

## Pilgrims in Egypt (12)

*The Life of Joseph*

By Rev. Garrett Eriks

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** Genesis 47  
**Preached on:** Sunday, August 3, 2014

### Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church

5101 Beechtree Street  
Hudsonville, MI 49426

**Website:** [www.hudsonvilleprc.org](http://www.hudsonvilleprc.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/hudsonvilleprc](http://www.sermonaudio.com/hudsonvilleprc)

We continue in our series on the life of Joseph this morning and we read God's word as it's found in Genesis 47. Genesis 47, the entire chapter will be the text this morning but we'll specially be focused on the first 10 verses of the chapter.

1 Then Joseph came and told Pharaoh, and said, My father and my brethren, and their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have, are come out of the land of Canaan; and, behold, they are in the land of Goshen. 2 And he took some of his brethren, even five men, and presented them unto Pharaoh. 3 And Pharaoh said unto his brethren, What is your occupation? And they said unto Pharaoh, Thy servants are shepherds, both we, and also our fathers. 4 They said moreover unto Pharaoh, For to sojourn in the land are we come; for thy servants have no pasture for their flocks; for the famine is sore in the land of Canaan: now therefore, we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen. 5 And Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee: 6 The land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell: and if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle. 7 And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. 8 And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? 9 And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage. 10 And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh. 11 And Joseph placed his father and his brethren, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. 12 And Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household, with bread, according to their families. 13 And there was no bread in all the land; for the famine was very sore, so that the land of Egypt and all the land of Canaan fainted by reason of the famine. 14 And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, for the corn which they bought: and Joseph brought

the money into Pharaoh's house. 15 And when money failed in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came unto Joseph, and said, Give us bread: for why should we die in thy presence? for the money faileth. 16 And Joseph said, Give your cattle; and I will give you for your cattle, if money fail. 17 And they brought their cattle unto Joseph: and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for horses, and for the flocks, and for the cattle of the herds, and for the asses: and he fed them with bread for all their cattle for that year. 18 When that year was ended, they came unto him the second year, and said unto him, We will not hide it from my lord, how that our money is spent; my lord also hath our herds of cattle; there is not ought left in the sight of my lord, but our bodies, and our lands: 19 Wherefore shall we die before thine eyes, both we and our land? buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants unto Pharaoh: and give us seed, that we may live, and not die, that the land be not desolate. 20 And Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for the Egyptians sold every man his field, because the famine prevailed over them: so the land became Pharaoh's. 21 And as for the people, he removed them to cities from one end of the borders of Egypt even to the other end thereof. 22 Only the land of the priests bought he not; for the priests had a portion assigned them of Pharaoh, and did eat their portion which Pharaoh gave them: wherefore they sold not their lands. 23 Then Joseph said unto the people, Behold, I have bought you this day and your land for Pharaoh: lo, here is seed for you, and ye shall sow the land. 24 And it shall come to pass in the increase, that ye shall give the fifth part unto Pharaoh, and four parts shall be your own, for seed of the field, and for your food, and for them of your households, and for food for your little ones. 25 And they said, Thou hast saved our lives: let us find grace in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's servants. 26 And Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt unto this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth part; except the land of the priests only, which became not Pharaoh's. 27 And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions therein, and grew, and multiplied exceedingly. 28 And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years: so the whole age of Jacob was an hundred forty and seven years. 29 And the time drew nigh that Israel must die: and he called his son Joseph, and said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt: 30 But I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their buryingplace. And he said, I will do as thou hast said. 31 And he said, Swear unto me. And he sware unto him. And Israel bowed himself upon the bed's head.

Thus far we read God's word.

Let's now ask God's blessing on the preaching in prayer.

*Father in heaven, as we hear this word this morning, we pray that thy servant may bring this word to us in the power of the Spirit and that we may hear this word in the power of the Spirit. We pray that today we may hear what it means to be pilgrims in this world, and that we would then be encouraged to live as God has called us to live as pilgrims and strangers, but may we do so with the hope, the wonderful hope that we have a home and that home is in heaven with thee. So we pray that thou will use this word to cut more and more our attachments to this world so that we may long for our heavenly home where we will dwell with thee forevermore. All these things we pray in the confidence that thou will hear us and answer us for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

We learn from this part of the history and the life of Joseph an important aspect of our identity as God's people. The important aspect of our identity as God's people that we learn here is that we are pilgrims and strangers in this world. Jacob and his sons were deeply aware of that as they went down to Egypt. They speak of that, too. They spoke of the fact that they were not looking for Egypt to be their home, but instead a place for them to live for a time temporarily. They were looking to be pilgrims in the land of Egypt and not set up their permanent home there in the line of generations, and in that we see that God's people, not just Jacob and his sons, but God's people are spiritual pilgrims in the midst of this world. In the way in which they were kept separate from the Egyptian culture of that day, we see that part of that pilgrimage is that we are to be spiritually separate from the world in which we live.

So we learn from the text what it means that we are to live as pilgrims and strangers in this world, and puts our lives in perspective. Through the whole of our lives, we're on a journey. We're on a journey. And that's part of being a pilgrim and stranger in this world. We're on a journey to our home and that home is our heavenly home. We have that. We are this. We're pilgrims that have this home because of the wonderful and amazing journey of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and we've heard of that in this series, too, and the series has been focused on Christ, and it ought to be. And again today the focus in Genesis 47 is on Christ. We are pilgrims and strangers because we belong to Christ. Because he came to this earth and he suffered, and he died, he arose and then he ascended to heaven, he was on his own pilgrimage, his own journey. But he did that to save us from our sins, and because of that journey of our Lord, we are on this journey as well. pilgrims and strangers in this world on our way to our heavenly home.

When we understand that and we understand that, that radically affects and changes how we live in this world, and that's part of what we must consider this morning as well when we consider the reality that we're pilgrims in the midst of this world. Remember the historical context here. The historical context is the famine that God had sent in that part of the world at that time. Joseph knew of that, Pharaoh knew that it was coming. They had saved up grain during the seven prosperous years, and now they're in the middle of the seven years of great famine. It was during those years that Joseph's brothers came down to Egypt looking for grain. It was in the second time down that Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, seeing that his brothers had changed. God had changed their hearts, and so Joseph reveals himself and in doing so he forgives his brothers for their sins against him. Now Joseph sent them back to their father with wagons and with goods

telling them to come down to the land of Egypt. So when the brothers go back and they tell their father Jacob, "Joseph is alive," he didn't believe them at first but then they showed him the wagons and they showed them the goods, and then he knew that his son was alive. No doubt they had to explain to their father what they had done as well, but now Jacob takes his family, all 66 of his children, their wives, and their grandchildren, all of them down to the land of Egypt, and there will be 70 total with Joseph and his family as well. And they go to live in the land of Goshen.

After they arrive in the land of Goshen, Joseph arranges a meeting. First, five of his brothers go before Pharaoh, and then Jacob does, and that's what we have here in Genesis 47. As the brothers speak to Pharaoh and then as Jacob speaks to Pharaoh, we find, then, that concept of pilgrim, stranger in the land. And so that's what we focus in on this morning in this chapter, that Jacob and his family were pilgrims and strangers in Egypt. We take that for our theme this morning, "Pilgrims in Egypt." We notice, first, the idea of that pilgrimage; secondly, the characteristics of our pilgrimage as Jacob speaks of them in verse 9; and then finally, the hope that we have as pilgrims.

As I said, Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt and not at all with the intention that this land of Egypt would become their home, but instead they would be pilgrims there, they would be sojourners in the land. Not only did they understand that they were sojourners in the land of Egypt, but Jacob and his sons understood the spiritual idea of being pilgrims in the midst of this world. They knew that they were spiritual pilgrims in this world. There are four things in the text that point that out to us, that idea, that concept of being pilgrims. First of all, Jacob himself lived a nomadic life, and that, no doubt, was not uncommon in that day, but Jacob himself lived that nomadic life. He moved around from place to place in his life. Remember that he grew up in Beersheba under the instruction, of course, of his parents Isaac and Rebekah, but he fled, then, to Padan-aram after tricking his father into giving him the birthright blessing. So Jacob left as a young man and he lived there in Padan-aram for about 20 years, and in that time, of course, he married Leah and then Rachel, her sister. He worked for his uncle Laban there in that land. Then when he returned to the land of Canaan, he was nomadic for a time, as well, until settling finally in the city of Hebron. And now again at the age of 130 years old, he moves again. Now he moves to the land of Egypt.

So that, first of all, tells us that Jacob in his own life understood that he was a pilgrim and a stranger in this world. Secondly, when his sons come before Pharaoh, they do not request ownership in the land of Egypt. Notice that in verse 4. The brothers five of the brothers, we don't read who it was, Joseph takes five of his brothers before Pharaoh, Pharaoh asked them their occupation. They say shepherds and then this is what they say, verse 4, "For to sojourn in the land are we come; for thy servants have no pasture for their flocks; for the famine is sore in the land of Canaan: now therefore, we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen." The idea is not that they would make their home there, they wanted to be here during this time of famine so that their flocks would have food, and they say, "We're going to sojourn in the land. We're going to be pilgrims here in this land." Now they didn't realize how long that they would be here, no doubt. The temporary turned into 400 plus years, but still it was not their intention that Egypt would

become their home. They knew the promise of God that he would give to them the land of Canaan. So they came down to Egypt as pilgrims.

Third, this concept of pilgrimage is brought out when Pharaoh asked Jacob about his age. Verse 8, "How old art thou?" It's when Jacob comes before Pharaoh. And then Jacob reflects on his life and how does he do that? He does that in terms of pilgrimage, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years." Now that response shows that Jacob, as he came down to Egypt, had been reflecting on his life and he came to a better understanding of what it meant to live as a pilgrim in the midst of this world. He evaluates his pilgrimage. He characterizes his pilgrimage as short and also as evil, as full of suffering, and we'll come to that later on, but that shows that Jacob understood his pilgrimage.

And then the last thing that shows us that focus on pilgrimage in the passage is that Jacob requests as he nears death that his body would not be buried in the land of Egypt, but instead that Joseph would take his body back to the land of Canaan, and that he would be buried where his fathers were buried, Abraham and Isaac. That shows his understanding not just of being a physical pilgrim in the midst of this world, that he wandered around from place to place, but he had a home and that home was not Egypt, it was Canaan because Canaan was a picture, a picture of heaven.

So Jacob is focused on his pilgrimage. Well, what's a pilgrim then? A spiritual pilgrim is one who understands that this earth as it is right now, is not his home. A spiritual pilgrim understands that his home is the new heavens and the new earth and the spiritual pilgrim seeks that city and wants to live there forevermore. The spiritual pilgrim understands that this world is not his or her permanent residence, but instead we only live here for but a time until we are taken to that home which is ours. That's the idea that comes out so clearly in Hebrews 11, Hebrews 11:13 through 16 as it reflects there upon the life of Abraham and our fathers who are mentioned in that passage. We read there in verse 13, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were," what? "Strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Exactly what Jacob had done. He confessed that he was a pilgrim on this earth. "For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country." They seek a country, "And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country," so they weren't just desiring Canaan, it was more than that, "that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city."

So we see that very concept and idea there that pilgrims are those who understand they have a heavenly home, they seek that heavenly home, they live their lives in the light of the fact that that is where they are going because no matter how long or short our pilgrimage here is on this earth, we know that we will dwell with God forever in heavenly glory. We don't view, then, our lives on this earth like the atheists do who say that this life is all that there is, and so they're only focused on this life, but as pilgrims and strangers, we don't fall into the other ditch, you might say, of saying, "Well, because

we're pilgrims and strangers, this life has absolutely no significance. I just have to kind of get through this life until finally I get to the real life which is heaven." Now heaven's not the real life, it's the fullness of our life. We have it in part now, and because we are pilgrims and strangers who belong to a heavenly city, we understand there's significance and importance to our lives now. There's importance to them. There's work. There are callings that God has given us to do, important callings, callings in our homes, callings in our marriages, callings to teach and instruct children, callings to do that not just as parents, but to do that as a church, work that God's given us to do in the service of him and of his kingdom. There's much significance to our lives.

Being pilgrims and strangers in this earth does not take away the significance of this life. Some would argue that. They might say, "Well, you're so focused on heaven, you are of no earthly good." Not true. Only those who are focused on heaven can be of earthly good because then as pilgrims they will serve the Lord in their lives, they'll serve the kingdom causes in their lives because they are focused on something bigger. You see, we're part of the kingdom of heaven. We're part of that kingdom of heaven because God has chosen us to be citizens of that kingdom. We're chosen by God to have this everlasting life, and we're redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ to have this life.

What comes out especially in the text then, is that this life of a spiritual pilgrim is a life of spiritual separation. It's a life of spiritual separation. What's striking in Genesis 47 is that the people of Israel were given a special part of the land of Egypt which was set apart from the wickedness of the Egyptian culture, set apart from the cities of Egypt. They were not assimilated into the cities and the culture of Egypt. God separated them to protect them, and the way in which he did that was through Joseph. Through Joseph. After Jacob and his family got settled in the land of Goshen, Joseph took five of his brothers before Pharaoh, but remember that before they went Joseph coached them on what they should say, and in coaching them he was making sure that they didn't lie about their occupation. Why would they be tempted maybe to lie about that? Well, because in Egypt they looked down upon those who were shepherds. It was an abomination to be a shepherd as occupation. That, no doubt, was the work for the slaves, for the lowly in the land of Egypt, and now you have a people of shepherds who are coming into the land of Egypt.

And so Joseph tells them, "When you go before Pharaoh and he asks what your occupation is, tell him that you are shepherds." That's not a lie. That was the truth. That's what they did. That was their occupation, but the reason that Joseph told them to do that was that then the Egyptians would not want to associate with them, and that was a good thing. They would then keep their distance. God was working through this to separate Jacob and his family from the wickedness of the Egyptian culture of that day, and Joseph knew firsthand how wicked that Egyptian culture was. He knew the temptations that his brothers and their children would face living in the cities of Egypt, that it would be hard. Joseph knew it from experience, and he knew that the only thing that preserved him was the grace of God so that he was not absorbed into the Egyptian culture. Now that's what Joseph was concerned with for his brothers, he was concerned that they not be absorbed, imbibed into that Egyptian culture and idolatry, and Joseph knew the vulnerability of his

brothers and their children. They'd been walking in sin for long, long time. God had changed them, but continuing in a right way would not be easy for them, and to have the added pressure of that Egyptian culture trying to take them in, that would be a great challenge for his brothers and their families.

So he tells them, "Tell Pharaoh that you're shepherds," and through that God separated the people of Israel. We learn from this how we are to live as pilgrims in the midst of this world. That does not mean we physically isolate ourselves from the wicked and unbelievers of the world in which we live. We're not called to go start a commune somewhere. We know that very well. But instead, the idea here is that in this separation we learn of the spiritual separation that must exist between us and the world in which we live. That's the spiritual separation that the New Testament speaks so clearly about as we live in the midst of this world. 2 Corinthians 6 beginning at verse 14 we read there, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" The idea there is that there's to be a spiritual separation between us and the wicked world. That's also the idea that you find in James 4, James 4:4, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

What does it mean to be a friend of the world? What is it to yoke ourselves unequally with the world? That means to live like the world does in all of their sin and ungodliness. What's characteristic of the world in which we live? Every one of the people of the world who does not know the Lord Jesus Christ is only focused on themselves. They live for self, not for the glory of God. They may do some things outwardly that appear good, but in the end, it's all for themselves. And then you consider the wickedness that that leads to. The language that that leads to. The sexual immorality that that leads to. The drunkenness and the partying that that leads to. And all of the sinfulness and ungodliness that is found in this world. And the word of God says here that as pilgrims and strangers in this world, we must be spiritually separate from the world. That means don't live like they do. That means we love God and as those who love God because he has first loved us, we love one another, we put off hatred, we put off malice, we put off anger, we put off covetousness, we put off a love of money, we put off sexual immorality, we put off the partying and the drunkenness, and we put on love, loving each other because we love God. We put on holiness. We put on righteousness. We put on godly communication. We speak the truth in love. That's the spiritual separation this is talking about.

Now sometimes that does mean a physical separation. There are certain places we don't go, there are certain things we don't do because we love the Lord, but that's what this reminds us of. We live in this world but we don't partake of the godlessness that's found in this culture and land. We don't do that because we're citizens of the kingdom of heaven. We're called to live this life of spiritual separation, living unspotted from this world. That means, too, we're to keep ourselves not just from certain actions, but even from the ideas, the philosophies, the the thinking of this world. That's why we have to be so careful when we take in in our reading, what we take in in our television watching,

what we take in in our entertainment. What we take in. We have to be careful on the input. What are we taking in? Are we taking in the thinking of this world and how is that going to affect the way in which we live. We learn from this, too, that we will be despised by the world when we live like we should. Not because we're some obnoxious Christians who are always looking down our noses at the world, but because in our humility and gratitude, we're living to glorify God the world can't stand that and the world wants no part of that. That's all part of this pilgrimage.

Now, Jacob as he stands before Pharaoh and he speaks to Pharaoh, he gives important characteristics of not only his pilgrimage but our pilgrimage. It's striking what Jacob says before Joseph. Pharaoh has simply asked Jacob the question, "How old are you?" And Jacob answers in a way that shows not only was he not surprised by the question, but he had been reflecting of late upon his own life from the perspective of pilgrimage and what God had done to do that, so that he would reflect on his life as it was hard for him. We saw that in the last time, it was hard for him to leave the land of Canaan and go down to Egypt. He was leaving the land of Promise, the land that God had promised not only to his fathers but to him as well, and to the seed that followed. It was hard. But that meant he had to reflect on the fact that God had a moving in his life, and that he was a pilgrim, and that there's something more and higher and better than Canaan, and that is heaven.

So Jacob evaluates his life in answer to Pharaoh's question from a spiritual perspective, from the perspective of a spiritual pilgrimage. He doesn't evaluate his life from a worldly, superficial perspective. Jacob doesn't say something like this, "Yeah, you know, my life has been pretty tough, but overall life has been so good. I've been rich since I was a young man. I worked hard for my Uncle Laban and I got rich working there. I married my sweetheart, Rachel, and her sister, Leah. And the two of them, along with their maids who I married as well, through them I had 12 sons and one daughter. And you know, in the end my children turned out alright. You know, they're all successful ranchers. They they know what they're doing. They're good businessmen. And now look at my son Joseph. He's rich and powerful in the land of Egypt. Life is good." That's not his evaluation. You'll find people today evaluating their lives from that perspective. "Life is good. I have a lot." And that's their perspective. "Life is good, my children are successful in this world." They wouldn't put it this way but, "Hey, they're working for pagans and they're making good money working for the pagans." But that's basically their perspective. It's all about the money, the possessions, the power, that they and their children have. That's not Jacob's perspective. In his old age, he sees those things are not important. Instead, he confesses that his life has been short and evil, "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been."

We should understand, as well, that Jacob's not complaining here. He's not looking at his life from a pessimistic point of view. He's not feeling sorry for himself in his old age. No, he sees it in the light of the sovereignty of God. How often have we seen that Joseph looked at life from the viewpoint of the sovereignty of God, and Jacob here looks at his life from the viewpoint of the sovereignty of God. He's not complaining about how bad he has it in his life. That was partly what was so beautiful about what we just sang in Psalter 106, stanza 2,



"I suffered silently,  
Because Thy will is best;  
Remove Thy heavy stroke from me,  
For I am sore distressed."

The psalmist here is speaking of the difficulties of his pilgrimage but he does so in the light of the will of God. Thy will is best." Jacob knows that, too, that God's will is best, and that's why he evaluates his life from this perspective.

There's something important that we learn here. What we learn here is that just as Jacob in his old age evaluates his pilgrimage in a good and right way, so also we in the church ought to value very highly what the elderly say. In our culture today, the elderly are not valued. Other cultures value the elderly more than in our culture. Our culture does not. The elderly are looked at as those who don't understand the new things that are coming out, and because of that they're behind the times and they're old fashioned. But as Christians we ought not to look at the elderly and the church that way. Instead, we ought to value what the elderly say and the cautions that they give about things that are new and changing within this world. We ought to hear what they have to say as they evaluate their pilgrimage in this world, and we ought to listen very carefully to what they say. That's why it's so important that we have contact with the elderly in the church and elderly in our families, too. I know it's been a practice for many families that if nothing else Sunday morning after church they get together for a Sunday coffee and where the generations of a family are together, and to visit in that time. But there are many things in the church that are happening that we take and see that that's important. For example, the build group and the the life group, they both have opportunities to write to the elderly in the church and have some contact with them. Young people have done that before. Bible studies have done that. What a wonderful thing that is for us in the church to hear from the elderly of the church and to learn from them. I find that myself when I go visit the elderly in the church. I gain more from it than I'm sure they gain from me because they speak of their pilgrimage and the great things that God has done, and I leave built up as they're speaking of the grace of God. That's what we learn from this, the value of that perspective of the elderly in the church.

Now this is what Jacob confesses about his pilgrimage. He says, first of all, that the days of the years of his life were few. You might wonder, "Really? Few?" He's 130 years old when he says this and he lives another 17 years. He dies when he's 147 years old. How could it be true that the days of his life were few? Well, first of all, his days were few and short by way of comparison to the lifespan of his fathers. His grandfather Abraham lived to be 175 years old. Isaac lived to be 180 years old. So compared to his grandfather and his father, he was somewhat of a young man, and Jacob knows, at this point, he's not going to live much longer. But it's not that so much either, I don't believe. The focus is this: he does know and believe that soon he's going to die. The reality of death is setting in. He knows that God didn't create man to die but it happens because of sin. Death happens because that was God's punishment upon sin coming into the world. And because of sin, then, man's life was cut down in death like the blade of grass is cut down,

and that is part of what God uses for Jacob to evaluate his pilgrimage and see and understand that the days of his life on this earth were few. They were few.

No matter how long we live on this earth, that's true, even if you live to the age of Methuselah. We had a sermon about him last week. 969 years old, I believe when he died. It could still be said that his days were few because death reminds us that when we die we're going to heaven to be with God and the life that we have with God is forever. What's 900 years compared to forever? It's not much. What's 147 years or 130 years compared to forever? It's not much. What's 180 years, 175 years compared to forever? It's not much. And that's true of our lives, too. 70-80 years, 20 years, 30 years, it's not much as long or as short it is compared to the forever that is ours in Jesus Christ.

And that's what we understand about our pilgrimage. Death, the reality of death, causes us to see that. Life flies by. It does. We all say it, whatever stage of life that we're in, "It all goes by so fast and then we die." God uses that to keep our focus on heaven, there is a life that is forever and compared to that, our life in this earth is small and short, it's brief. That's the first evaluation that Jacob makes, and that we ought to see about our pilgrimage, too. It's short, and because of that we ought to make the most of our lives here on this earth from this perspective, not having as much fun as we can, but serving the Lord. Be busy serving the Lord. Whether young or old, serve the Lord in the callings that God has given to us.

The second thing, second way that Jacob describes his pilgrimage is with the word "evil." Although Pharaoh doesn't ask about this at all, Jacob uncovers this about his life, and he doesn't paint some rosy picture of his life. That was not true. But he says that the days of the years of his life were few and evil. When he says "evil" there, he's not referring specifically to sin, although that certainly would be true, but he's saying that his life is characterized by trouble and grief and disappointment and suffering, and many, many struggles. Jacob is saying that what characterized his life on this earth was constant struggle and suffering. That's what characterized his life. Many times through his life tears were running down his cheek, maybe he cried so much he couldn't cry anymore. Think especially about the 22 years when he believed that his son Joseph was dead. His favorite son, his favoritism, we know, was wrong, but on the other hand he loved his son and for 22 years he believed his son was dead. And he struggled with that.

He suffered in that time, but that was not the only suffering that he had in his life. He struggled when he was young. There was sorrow when he was young. As a young man, he had to flee from Esau, his brother, who wanted to kill him. That of course, was because Jacob ran ahead of God and tricked his father, Isaac, to steal the birthright blessing, but still there was suffering for Jacob. He worked for his deceitful uncle Laban for 20 years. Uncle Laban's trying to keep him there because God was blessing him through Joseph's presence. When he returned to Canaan, his mother was dead. He soon buried his favorite wife, Rachel. Not only that but within his family there was fighting, division and jealousy. He created that, but it was there. His children lived in great sin. Think of his daughter Dinah who fornicated with a Gentile man. And then remember what his sons did, Simeon and Levi in retaliation after the men of the city of Shechem

had circumcised themselves, they went in and killed all of the men of that city and then all the brothers took the women and the children captive, and took all of the goods and the possessions of that city. His son Judah committed adultery with his own daughter-in-law. And then Jacob's sons sold Joseph into slavery and lied to him for 22 years about it.

Now in his old age, he leaves the Promised Land of Canaan and goes down into the land of Egypt. Suffering constant throughout his life. Jacob understood it was related to his own sinfulness. He's not simply feeling sorry for himself, now he's reflecting back on that suffering and part of what hits them so much is his own sin. Don't we have that when we reflect back on our lives even just a little while? And there are maybe even great blessings we see in our lives, great blessings in the lives of our children, and we look back and say, "Yeah, but there's so much sin." So much sin. Jacob sees that, too, so much sin in his own life, favoritism towards his son, the mess he made with his many wives. He allowed Rachel's idolatry, so many other things.

But what we see in what Joseph says is what characterizes our pilgrimage, suffering. That can be hard for us. The world in which we live tells us that suffering is bad and that you don't have to live a life of suffering. You can live a life of doing whatever you want and a life of having fun that will bring you an escape from hardship and suffering in this life. But we see from this that suffering is a normal part of our pilgrimage in this life. We don't like suffering either. We don't like that part of being a disciple of Christ, the part of taking up the cross, but Jesus tells us there in that part of discipleship is that we have to suffer in this life because he was a suffering Savior, and as those who belong to him, we suffer as well. But we don't like suffering, and the world in which we live doesn't like suffering either. There's a pill for almost every kind of suffering, the world says. There's a way to escape suffering in this life, and we begin to take that on ourselves, "I just wanna get out of this suffering in my life." God says, no.

He reminds us this morning suffering is a part of life. It's part of our pilgrimage. It makes us want heaven more and more. How do you see that in your life? As you describe your pilgrimage, do you say with Jacob, "The days of the years of my life have been few and evil. There's been suffering in my life." We have to say from the perspective of the sovereignty of God that suffering is good. God sent that suffering and it was for my profit. It was for my benefit. God knows best and his will is best, as we sang in Psalter 106. Do we see our suffering from that perspective, that God through suffering is polishing, he's refining us, he's making us ready for heavenly glory? And that in the end is the hope that we have as pilgrims. That's part of our pilgrimage. We live with a real and certain hope. That was Jacob's confession as well. It's not one of despair. It's not as if, "All is lost because my days are few and my days are evil." No, Jacob speaks to the spiritual pilgrimage knowing that there's an end and that there's a beautiful destination that is his, and that destination is not an earthly place, it's heaven. It's heaven. Jacob's saying, "I'm looking forward to the day when I will be brought home and I'll stand before the throne of God."

That's our confession this morning, too. We have this wonderful hope. We have a home that we're going to. I'm a pilgrim here on this earth. I'm a pilgrim in Egypt, as it were.

God has made me spiritually separate from this world in which I live and I struggle with that, but I'm a pilgrim and I have a home which is heavenly glory, and that makes all the difference along the way in our journey. That makes all the differences as we're going through the hardships of this life because I have what I need most. Not deliverance from suffering. No, I have Christ. You see, remember what the Apostle Paul said about his life, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain, to die is gain because it's more of Christ, but in this life I have Christ." To live is Christ. It's to have Christ. That's true for us. To live is to have Christ. I'm redeemed for my sins. I'm saved. I have life with God and all the suffering of this life and the hardship of this life and all the pilgrimage is to prepare me for that life that I will have more fully with God in heavenly glory.

There's the assurance of that in this history that we read in Genesis 47. I don't have a lot of time to go into that this morning, but the one thing that's striking in Genesis 47 is how God took care of his people there in the land of Egypt, and they did not have to give up anything to have the food that they needed. Look what happened to the people of Egypt. Now some people criticized Joseph for this, but I don't believe there's a criticism of him in this, but the people of Egypt, first of all, had to use all their money to buy the grain that they needed. Then they had to sell all their animals to get the grain that they needed. Then they had to give up their land for the grain that they needed. They lost basically everything in these years of famine. What about the people of Israel? They didn't have to trade their animals in to get grain. They didn't have to give up the land of Goshen to get grain. God providing through Joseph. A beautiful and amazing thing the way in which God provided for his people at the expense of the people of Egypt.

God used them for the good of his people but that showed the blessing of God that was on his people there even in the land of Egypt as they went through their pilgrimage. We know that, too, in our pilgrimage, God is blessing us, taking care of all of our needs. And what that means is that the pilgrim of God evaluates life in the light of this blessed truth. We understand there is a purpose for suffering and that God through suffering is preserving us but also preparing us for heavenly life. And what a difference this makes in the way in which we live. Not like the world. Their way of life leads to destruction. We don't go in the way of the world. We must not with all of their music, with all of their dancing, with all of their drinking, with all of their sexual immorality, all their focus and emphasis on fun and pleasing self. That's not what life is about. Life is about the victory that I have in Jesus Christ. It's knowing that this pilgrim's mantle will be replaced with a heavenly crown and the full victory that is found in heavenly life.

There are many sorrows in this life but our hope is found in Jesus Christ. That's the hope that Jacob has. He has this hope because of the home that he has. It's like this, "Pharaoh, you asked about how old I am? Let me tell you about the hope that I have." May that be the way we speak in the midst of this world, too. "You want to ask how old I am? You want to ask how I'm doing? Let me tell you about the hope that I have. I'm a pilgrim in this world, there's suffering for me, but in the end I'm victorious. I'll live with Jesus Christ forever more and because of that I'm content. That's enough. That's everything for me because to live is Christ and to die is gain." May that be our beautiful confession as

we go through this pilgrimage of suffering. There's grief, there's suffering, but there's the heavenly home that is ours because of the victory that is found in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let us pray.

*Our Father in heaven, we are thankful for the encouragement we received this morning to live as pilgrims in the midst of this world, and that we are pilgrims because of thy saving grace. We pray, O Lord, that thou will strengthen us in this blessed truth, and that we would then live as thy children, thy pilgrims in the midst of this world, knowing that the suffering and hardship we face is always for our good. All this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

