharaoh's dreams. and proposed to Pharaoh a plan that in the seven years of plenty they would store the grain for times of need. And there's probably an economic lesson, there's probably a stewardship lesson in there somewhere, that sometimes when in times of plenty you store some away for times when you have need. And Pharaoh was all about it and made him The prime minister, that's a British term, the prime minister of Egypt, he was the second in command in Egypt. And you have to pinch yourself that this son of Jacob, Joseph, who Jacob and his sons, Joseph's brothers, think is dead. is now the chief architect, planner. Pharaoh's given all of the economic and administrative duties into Joseph's hand. Now in chapter 42 and verse 1, when Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, why do you look at one another? The focus so far has been on Joseph, but in this chapter the focus is both on Joseph and in particular on Jacob. And Moses is telling a story about Jacob. God had made a promise to Jacob. He'd made a promise to Abraham and Isaac, and then to Jacob. that their seed would be as numerous as the sand upon the seashore and the stars in the night sky. But that promise now seems to be completely gone. There's a famine in the Levant. There's a famine in Egypt. It looks as if they're going to die. They have no food.

And that promise seems to have disappeared. And the question that Moses is posing at the beginning of this chapter is, what's going to happen to the promise? Are you willing to trust God in dark times? And I mean really dark times. That's the question that's being posed. Now, it's a tale of a father and a son. Jacob, of course, is oblivious to it. Almost 20 years have passed since Joseph had disappeared. 20 years is a long time. I mean, imagine where you were 20 years ago, and over the last 20 years, Jacob has lived in sorrow and grief. Because Jacob loved Joseph and Benjamin more than he loved his other sons. They were the sons of Rachel, and perhaps it's true that he loved Joseph even more than he loved Benjamin as the firstborn. The grief that he experienced was intense. So he's been living in these dark times. Now there are two scenes of Jacob and his sons at the beginning and at the end. Moses is a great storyteller. It's a very Hebrew way of telling a story. You have these bookends where there's a narrative of Jacob and his sons. And then in the middle, contrasting with those narratives, there is a story about Joseph and his brothers. I want you to try and put yourself in Moses' shoes for a minute. Moses, who's hundreds of years later, and this story has been passed down from one generation to another, and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Moses is writing the book of Genesis, and he's telling the story of Jacob and Joseph, which is half the book of Genesis. I think when Moses is writing this story, Moses is saying, you know, I believe in providence. I believe in the doctrine of providence. And you've heard me say it ad nauseam, and I'll say it until I die, that nothing happens without God willing it to happen. And willing it to happen before it happens, and willing it to happen in the way that it happens. Now, that's a Presbyterian doctrine. For sure, and those of you who have just joined First Presbyterian Church, welcome to the doctrine of providence. Because the doctrine of providence helps you sleep at night. When things are hard and when things are tough and when things don't go as you planned, when your children aren't what you thought they would be, when you pray for your grandchildren, when disease comes, when that phone call comes from the doctor and there's a seriousness to his voice and you take a breath and something is amiss. Paul Riddle had open heart surgery today. He's a young man. He's way younger than I am. And I called Shona yesterday and prayed with her on the phone. They'd just gone in for a regular checkup. And then all of a sudden, they find something. And within 15 hours, he's on the operating table. Suddenly, like that. Pray for the riddles. And everyone else is having surgery right now. But Moses is telling you, I believe in providence. Now Joseph, Joseph has a wife. She's called Asenath, and she's the daughter of, well, the Hebrew is a little complicated. She's the daughter of Potiphar, whom Hebrew scholars think is the same as Potiphar. We won't go there. But he has a wife. And he has two children, and their names are very familiar to you, Manasseh and Ephraim. And Manasseh means that God has made me forget all my troubles. That's a great name, isn't it? Every time you call him, God has made me forget all my troubles. And Joseph had plenty of troubles. Sold into slavery. Accused of rape. Ten years in prison. abandoned and forgotten. And then Ephraim, which means twice fruitful. Those are great names, Manasseh and Ephraim. And in verse 46, Joseph was 30 when he began to work for Pharaoh, so if he was sold into slavery when he was 17 and now we're two or three years into the famine, roughly 20 years has gone by. And the sight of his two boys made him forget the pain. He's gainfully employed, to put it mildly. He's in charge of politics and economics and administration. And one imagines that Joseph has changed, you know, from 17 to what, 37? He now speaks fluent Egyptian. He's dressed in Egyptian clothes. Egyptians didn't have beards,

you know, they were clean-shaven, as opposed to the Hebrews who had beards, which is why Joseph's brothers probably didn't recognize him because they'd never seen him without a beard. And life is good. Life has turned 180 for Joseph. God is in this. We have a young man from Zimbabwe here today. Stand up. Welcome him to First Press. When I was his age, Zimbabwe was called Rhodesia. It was part of the British Empire, but now it's called Zimbabwe. And he's on his way to college somewhere up north, right? Somewhere up north. So before you leave today, if you have the opportunity, say hello to him. Jacob's brothers come to Joseph. They're sent by their father to buy grain. And in verse 6 we read, Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him and their faces to the ground. And Joseph has a memory of a dream that he had. I've seen this before. I've seen my brothers bow down before me before in a dream. And when I told them, they didn't like it. And Jacob didn't like it either. And here it is. They are there, Joseph, 10 of his brothers, his stepbrothers. The sons of Lear, Benjamin is not there. Jacob kept Benjamin behind. He hasn't repented of his sin of favoritism. In verse 9, Joseph remembers his dream. His brothers didn't recognize him, but he recognizes them. And there's a plot narrative here that Moses wants you to understand that Joseph understands Hebrew, right? But he speaks to them in Egyptian through an interpreter. And what a great story. And they're chit-chatting about what they did to Joseph and so on, and regretting. And Reuben is saying, I told you so. Didn't I say so? You know, there's always one. And all the while, Joseph is listening, and he's understanding all of it. And what are we to make of Joseph's harsh treatment of his brothers. Well, on one level, you might say, you know, they deserve it. I mean, after all, they sold him. I mean, at one point, they wanted him dead. And then they sold him into slavery. So what would you say to your brothers who came without repentance or remorse? They're sorry. because of the circumstances that they now find themselves in, but they're not repentant. There's remorse, but there's no repentance. And maybe Joseph is saying, you know, we need to squeeze this a little tighter. You know? They need to fully understand the consequences of what they did. And Moses, you know, there's a ratcheting up of the narrative and they're put in prison for three days and released with an impossible demand that they bring Benjamin. Simeon is taken, nine of the brothers are sent back to Jacob and there's a trap. Because the money to pay for the grain is in the sack. And this was not an act of kindness on Joseph's part, this was a trap. Because now Joseph can accuse them of being thieves and spies. The proof is now in their hands. As they're holding the silver in their hands, that's the proof that they're spies. And Jacob's world has collapsed. He's lost, as far as he knows, he's lost Joseph. And he's lost Simeon, because he's back in Egypt. And he's about to lose Benjamin, his now favorite son. And Moses wants you to concentrate not so much on Joseph, but on Jacob, his father. And I want you to see that the same hand of providence that has been sweet to Joseph is bitter to Jacob. It's the same story, it's the same narrative, it's the same governance, it's the same providence, but to one it is sweet and to another it is bitter. And Jacob is understandably cranky and short with his sons. And when the nine arrive home without Simeon, demanding that Benjamin be sent, Jacob thinks the worst, and in verse 36 we read, all these things are against me. All these things are against me. And I was looking at this yesterday and I was wondering, I wonder if Paul was thinking about this text when he wrote Romans 8, 28, that all things work together for good for those who love God. Because for Jacob, all things are working together for bad, for evil. And God

is saying, now when you love me, when you trust me, even in the dark places, even in the dungeon, if you trust me, They work together for good. I have a plan. And I have a purpose that you know nothing about. And Jacob feels desperately alone. I don't know if you've ever been there. I've been there a couple of times in my 71 years of life, where I've sat in a chair and felt alone. where all the dreams seem to have disappeared, all the hopes seem to have gone. And all these things are against me. I want you to go away today. You know the end of the story. You know, but as Moses is telling the story, I want you to imagine that you're reading it for the first time. And there's drama and suspense here. Because if he complies, and he has little choice, I mean, if he doesn't comply, he's got grain to last him for a season, but not enough for seven years of drought. So one way or another, he's gonna have to go back cap in hand for some food. And if he doesn't take Benjamin with him, it's over. So he has no cards to play from a human point of view. God has brought Jacob, remember God had taught Jacob several lessons in the past. He made him limp to remind him that he must wait upon the Lord. So there's always been that stubborn streak in Jacob from the very get-go in the life of Jacob. But here in chapter 42, God has brought him to rock bottom. I mean, he's where Job was when he lost all his children and all his wealth. And Job responded with such faith, the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord. Now, forget about the next 38 chapters, but initially at least, he responded in faith. He handed his life and circumstances over to God, but Jacob's not there yet. Maybe God has to bring you to rock bottom. for you to listen. You're living your life, you're making decisions, you're in charge, and God is far away. And in the case of Jacob, he has to bring him to rock bottom. Now that's the micro story, but the macro story is the entire promise of redemption lies in the hands of Jacob and his sons. God made a promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so that the plan of redemption, your salvation and mine, the coming of Jesus and everything that goes with it, hangs in the balance of Genesis 42, when Jacob says, all these things are against me. So where are you today? Eyes open, ears open, looking to God in faith, rejoicing in the God of providence. The God of Romans 8.28. Because inside that bubble of Romans 8.28, there's peace and contentment and faith and courage and commitment. But outside of that bubble of Romans 8.28, there's nothing. There's uncertainty. Romans 8.28 is better than insurance. Better than your best insurance policy. Because it is the promise of God, whose word can never be broken. I wanted you to read Genesis 42 as though you were reading it for the first time, and you want to turn the page. What happens? How is this promise going to be fulfilled? Well, I've got two more lessons to give to you, but let's pray together. Father, we thank you. Thank you for the story of Joseph and his father Jacob. You sometimes bring us low in order that we might come to an end of ourselves and cast ourselves entirely upon you and your sovereignty and your embracing fatherly arms stretched around us. Now bless us, we pray. Bless our brother from Zimbabwe who's heading to college, and may you go with him and surround him with your blessing and presence. And hear us, we pray, we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.