



The Sermon

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Genesis 37:12-36

"In the Pit of Providence"

September 4, 2022

TRANSCRIPT

So, I want to invite you to take your Bible and turn with me to the book of Genesis 37. We're going to begin in verse 12; it'll take us to the end of the chapter. And the title of this message is "In the Pit of Providence. In the Pit of Providence." I want to begin reading in verse 12, Genesis chapter 27. I trust that you have your Bible open and in front of you and can follow along with me. This is God's inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word, written by a servant, Moses, as Moses was led by the Spirit of God to record this perfectly.

So, beginning in verse 12, "Then his brothers" - referring to Joseph's brothers - "went to pasture their father's flock in Shechem. Israel" - that's Jacob - "said to Joseph, 'Are not your brothers pasturing the flock in Shechem? Come, and I will send you to them.' And he said to him, 'I will go.' Then he said to him, 'Go now and see about the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock, and bring word back to me.' So he sent him from the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.

"A man found him wandering in the field; and the man asked him, 'What are you looking for?' He said, 'I'm looking for my brothers; please tell me where they are pasturing the flock.' Then the man said, 'They've moved from here; for I heard them say, "Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

"When they" - referring to his brothers - "saw him" - referring to Joseph - "from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted

against him to put him to death. They said to one another, 'Here comes this dreamer! Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, "A wild beast devoured him." Then let us see what will become of his dreams!' But Reuben heard this and rescued him out of their hands and said, 'Let us not take his life.' Reuben further said to them, 'Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him' – that he might rescue him out of their hands, to restore him to his father. So it came about, when Joseph reached his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the varicolored tunic that was on him; and they took him and threw him into the pit. Now the pit was empty, without any water in it.

"Then they sat down to eat a meal. And as they raised their eyes and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing aromatic gum and balm and myrrh, on their way to bring them down to Egypt. Judah said to his brothers, 'What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.' And his brothers listened to him. Then some Midianite traders passed by, so they pulled him up and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt.

"Now Reuben returned to the pit, and behold, Joseph was not in the pit; so he tore his garments. He returned to his brothers and said, 'The boy is not there; as for me, where am I to go?' So they took Joseph's tunic, and slaughtered a male goat and dipped the tunic in the blood; and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father and said, 'We found this; please examine it to see whether it is your son's tunic or not.' Then he examined it and said, 'It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!' So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, 'Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son.' So his father wept for him. Meanwhile, the Midianites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh's officer, the captain of the bodyguard."

What an amazing, amazing narrative in the Word of God. And I think you and I will be able to find ourselves in this narrative as well. This isn't just about a story four thousand years ago, it's a story about how God works through circumstances in the lives of people to move them from Point A to Point B according to His far greater, inscrutable, sovereign will and purpose

for our lives. This is how God works in your life as well. Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

[Prayer] \_\_\_\_\_ [0:07:53] Spirit, to illumine us and to open our eyes to behold passages of Scripture, we cannot come to this book as though it's a math book or a chemistry book and all we need is an IQ. No, we need supernatural insight to be given to us words. So help us to see with understanding what is here. We will give You the glory and the praise on the frontend, in Jesus' name. Amen. [End]

In these verses that I have just read we see the invisible hand of God at work in the affairs of providence of Joseph. Here is God working in and through these circumstances to accomplish God's overriding sovereign will for Joseph. Here is God working through a father who showed favoritism and partiality. Here is God working through a random stranger in a field. Here is God working through a band of brothers who are filled with hatred and spewing lies. All of this to move Joseph to where God \_\_\_\_\_ [0:09:21] from Hebron to Shechem to Dothan to Egypt. It's of God that He often uses sinful acts and sinful men to bring about His eternal and sovereign purpose.

Did that not occur at the cross? Was that not the eternal purpose and plan of God from before the foundation of the world? Was He not the Lamb of God slain from before time began? The answer that \_\_\_\_\_ [0:09:51] was it not Pilate and the Pharisees and an apostate nation of Israel that cried out, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him"? Did God not use ungodly people to bring about the greatest blessing that has ever come to your spiritual life; and I'll answer that for you. The answer is yes. That's what's taking place here. And amazingly, amazingly, God's name is not mentioned in this entire chapter. God's nowhere to be read. And yet we know that God is in the midst of all of this.

And you may say, "So, how do you know God was in the midst of all this? You're always talking about the sovereignty of God; how do you know this?" Well I want you to turn back to Genesis 50, it'll be worth your turning back for one second. But there are two verses that I want us to see that really becomes the divine interpretation of Genesis 37. This is the lens that you must put before your eyes through which you see Genesis 37. If you don't see Genesis 50 you'll not see Genesis 37, you'll just see black print on white paper.

And when we come to his life, as Joseph now has been taken to Egypt, which is exactly where God wants him to be, and God has raised him up to a position of extraordinary leadership in Egypt. And at last, Joseph's brothers come to him, and he recognizes them, and they recognize him. This is what Joseph said about what took place in Genesis 37.

So, in verse 20, Joseph said to them, "You meant evil against me." It was murder, it was hatred, attempted murder. It was lying, it was deception, it was evil. "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." They were carrying out their sinful ways; but over it all, the sovereignty of God was using it to accomplish a far greater purpose and a far higher aim, which was to move Joseph to Egypt that he would be a source of blessing to untold number of people.

And I want you to look at the previous verse, verse 19, as well, which should just jump off the page. Let me just begin in verse 18: "Then his brothers" - these brothers who sold him into slavery, these brothers who plotted to have him put to death, these brothers who had stuffed him down into this pit - "then his brothers came also and fell down before him and said, 'Behold, we are your servants.'" Verse 19, "But Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place?'"

The answer to that is yes. Joseph understood, "I'm right where God wants me. This is God's place for me." But the path that God has chosen has been a painful path. It's been a path that's involved him being put into a pit, being sold into slavery, and being put into a prison in Egypt. They meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.

Joseph did not see himself as a victim, like our whole culture sees itself, that "I'm a victim of my parents. I'm a victim of my friends. I'm a victim of my environment, my circumstances. I am a victim of society. I'm a victim of the government. I'm a victim of this or that, or this or that, or this or that." You need to wake up and understand the sovereignty of God. You need to wake up and understand that God sovereignly placed you in the family that He did, and He gave you the mother and the father that He gave you, and God knew exactly what He was doing. And God has a path for your life and a purpose for your life, and it's not all going to be a bed of roses. His path for you involves suffering and difficulty and injustice, and things to be done against you to inflict much pain to you; but it is a part of God's sovereign providence to bring you to His place where you need to be.

And so we need to get over this victimization of people and grow up and have an understanding of who God is. And if you don't understand who God is, you're just going to whimper your way through the rest of your life. But if you understand who God is, you're going to stand tall, you're going to move forward by faith, and you're going to understand that God's invisible hand has been upon your life to move you from Point A to Point B to Point C, and strange are the ways of God.

So, that's what this story is all about, and we need to understand this story. So I want to walk through this passage now, and the outline I think will actually be of help to us, because I want us to understand and see the bizarre way that God worked to bring him to Egypt, to put him into God's place, because this is how God has worked to put you in His place.

There's nothing random in life. There's no such thing as bad luck; that's just a pagan myth that does not exist. There is no such thing as bad luck. There is no such thing as an accident. There is no such thing as a random occurrence. As R. C. Sproul says, "There are no maverick molecules in the universe."

So, I want to give you seven really strange ways that God worked in Joseph's life. And let me just say one more thing - I'm kind of getting amped up here. It's been too long since I've been able to preach. This may be the point of the day: "God never has to have the circumstances perfect for God to work." You didn't have to have perfect parents for God to work. You didn't have to be in a perfect place for God to work. If you had to be in a perfect place with perfect parents for God to work, you would be in heaven, you would not be here on the earth.

So, I want to give you the seven unusual ways through which God worked in Joseph's life to move him to God's place. The first is "an unfair father," which may strike home with many of you here today, "an unfair father." Beginning in verse 12, "Then his brothers went to pasture their father's flock in Shechem." And the brother who's missing is Joseph, and Joseph is missing because Joseph is his father's favorite. We've been learning about that over these last Sundays. I mean, Jacob was a father who was filled with partiality and favoritism towards Joseph. And as the brothers now leave in verse 12, Joseph is not with them because they don't want Joseph, because

Joseph has received special treatment, which has fed his ego, and as you looked at last week with his brothers bowing down to him in a dream.

And so in verse 13, "Israel" - who is Jacob - "said to Joseph, 'Are not your brothers pasturing the flock in Shechem?' - the answer to that is yes - 'Come,' - which is a call to action - 'and I will send you to them.'" He's going to send him there to see if they need any help, because surely whatever their need is Joseph will be able to meet that need.

"And Joseph said to him, 'I will go.'" Now he doesn't know why. He is such an obedient son to his father. And by the way, at this point Joseph is 17 years of age. He's a stripling teenager who would be old enough to do many things on his own, but he is still in a humble posture of obedience to his father, and his father says, "Go to Shechem to help your brothers." "That's all I need to hear." And he immediately says, "Yes."

Verse 14, "Then Jacob said to him," - Joseph - "Go now and see about the welfare of your brothers, the welfare of the flock, and bring a word back to me." Only now does he explain why he wants him to go to Shechem after he has just simply said, "Go." And Joseph has said, "Yes, sir." Now he opens up the explanation.

"So he" - Jacob - "sent him" - Joseph - "from the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem," which is 50 miles away. It's not just over the hill, it's 50 miles due north. And before we move on here I think we just need to state the obvious if you may have had an unfair father. You may have had an over-ruling, dominant father, who was unkind, ungracious, unfair to you. I want you to know that God still works through fathers, and God never has to have a perfect father through which He works to move those who will be His servants.

So you need to understand that. And it may be you need to confess today a certain attitude that you have allowed to fester inside of your heart and to ask for God's forgiveness. So that's the first thing: an unfair father. This is where this story begins. The second thing is "an unknown stranger." This becomes almost more bizarre really.

So we come to verse 15, and Joseph is now in Shechem, which is 50 miles north, "And a man found Joseph." Now please note, Joseph did not find the man, the man found Joseph, and the reason he found him, he tells us in the middle of verse 15, "Behold, he" - Joseph - "was wandering in the field." He obviously looked lost. He's wandering around in circles. He, no doubt, is peering over the horizon and looking, trying to find his brothers and all of their flocks; he can't find them anywhere. No doubt, he has a look of bewilderment on his face.

"And the man asked him," - Joseph - please note, Joseph doesn't ask for directions - "the man, the man asked Joseph, 'What are you looking for?'" Now we don't even know who this man is. He's not named in this entire passage, he's just a man, an anonymous man, an unknown man, "who just happens to be standing in a field," and walks up to Joseph and says, "What are you looking for?" And Joseph, verse 16, said, "I'm looking for my brothers; please tell me where they are pasturing the flock."

Now look at verse 17: "Then the man said, 'They have moved from here.' - the man knows where his brothers are - 'Oh, yeah; I know your brothers. They were pasturing some flocks. They have moved from here,' - but more than that - 'for I heard them say, "Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan."

It was God who planted this man in a field to be the GPS for Joseph to go up and ask him, initiate, "What are you looking for? Oh, I know the answer to that. I know where your brothers are; they're over here in Dothan." Well, Dothan is 15 miles away, which is at least a full day's journey if it's just you. With a flock it's going to take longer."

But this is just another link in the chain with an unfair father, and now an unknown stranger to move Joseph to where he needs to be. This is how God works in your life, my friend. God places the right person at the right time in the right place to introduce you to your future spouse, to connect you with your next job, to point you to your next house or apartment or roommate, to direct you to this church. That's how God works, through unanticipated, even unknown people.

I was thinking about this of all the times I have flown around the world and different places, but this one story is still remarkable to me. My father was

dying of cancer, and I was in Mobile, Alabama and driving to Memphis, Tennessee to see him, what would be one of the last times I would see him alive. And I was driving through the middle of nowhere in Mississippi – that would be the whole state, OK. It's not the end of the world, but you can see it from there. And all of a sudden my cars goes, "Thump, thump, thump, thump," and I realized I've got a flat tire and, really, I am in nowhere. And so I pull over to the side of the road and I'm just thinking, "How am I going to call Anne to come fix this tire?" because I've never fixed a tire in my entire life; I'm a card-carrying AAA guy.

But I'm in the middle of nowhere, my cell phone's not even working. And I look up in the rearview mirror and there is this pickup truck that pulls in behind me, and two men get out of this pickup truck and come towards my car, and I'm thinking, "This could be the end of me. I could end up in my trunk." Yeah, because I have a spare tire. And these two men, two African American men, got out, and they said, "Let us change your tire." So they opened my trunk, got the jack out, jacked it up, changed my tire, put the new one on, the spare tire, put the old one in the trunk, and before I could even say, "Would you meet me at the next gas station; let me buy you something," they were gone. And I thought, "This is almost like a divine visitation, I mean, God just sending someone to get me to my father's house."

How many times does God work like that in our lives to point us, to move us in the right direction? And that's exactly what God is doing with Joseph, because he's not going to go to Egypt from Shechem, he's going to go to Egypt from Dothan. And this too is a part of God's inscrutable plan.

So this leads us now to, third – it gets more bizarre. I want you to see "an ungodly family," just an ungodly family, beginning in verse 18: "When they" – his brothers, Joseph's brothers – "saw him from a distance." So they can see him coming over the horizon. They have no idea he's coming; but, no doubt, they immediately recognized his coat of many colors, that he's just standing out on the horizon.

And so, "When they saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him" – they deceitfully conspired against Joseph, please note – "to put him to death." What kind of a dysfunctional family is this? I mean, they are evil, they are dark, they are devilish. The



devil has carved his initials in their heart to want to put their youngest brother to death.

So, verse 19, "They said to one another, 'Here comes this dreamer!'" They are dripping with hatred, and literally out of the Hebrew it translates "this master of dreams," "this owner of dreams."

Then verse 20, "Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits," and one of these pits will end up being like a prison house. In this day and time it's really a cistern. And a cistern is carved out of just stone and it goes down as deep as 20 feet deep, and it's a bowl-like shape where it's large at the bottom and there is a vertical shaft at the top, and the intent is to collect rainwater in arid climate. But once you go down into this pit, you cannot come back out of this pit. And they would put a stone over the top; and so you're just submerged 20 feet underground. And they said, "That's where we're going to put our little brother. That's going to be his timeout."

"And we will say," – now they another sin – "and we will say, 'A wild beast devoured him.'" Understand this: one sin, if it's unrepented of and unconfessed, it always leads to another sin. Sin never travels solo. Sin always breeds like mosquitoes. Sin always spreads like a prairie fire. And so their hatred and their desire to put him in this pit, now they're going to make up a lie to cover it up. And I will remind us all John 8:44, "For your father is a murderer from the beginning, he is the father of lies," referring to Satan. This is Satan really in control of their hearts.

And verse 21, "But Reuben heard this." He's the older brother, and he has some sense of conscience, like, "We can't go this far." "But Reuben heard this and rescued him out of their hands and said, 'Let us not take his life.' Reuben further said to them, 'Shed no blood.' – verse 22 – 'Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness.' – which is out even further in no man's land, unpopulated pasture land – 'There's a cistern out there, we'll stuff him there, and we'll just leave him to die there; that way we don't have to kill him with our own hands. We'll just put him out there to die.'"

And then at the end of verse 22 you see this long dash which is to signify this: as Moses wrote this, Moses is giving the interpretation behind the scene. This could just as easily be in parentheses, "that he" – Reuben –

"might rescue him" - Joseph - "out of their hands, to restore him to his father." So this was his plan. "No, let's don't stuff him here, let's put him in a pit way out there and just leave him there." And Reuben is thinking, "I'll just go back and rescue him once my brothers have left." So that's the plan, and Reuben is doing all that he can as the older brother to circumvent the original plan.

So, verse 23, "So it came out, when Joseph reached his brothers," - he finally now is in their presence - "that they stripped Joseph of his tunic." Now I looked up this word "stripped"; the next time it's used in the Old Testament is in Leviticus 1:6 when the priest would take a butcher knife and slay the sacrificial animal and just strip him down. So this indicates rough treatment, like the skinning of a sacrifice. And then it says, "the varicolored tunic that was on him." They don't even want to see that tunic anymore.

Verse 24, "and they took him and threw him into the pit." They didn't lower him down, they just cast him down. They hurled him down actually into the pit, and they thought their problems are behind them now. "We finally have got this little kid brother of ours who think he's better than we are, we've got him out of our hair, and we've stuffed him down in this pit, and we'll never see him again."

Moses adds, "Now the pit was empty, without any water in it." So he's going to die either of starvation, dehydration, or exposure, because he doesn't have a coat anymore. And I think what we need to understand is that the providence of God, the providence of God which is sovereign outworking of His purposes in our lives often leads us into a pit, into dark places. Remember, Jesus sent His disciples on the Sea of Galilee that night into the storm intentionally. None of us are exempt from the pit of providence. None of us get a free pass in this world. And we need to understand that even if someone who is evil brings about a sinful act against us, there is a higher overarching purpose that God always has.

So notice, fourth, "the unexpected appearance." And this continues to become just an extraordinary providence. In verse 25, "They sat down to eat a meal." That's how seared their conscience was. They have just slammed dunked their younger brother into a pit never to be seen again, so they thought, and they sit down and have a meal. They probably said a prayer before the meal and gave thanks to God for the food after they have just brought about circumstances that will kill their brother.

"And as they raised their eyes," meaning at this very moment, at this time. There's a timing about God's providence. "As they raised their eyes" - they just looked up from their meal - "and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites." All of a sudden they just come over the horizon at this exact moment, not before they put him into the pit, but after they put him into the pit. And Dothan happens to be on the great trade route headed south to Egypt. It didn't go through Shechem, it goes through Dothan. And God has moved this whole operation to Dothan just so that this caravan will come over the horizon at this exact moment, because this is going to be the airplane flight for Joseph to get him down to Egypt.

And so, "They looked, and behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing aromatic gum and balm and myrrh." All of these would be used in embalming mummies and dead bodies in Egypt, as well as pleasant fragrances in the house. There's a lot of money down in the Egyptian dynasty, and so there's money to be made by bringing their product down to Egypt. And it says, "on their way bringing them down to Egypt."

So this really becomes even worse in verse 26: "Judah" - who's another brother - "said to his brothers, 'What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood?'" I mean, he has an eye for business. And there's money to be made here: "Let's don't just kill him, let's sell him." Brilliant idea; entrepreneur, supply and demand. "There's only one Joseph; let's sell him. We'll make money, and we'll figure out how to explain it later."

So, verse 27, "Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him," - in other words, "If we kill him, we won't make any money." - "for he is our brother, our own flesh." Suddenly he has a moment of some small conscience, like, "We can't do this to our own brother; let's just sell him." And his brothers listened to him, because they're greedy. And the flesh always loves a fleshly solution to a problem.

So, verse 28, "Then some Midianite traders passed by." That's these in the caravan. They pass by at that very moment. Strange is the providence of God. "So they pulled him up out of this pit," - Joseph's brothers, end of verse 28 - "and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver." That's the average price for a male slave. "Thus they" - the Midianite traders - "brought Joseph into Egypt."

This was God's sovereign purpose for how Joseph will be taken down to Egypt, and it will be through the hatred and the lying and the deception and the greed and the ego of his brothers that he will be brought there. You know, the same is true for your life. Strangely enough, God often uses sinful people in your life, even unbelievers in your life, to work out His sovereign purpose for you.

I was thinking about the first time I ever met my wife Anne. I had been preaching in a church here in Dallas, and her ex-fiancé just walked up to me after the sermon and said, "Would you like to come eat lunch with us?" I was a broke seminary student, so I said, "Let me pray about it. Yes." So that's how I first met her.

But more bizarre than that, the first time I ever went over to her apartment, a friend of mine who was in ministry invited me, "Why don't we go over to Anne's apartment and we'll have a meal?" So I agreed. This person who took me over to her house was a con artist who went to prison for bilking money out of banks here in Dallas. That's who introduced me and brought me over to her house, a scam artist.

God works through unusual ways, does he not? God works through evil men to move us to where we need to be at times. It was evil men who led Jesus to Pontius Pilate as He was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, a cohort of soldiers led by Judas. But that was God's sovereign purpose for Jesus to get Him to the cross for the greater good for those who would believe in Him.

Well this leads, next, to "an unplanned absence," in verse 29. I mean, there's another layer. There are just layers of bizarre providence that are taking place here. And so in verse 29, "Now Reuben returned to the pit." Reuben the older brother who said, "No, let's put him in a pit way out in the middle of nowhere so I can circle back and pull him out, and I'll take him back to father once everybody has left." He now returns to the pit to pull Joseph out, and he makes an amazing discovery that Joseph is not there. And so, obviously, Reuben was not there when the other brothers pulled him out of the pit and sold him to those traders headed to Egypt. There's so much going on in this narrative; and yet through it all, God has wired it. God has wired the whole of this beneath the surface to bring about His sovereign plan for Joseph.

So, "Reuben returned to the pit, and behold, Joseph was not in the pit," - so clearly, he had not been there when they had extracted him - "so he tore his garments." - which was an expression of deep grief and sorrow - "He returned to his brothers and said, 'The boy's not here.'" Well, of course, they know he's not here, they are the ones who perpetrated this crime and sold him to the traders. But they're so full of deception they don't own up to what happened, they just sat there silent as if to say, "Wow, that's amazing. I wonder how that happened."

And so, Reuben says, "As for me, where am I to go?" In other words, "Where will I find him? What am I to do?" And there are times in our lives when we find ourselves in despair and don't know where to turn and don't know what to do and don't know where to go; and that's where Reuben is. But in no way does this hinder the sovereign purposes of God moving forward.

So, in verse 31, we see "the unholy deception." This gets worse. How can God work through such evil means? But God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick, and God is a make it happen God.

And so, in verse 31, "So they took Joseph's tunic," - the brothers - "and slaughtered a male goat and dipped the tunic in the blood," - and this is one more sin; it started with hatred, then it goes to lying, now it's deception, a great coverup - verse 32 - "and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father," - 65 miles away. They have gone out of their way intentionally now to commit this sin. This wasn't an accidental sin, this required that they travel 65 miles to go deceive their father - "and say to him," - and just lied through their teeth - 'We found this; please examine to see whether it is your son's tunic or not.'" Now they want to so distance themselves from Joseph, they don't say, "Check out this tunic to see if it's our brother's." No, they say, "It's your son's tunic." They don't want to have anything to do with Joseph.

Verse 33, "Then he" - Jacob - "examined it and said, 'It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; and Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!' - he bought the lie - "So Jacob tore his clothes," - a sign of grief - "and put sackcloth on his loins" - which would be a coarse animal hair, another sign of grief - "and mourned for his son many days."

And, verse 35, this just adds to the evil of this whole thing: "Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him." The sons who have put him in a pit, the sons who have sold him to traders, the sons who have profited off of him, the sons who have now deceived their father, they try to comfort him. I mean, this is the hypocrisy of all hypocrisy. "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can understand it?" Jeremiah 17:9.

At the end of verse 35, "and he" - Jacob - "refused to be comforted," - no words could bring him comfort; and he is so brokenhearted he says at the end of verse 35 - "and he said, 'Surely I will go down to Sheol' - which is the place of death, it's the grave - 'in mourning for my son.'" What that means is, "As long as I am alive, I will weep and I will mourn. There will be not one moment of comfort for me until I'm dead." This is how devastated Jacob is over the perceived death of his favorite son. And at the end of verse 35, "So the father wept for him." He wept uncontrollably. Word in the Hebrew means "to weep bitterly with loud wailings and shrieks and moans and groans."

There's one last verse in this chapter and it's the seventh heading and it just adds to the - I keep using the word "bizarre," but the bizarre nature of this providence. In verse 36 it's "an unjust slavery, an unjust slavery." All of this has transpired in the plan of God to move Joseph to Egypt. But as he goes to Egypt, it's not to be in luxurious conditions; he is sold into slavery and will end up in a prison. It goes from bad to worse.

And so, in verse 36, "Meanwhile," and that's an important word. "Meanwhile" means simultaneously while Jacob is mourning and weeping, at that same time Joseph is being sold into slavery. "Meanwhile, the Midianites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh's officer, the captain of the bodyguard." And if you're familiar with the story you know that this is a slippery slope from which he will not recover easily, as he will be accused of making advances at Potiphar's wife and will end up in a prison. But it will be from that prison that he'll be an interpreter of dreams, and he will become a high-ranking officer in the Egyptian dynasty.

This is just layer upon layer upon layer of imperfect people and imperfect events to bring about the perfect will of God for Joseph. This is how God works. He works through an unfair father. He works through evil siblings. He works through a random stranger. He works to orchestrate people and

events, here to put this caravan there to take him down to be sold to Potiphar. Each of these is a link in the chain that is intended to bring about a far greater good for many people in Egypt.

I wonder how this relates to your life. There's no way it cannot relate to your life. None of us grew up perfect circumstances in a perfect world. None of us have been immune from the trials and tribulations of life. Yet God has never taken His hand off the steering wheel. And what others have meant for evil, God has meant for good in your life, because He's causing all things to work together for good to those who love God, who are called according to His purpose. And that greatest good is not for you to have an easy life, that greatest good is to conform you into the image of His Son Jesus Christ.

And God has so worked through these circumstances in your life and in my life that He's used it to bring us to God's place. For some of you here today He has worked through circumstances to bring you right here to this church to hear what I'm about to say, that the parallels between Joseph and Jesus Christ are most notable, that both Joseph and Jesus were sent by their father; Jesus sent into this world by His Father. Both Joseph and Jesus were rejected by his brothers. The Bible says, "Jesus came into His own and His own received Him not."

Both Joseph and Jesus were betrayed: one by a man named Judah, the other by a man named Judas. Both Joseph and Jesus also were betrayed for money, and all of these parallels between Joseph and Jesus are somewhat unmistakable. And so you need to understand that it was the sovereign purpose of God to send His Son into this world to suffer and to be put to death upon a cross to bear the sins of all who would believe in Him, to be buried, to be raised from the dead, and to ascend to the right hand of God the Father. And what you need to know, that if you are to go to heaven, if you are to have a right standing with God, you must put your faith in Jesus Christ.

There's no other way for you to be accepted by God but to believe in Him. And if you have never believed in Jesus Christ, I call you this very moment to transfer your trust from yourself completely into the saving arms of Jesus Christ, and He will receive you, He will save you, He will forgive you, He will clothe you with His perfect righteousness, He will move into your life, and He will live inside of you, and He will be to you everything that you

need for the rest of your life. And if you do not have Jesus Christ, you do not have anything of any value. But if you have Jesus Christ, you have everything that you need. David the psalmist said, "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want." You need a shepherd. You need someone to find you in your lostness and to bring you into the kingdom of God; and the Lord Jesus Christ is ready to receive you.

This could be your day with God. This could be your moment of moments with God. This could be the time in God's perfect timing, the orchestration of the events of your life, that your whole life has been a preparation for this one specific moment for you to meet Jesus Christ and for you to commit your life to Him. And if you have never done that, I call upon you this moment in your heart of hearts to repent of your sin, to deny yourself, to take up a cross and become a follower of Jesus Christ. It's the greatest decision you will ever make in your life. And if you refuse to commit your life to Christ, it is the worst decision you will ever make in your life. Let us pray.

[Prayer] Father, what an amazing story with Joseph. It's really mindboggling how You so orchestrated the events and the affairs of his life to bring about a far greater good, not only for Joseph, but for countless other people. Help us to trust in Your sovereign will and in your sovereign purposes to bring about a greater good. And may anyone here today, all here today who are without Christ, may this be their day of salvation, in Jesus' name. Amen.