

He Came unto His Own

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[0 : 0 0] that. Well, we come now to open God's Word together, continuing our series of studies in the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. And this morning, we'll be reading from chapter 37. If you have a Bible, please do open it and follow along. If you don't have one, if you raise your hand, I'm sure one of our welcome team would love to bring a copy to you.

Our senior minister, Willie Philip, will be preaching to us from this passage a little later in our service. And we'll be reading Genesis 37, beginning at verse 2, all the way through to the end of the chapter. Genesis chapter 37, verse 2. These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being 17 years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. Now, Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him. Now, Joseph had a dream. And when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. He said to them, hear this dream that I have dreamed. Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field. And behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered round it and bowed down to my sheaf. His brothers said to him, are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to rule over us? So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and 11 stars were bowing down to me.

But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, what is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you? And his brothers were jealous of him. But his father kept the saying in mind. Now, his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. And Israel said to Joseph, are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them. And he said to him, here I am. So he said to him, go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock and bring me word. So he sent him from the valley of Hebron and he came to Shechem. And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, what are you seeking? I am seeking my brothers, he said.

Tell me please where they are pasturing the flock. And the man said, they have gone away. For I heard them say, let's go to Dothan. So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan. They saw him from afar. And before he came near to them, they conspired against him to kill him. They said to one another, here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him and we will see what will become of his dreams. But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands saying, let us not take his life. And Reuben said to them, shed no blood, throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father. So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty. There was no water in it.

[4 : 1 2] Then they sat down to eat. And looking up, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh on their way to carry it down to Egypt.

Then Judah said to his brothers, what profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh. And his brothers listened to him. Then Midianite traders passed by and they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites for 20 shekels of silver.

They took Joseph to Egypt. When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes and returned to his brothers and said, the boy is gone and I, where shall I go?

Then they took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, this we have found, please identify whether it is your son's robe or not. And he identified it and said, it is my son's robe.

A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces. Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son for many days. All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, no, I shall go down to Sheol to my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him. Meanwhile, the Midianites had told him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard. Amen. This is God's word.

[6:07] Well, do turn with me if you would to Genesis chapter 37. Genesis 37 and verse 2. These are the generations of Jacob. This announces the 10th, the climactic book of beginnings of Genesis, which tells how God's promise to Abraham begins to flourish into a chosen people who will at last be the means of blessing for the whole world. But the problem is that this family is a mess. We saw the shameful massacre at Shechem in chapter 34, led by Simeon and Levi, which left such a public stink. Then we saw Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, bringing the shame of incest into the household. And the next chapter 38, we'll see another story of sexual debauchery involving Judah, the one who was next in line for leadership after these three had disgraced themselves. This really is a mess. Is this the family who's going to bless the world? Is that a joke? This family needs saving from itself.

And that really is what these final chapters in Genesis are actually all about. The saving of God's people and that people's savior. The God whose tenacious grace has kept true to his promise, despite all whose transforming grace has been at work in Jacob's life throughout, is now seen to be the God of triumphant grace who's forging a triumphant grace who's forging a people for a glorious future. But it will be through the fires of affliction. We'll be on the anvil of testing that that future is forged, not without heartache and pain and great cost for his people, and above all, for their chosen savior. Joseph, whom they reject, is their own flesh and blood whom they despise. He will be exalted through suffering so that he might share the fruit of that glory and that exaltation with them, with his own people for their blessing and for their peace, those who hated and wanted to kill him. So this is not a romantic story. It's not a sentimental story.

Don't let Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical fill your heart and guide your thinking about this. It is a brilliant story. Yes, it's captivately told, but it is brutally real about the tragedies of human life, about the bitterness that so often is in the human heart.

Summed up in retrospect, don't look it up, but in chapter 50, Joseph famously says this, as for you, you meant it for evil. It is a story of the sinful perversity of human beings, even inside God's church, inside God's chosen family. But it's also a story of the sovereign power of God. You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. Even man's worst evil is like clay in the hands of the potter, under God's complete control, serving his sovereign purpose, which is, as Joseph says, for the saving of many lives.

God's great purpose is that he's calling out a people for his name. That's the whole story of Genesis from the beginning. And he does the New Testament makes clear. He's been doing that since before the foundation of the world. His whole purpose in creating the world is that he is building a church, a people who will display God's glory in heaven as well as on earth, all to the praise of his glorious grace. It's a story that reaches its fullness, of course, in the saving work of the seed of Abraham, the Lord Jesus Christ. But Genesis is the beginning of that great story unfolding. And even here, just as at every stage of that story, even here, there are numerous echoes of God's saving pattern. There are chimes, there are foreshadowings that can't but cause our minds and our hearts to wonder at the marvelous way that God has laced, as it were, the whole of human history with the fragrance of his beloved Son.

[10:58] The shadow of Calvary and the Christ of Calvary is discernible all the way through the unfolding pages of Scripture in every story, but perhaps never more visibly so than in this story, which begins in this chapter, as we'll see, with a father who sends his son out to seek his son out to seek his errant and hateful brothers for their good.

And they seize him and they abuse him and they try to kill him. Joseph, whom God has chosen as his instrument of salvation for the whole family, he's sold as a slave, he's as good as dead, by his

own brothers.

And that's our story today. He came to his own, but his own received him not.

Indeed, they tried to kill him. So let's look briefly at the events of the story as they unfold and try and understand what God wants us to see in it all. First, look at verses 1 to 11.

This describes the life in Jacob's family as one of simmering conflict. On the surface, it's about a special robe, whether it's multicolored or it's a long-sleeved robe, as the footnote says.

[12 : 14] It's about a robe and it's about dreams and so on. But really, really, it's about the future of the family. It's about the leadership of the family. It's about the covenant of God.

And this is, remember, a story in a family where birthrights and blessings are very, very important indeed. And it's usual for commentators and preachers, indeed, to slam the young Joseph.

Oh, he was proud. He was arrogant. He was a tale teller. He was a spoiled brat. He deserved everything he got. But remember that, although it was his brother's view, is not, I think, the view of the writer of Genesis, nor the view of God himself.

Remember back in chapter 31, Laban's sons had a view of Jacob that was very derogatory, but it wasn't at all God's view, was it? So we need to be careful who we listen to. It's a bit like Moses in Exodus chapter 2, because he's criticized there, isn't he, by his kinsmen when he kills an Egyptian enslaver, but not by God.

So remember the bigger story here in Genesis. It's been a story of conflict since the very beginning. The seed of the serpent in conflict with the seed of promise.

[13 : 31] And we saw that last week in chapter 36, the perpetual enmity of Esau's seed against Israel. And here in chapter 37, what we see is Jacob's own household behaving just like the seed of the serpent, just like enemies of God's promise.

Now we've seen the cut of their jib, these brothers, already in chapter 34. Very unpleasant it was, remember? So we need to be careful.

Whose side are we on here? No doubt Joseph's brothers accused them of dishing up dirt, dressing up proudly, dreaming up all kinds of fantasies. But what does the text actually tell us?

What does the text actually emphasize? Well, it seems to tell us that Joseph actually is a very dutiful young man concerned with his father's business. Verse 2, he brought a bad report of his brothers to Jacob.

Now you could read that as Joseph telling tales, as telling malicious slander. But given what we already know about Jacob's sons, it seems far more likely, doesn't it, that the badness in the report was their badness.

[14 : 41] Joseph's telling his father about their ongoing bad behavior. Because he seems a very obedient and diligent son to his father. He's quite the contrast, isn't he, to Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, who utterly scorned his father by sleeping with his father's wife.

And in verse 14 here, Joseph dutifully goes a long way, doesn't he, to seek his brother's welfare on behalf of his father, despite their attitude to him.

It seems a very noble thing to do, not a nasty thing. Joseph did have a lot to cope with. Jacob's favoritism was no doubt foolish, as verse 3 speaks of.

He put a robe on Joseph that seemed to mark him out as the leader of the family in the next generation. And it provoked the other sons, verse 4. And it was Jacob's right as the father to do this. And Joseph was the firstborn of Rachel, whereas Leah's firstborn, Reuben, had disgraced himself. But it can't have been easy for Joseph, can it, to be marked out in that way among his brothers.

[15 : 46] But God marked him out too. Because God sent dreams to Joseph. And these dreams surely had the force of an oracle of God, just exactly like the oracle that was given before Jacob was born.

Do you remember? Marking him out, the younger brother, as the one over Esau. Oh, but Joseph should surely have kept quiet about his dreams, people say.

Or should he? Should David have kept quiet when God marked him out as the leader of God's people so as to avoid upsetting Saul? Should he? Should Jesus have kept quiet?

And never risked hatred by claiming that he was chosen by God and God wanted people to follow him? See, the whole story required that Jacob's brothers were told about God's plan for Joseph.

And yet it's in the telling here that gets Joseph very much into trouble. Maybe Joseph was indiscreet in what and how he told the dreams.

[16:53] But God gave him the dreams twice, as if to reaffirm it all. And the dreams didn't really need much interpretation, did they? Although perhaps he was immature, perhaps he was naive in the way he dealt with things.

I suppose at the age of 17, who isn't? But when we get to chapter 39, just a very little time later, we see an extraordinary maturity, don't we, in someone who's very young? Despite all kinds of great traumas, I'm not sure that we can even heap that upon Joseph here.

The text certainly says nothing at all about Joseph proudly parading his coat. For all we know, Joseph might have hated the coat.

We don't know. The text doesn't tell us anything about that. What the text does tell us repeatedly, shouting aloud to us, look at verse 4 and verse 5 and verse 8 and verse 11.

What it tells us is that Joseph's brothers hated Joseph. They couldn't so much as be civil to him. They hated him. They hated him. They hated him for his dreams.

[18:01] In particular, for the oracle that came from God. And they hated him even more for his testimony to the oracle that came from God. Verse 11, the word there, jealous, really means violently jealous.

Ever stronger hatred. But even stronger than the hatred was this envy, this jealousy. And that's what led them to look for vengeance.

And that is what overshadows everything else in this text. Whatever incitement there may have been by Jacob's favoritism or even by Joseph's attitude, if he did act foolishly. The overarching thing is the visceral hatred of Jacob.

Of Joseph by his brothers. And that is the spirit of Cain. Cain who hated his brother, Abel. Esau who hated his brother, Jacob.

Because behind all of that, you see, is ultimately a hatred of God himself. Hatred of God's election. Hatred of God's plan. God's purpose. It's not just Joseph that they hate.

[19:10] It's the dream, isn't it? It's God's sovereign choice to be God. To do things his way. To choose the person that he chooses. And people always hate the challenge of a sovereign God.

Because it challenges our precious autonomy, doesn't it? It challenges our self-rule. There's nothing new about that. And that is exactly what we're seeing here. They reject the oracle of God because they hate the idea of having to submit to God's rule his way.

And so they despise the messenger also. So here's the family that God has chosen to bless the world. And through whom he's going to bless the whole wide world.

All the families. And yet they are raging at God's chosen way of salvation. They're hardly a family of saviors, are they? They need a savior themselves.

To transform them before they can do anything to help others. And yet when God provides one among their own brothers, Joseph, they want to kill him.

[20:19] And that pattern of simmering conflict against God and his covenant promise is a perpetual pattern throughout history. God's people always seem to reject the deliverers that he sends to them.

If you doubt my reading of this chapter, have a read later on of Acts chapter 7. You can read Stephen's inspired, authentic commentary on these matters in Acts 7. And he sums it all up. Speaking to Israelites, the very family of faith, and says, You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in hearts and ears, you always reject the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.

You see, they hated Joseph. They were jealous of Joseph. And they wanted to kill him. Because they were angry and hated God. And verses 12 to 30 tell how they got their chance.

Because these verses tell of a shocking crime. Look at verse 12. It seems strange to think, doesn't it, that the family would want to go anywhere near Shechem again, given the history of their exploits there and their reputation.

[21:40] And maybe that's why Jacob was nervous and concerned for news in verse 14. Perhaps he feared for them. And it also seems rather strange, doesn't it, that Jacob would send Joseph alone, a 17-year-old boy, into their midst.

Didn't he perceive the depth of the hatred of the brothers? Perhaps he just couldn't imagine that his children could stoop so low as to do any harm to Joseph.

Parents can be very naive, can't they? Very foolish. My little Johnny would never do that. Oh, my little Jenny would never use language like that. I hope Christian parents are not as naive and stupid as that.

But maybe Jacob thought that. And off Joseph goes. And I think we need to be struck, don't we, by his willing obedience to his father here and his care for his brothers who hate him so grievously. It's a 50-mile journey, at least, to Shechem. And then verse 15 says he has to go further on because they're not there. And he's very vulnerable, wandering around on his own in hostile territory, where his family is a bad name.

[22 : 46] But notice it's not the strangers who are a danger to him. It's actually going to be his own brothers. Verse 18 tells us they saw him from afar. And they conspire, they plot to murder him.

By the way, it's the same word there, to kill him, as is used in Genesis 4 of Cain, killing his brother Abel. And there's the same glaring repetition also all through this chapter, do you notice, of the word brother, 21 times.

Brother, brothers. So Joseph found his brothers, verse 17, and they conspired to murder him, their own brother, our own flesh, as Judah describes him in verse 27.

They wanted to get rid of Joseph. Notice verse 20 also, they wanted to get rid of his dreams. They wanted to silence him and silence the intrusion of God's unwelcome revelation into their lives.

Telling. But verse 21, Reuben intervenes, probably more out of self-interest, I think, than pity.

Perhaps he wants to get back into favor with Jacob. And rescuing Joseph would do something for his disgrace.

[24 : 04] So they don't kill him immediately. They strip him of his robe, the special robe, the royal robe. And they throw him in a pit. And then, verse 25, they just sit down to eat as if nothing had happened.

Incredibly callous and cold-hearted, isn't it? Can't help but think of another man, stripped of his robe. There's a bunch of coarse men just sat down to play poker roundabout.

And Reuben, it seems, has wandered off because in verse 26, Judah takes charge. He's obviously another rival for leadership of the tribe. And he says, well, let's make some loot out of this from ourselves as well.

That's the word prophet. Well, Selim is a slave to these Ishmaelites, these Midianite traders, these complete pagans. Notice they are, verse 27.

And there's no mercy in his suggestion. Don't be mistaken. Kidnapping people, people trafficking was a capital crime in the Mosaic law. It was treated just like murder. Everyone hearing this would know exactly that.

[25 : 08] And clearly the brothers never expected to see him again. Slaves didn't tend to last very long. So they deliver him over to what is a certain death, but they avoid the nasty business of killing him themselves.

Not our hand on our flesh, verse 27. So they solve their consciences easily, it seems. And they get their pieces of silver. Blood money.

Oh, a little chime. And Reuben then, verse 29, comes back. But what a pathetic outburst. Oh, where shall I go, he says. What can I do now?

Well, he could have insisted, couldn't he, that they all go after the traders and get their brother back. I mean, this is the family who went and slaughtered an entire city in order to get their sister back a little while ago.

But no, he just acquiesces in the shocking crime. And then verses 31 to 36 tell us that he joins in what is now a shameful cover-up. A shameful cover-up.

[26 : 15] What a sorry story it is. But it's replete with irony, isn't it? Because remember, Jacob deceived his blind old father with stolen clothes. Remember? And with a goat.

And now he's deceived with clothes and the blood of a goat. You do tend to reap what you sow in life, don't you? At least according to the Bible.

And if you live by deception, don't be surprised if that deception comes back to bite you. And there's cowardice, I think, from the brothers. Verse 32, notice they sent the robe.

That probably means that they sent it ahead by the hands of servants because they knew the shock that it would cause their father. And they wanted to shield themselves from it. But they do come to Jacob.

And the cruelty of maintaining the deception is very stark, isn't it? They let him mouth the very words that they had concocted to say back in verse 20. A fierce animal has devoured him.

[27 : 17] And then added to the cruelties the hypocrisy of their feigned comfort in verse 35. How did they manage that? They're quite something. You wonder, don't you, when grieving parents,

sometimes we see on TV after a child has been murdered, and you have the grieving parents making a plea for catching the murderer.

And then, astonishingly, sometime later, we discover that actually the child was murdered by their own parents. And we're all taken in, aren't we? We think, surely parents could never do such a thing.

Surely a brother could never do such a thing. But we're wrong, aren't we, sometimes? Because there is no depth to the wickedness in the human heart.

And Jacob here won't be comforted. His grief is deep. It's terrible. It seems interminable. He says in verse 35, I'll go down to Sheol. I'll go down to the grave mourning for Joseph.

And it seems here he is grieving as someone with no hope. It's different from the grief back in chapter 35, even when his wife Rachel died. And maybe he thinks that now, you see, God has deserted him utterly.

[28 : 29] It may well be, I think, that Jacob thought that Joseph was the seed of promise, the leader for the next generation. That's why he marked him out with this cloak. And perhaps now he thinks, if Joseph is dead, God must have abandoned his covenant with me and with my family.

Can't be sure of that, but we can't miss the darkness here expressed in verse 35. There's mourning. There's weeping. There is utter, utter darkness. And to Jacob, in the midst of this story, it surely did seem that this was the end, the end of Joseph and the end of all hope.

But let's look again at the narrative, knowing what we know. And we can see, I think, hints even here that that is not so.

Because this whole chapter also bears reference to a sovereign control. A sovereign control superintending everything that unfolds here. Now, it's true.

God is not mentioned in this entire chapter, is he? Doesn't appear. He doesn't speak directly.

Although he is clearly the unspoken sender of the dreams to Joseph. But at first, it seems as though God's hand is absent here.

[29 : 48] But some years ago, when Ralph Davis spoke in this passage at a minister's conference here, he said this, God may seem to be absent, but his fingerprints are everywhere. If we have eyes to see, if we have ears to hear.

See, in verses 1 to 11, for example, amid the simmering conflict, the dreams do remind us of the big story. They do remind us of God's promise to Abraham and to Jacob, that rulers would come from their body.

Rulers who would turn the world upside down. And we're reminded of a pattern, aren't we, that God has revealed before, about older brothers serving the younger. There's a familiar pattern at work.

A sovereign control with fingerprints that we recognize. And then in verses 12 to 30, despite this shocking crime, there are so many apparent coincidences, aren't there?

We can't help but remember God's promise of presence and protection for his chosen one. Here's Joseph all alone on this long journey, but he's protected. Just as Jacob had been.

[30 : 54] And he just happens to meet a man in the field, verse 15, who can tell him where to go. Remember all these chance meetings that we've seen before at wells and places like that.

And it just so happens that the relocation of the brothers and then Joseph's delay means that, well, a caravan of traders just happens to be passing Dothan at just the right moment.

And Reuben, for whatever reason, decides to do the right thing. This incestuous adulterer becomes, as verse 21 says, the rescuer, the deliverer out of their hands.

It's no accident that that word is used. It comes right out of the Exodus story where God himself is called the rescuer, the deliverer of the people from Pharaoh. And even the pit, verse 24, we're told, turns out not to be a death pit, but a saving pit, because it's not full of water, as you'd expect a system to be.

And then even Judah's mercenary mind to make money actually turns out to be what saves Joseph's life. See, they meant it all for evil.

[32 : 01] There's no doubt about that. But a sovereign control is at work. Do you see? And that's underlined, isn't it, in verse 36, the very last verse here. Because there's grief, there's weeping, there's darkness, there's despair.

But, meanwhile, meanwhile, Joseph is not dead. But he's been sold, in fact, to a high-ranking officer in the very palace, the palace of Pharaoh.

Just as later on, another deliverer of God's people would be placed by God, we're right in Pharaoh's palace to be nurtured from his earliest age, to grow and to become the great savior of God's people, Moses.

And in that little verse, you see, verse 36, we're reminded that the great plan and purpose of God's not forgotten. It's not abandoned.

It's certainly not overcome, even by the worst evil of man. There is a divine hand at work in the midst of this conflict and the cruelty and the crimes.

[33 : 07] There is a sovereign control. God meant it for good. Not for Joseph's good, only, but for the good of the whole people, the people that he is gathering to bear his name forever.

And not only for that immediate family of Israel, but through their seed of promise, for a people of blessing to all the families of the earth, the entire church worldwide of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The protecting and the saving of God's savior here is for the protecting and the saving of his whole seed, his whole people of promise in the future.

This is not just Joseph's story. Just as Exodus is not just Moses' story, or even the gospels are not just Jesus' story. It's all part of the great story that explains every story.

And that is the purpose of God, from eternity, to bring into being a family who will display his glory to the earth and to the heavens forever and ever. We've been studying Ephesians recently, and it's Ephesians that lays out so clearly that great eternal purpose of God.

[34 : 19] The purpose set forth before time itself. As a plan to reach its climax in Christ, in the fullness of time. So that through him and his saving work in the church, Paul says, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known, even to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.

And that, Paul says, is the eternal purpose of God, revealed at last, come to pass in Christ Jesus our Lord. God's eternal purpose, the reason for this world and everything in it and everyone in it, is that through the promised Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, God will have a people who will display his marvelous glory to the entire universe, not just the earth, but the heavens.

And not just for time, but for eternity. And then Paul says something immediately very striking, just as he has expanded all of that to them.

He says this in Ephesians 3 verse 13. This is God's great purpose for his people. So, he says, so I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, for your glory.

I am suffering for that glorious purpose, he's saying, so don't lose heart, you see? Isn't that striking? It sounds very strange. But Paul's always saying things like that, isn't he?

[35 : 47] I'm sharing in the sufferings of Christ, and so must you, he tells Timothy and other servants of the gospel, because that is how God's glory is being forged for all God's people, according to his eternal purpose.

And you see, if we see that pattern, which is the pattern of Calvary, we see it foreshadowed in the lives of all who serve that great covenant purpose, leading up to the coming of Christ in the flesh.

And we see it thereafter, echoed in the servants of Christ who serve the same purpose today, as we await the return of Jesus Christ in person. And if we see that, you see, I think we begin to understand both the mysteries and the experience of Bible characters like Joseph, and also, also the mysteries that we experience in our lives as the saints of God today.

Because, you see, if we're believers in Christ, we are part of this same story. It's the story of God gathering himself, a people for his name, and keeping them alive forever, to be freed at last from the curse of sin and from death, and to share in the promise, the eternal promise of his marvelous grace.

So as we draw to a close, let's just look back over this story, in the light of what Paul says there to Ephesians, about the great story, the marvelous story of God's marvelous mercy, of which this story is just one part.

[37 : 21] Let's look back and just try to let it sink in, what it means to be a part of that story. The story of all God's people who are chosen for glory. First, we surely can't escape marveling, can we, at the magnitude, the sheer magnitude of God's mercy.

That this family, so dysfunctional, so destructive, so full of hatred, enemies of God's grace, that this family were the object of his saving mercy.

The whole story of these chapters is about God's rescue of these brothers, to bring them into a place of blessing, into a place of prosperity, to rescue them, not only from hunger in their homeland

that was to come, but even more importantly, to rescue them from the hatred in their hearts that would otherwise have destroyed them.

It's easy to look down on Joseph's brothers, isn't it? Until we realize that in looking at them, the truth is that we're looking in a mirror.

We're seeing in them, aren't we, so much of what we see in our own hearts. Never mind what we once were, but even as Christians, as believing people, so often we still are.

[38 : 45] Resenting other people, who are called and chosen for a role that we covet and we would like. Hating in our hearts, often people who have things that we don't and we want.

It's not just, it's not just pagans who have a chip on their shoulder in life, is it? Not just pagans who harbor grudges, who harbor bitterness in their heart, is it?

And without God's mercy in Christ, how lost, how lost all of us would be. Paul says to Titus, Is that untrue?

But, he says, the goodness, the loving kindness of God our Savior appeared and saved us. Not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy.

Mercy. We are not Joseph's brothers, as Bob Fowle would be quick to remind us. But we do share far too closely their flesh, don't we?

[40 : 05] Their hearts. I don't think we can read these verses, honestly, without being humbled ourselves, again, at the sheer magnitude of God's mercy to us. In the Lord Jesus Christ.

But secondly, this story also surely makes us marvel afresh at the means of God's mercy. It comes through the appearance of a Savior, says Paul, who suffered for us, in our place, that we might inherit his glory.

There's an inspired commentary on the whole life of Joseph in just a few short verses in Psalm 105. You can look a little later.

It speaks about God sending a famine to judge the land. But for Israel, he said, he had sent a man ahead of them, Joseph, sold as a slave. His feet were hurt in fetters.

His soul put in iron. And so, says God, through his suffering, Israel were made fruitful and stronger than their foes.

[41 : 17] You see, here in Genesis 37, we can't see yet any good can come out of this dreadful evil. Just like the disciples around the cross and the women at the tomb could see only darkness, only death, only despair in the death of their beloved master.

But John Calvin comments on these verses, God brings forth the salvation of his church, not from magnificent splendor, but from death and the grave.

There's a familiar pattern, isn't there? God's way of dealing with evil is by means of suffering servants, of the brother who suffers and bears enmity from the very ones that he comes to save.

And Joseph is just one of the many deliverers of God's people. But each one faces the same rejection, the same hatred, the same scars. It's always a pattern of deeply painful experience for God's saviors just because of the persistent perversity of sin and enmity in the hearts of those who need God's saving mercy.

And that's why Joseph's story of triumph and fruitfulness only through humiliation and suffering so rings, so chimes with the experience of the Lord Jesus himself. Because always it has been so.

[42 : 44] For Joseph, for Moses, for all the prophets that Stephen speaks about, all who resisted because of hearts that were hardened by sin.

And for Christ himself and for the apostles just like Paul. They're all sharing in the great saving suffering of our Lord Jesus himself.

Through which his marvelous mercy is being poured out on his people so that they will be glorified forever as he's purposed according to the mystery of his will.

You see, when we understand this, the means of God's mercy at work to bless his people eternally in Christ, that is what is going to help us when we face the mysteries of his mercy.

When we as Christian people find ourselves amid the perplexities and even in the pit of despair that Joseph must have felt himself in here in Genesis 37. In the very real pit that was a prison then and then in the prison that he was in later on.

[43 : 55] It's true, we are not Joseph. But the spirit of the Lord who led Joseph through all of these things is the spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. He indwells our heart and he leads us in the privilege, says Paul, of not only believing in him but also of suffering for his sake.

Because we too, says Paul, are engaged in the same conflict. Because we too are called to share in this great marvelous story of God gathering a people for himself. But he brings forth his salvation not from magnificent splendor but from death and the grave. Or as Jesus put it, whoever would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains there. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. If anyone serves me, says Jesus the Father, will honor him. It won't look like honor to the world. It won't feel like honor to you when that service of Christ and his grace puts you in a pit, puts you in a prison. It won't feel like that.

[45 : 20] Or in the midst of great darkness when every fiber of your being cries out, my God, why? Why have you forsaken me? And it won't feel any less painful when men do intend evil against you or against us because of who you are, because of who we serve.

It will feel dark and despairing and like desertion. But you see, amid the perplexity, amid the mystery, when you remember the means of God's great mercy and the magnitude of that saving purpose in which we also, like Joseph, have a part to play and are playing even through such conflict, when we remember that, we will be able to say with Paul, I rejoice in my sufferings for the sake of Christ and his body, the church.

And we'll be able to say with Joseph, God meant it for good for the saving of many lives. Well, amen.

Let's pray together. The Apostle Peter says, Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as if something strange were happening to you.

But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you also may rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you're insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the spirit of glory, even of God, rests upon you.

[47 : 06] Our Father, we thank you that you have granted it to us not only to believe on your Son, our great Savior, the means of mercy and salvation and blessing to this world, but you've granted it also that we should share in his sufferings, sharing in the same conflict from the beginning of time that will be until the return of our great Savior in glory and in power.

So help us, Lord, to revel in the magnitude of your mercy and in the means of your great mercy to this world. And so, amid the many mysteries that we will walk through, we shall be kept strong and true and fruitful for the name of our great Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen.