

# Purpose In The Pit

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, please take your Bibles this morning and open them up to Genesis chapter 37.! Their story last week in chapter 36.

And now the rest of the book of Genesis, starting here in chapter 37, is going to focus in on the story of Joseph. And so if you would, when you found it, Genesis 37, let's stand in honor of the reading of the Word of God.

Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings in the land of Canaan. And 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 of his other 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.

[ 1 : 35 ] 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 around it and bowed down to my sheaf.

And his brothers said to him, Are you indeed to reign over us? Or 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 eleven 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.

[ 2 : 44 ] 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 us 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. And 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.

[ 3 : 43 ] 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. 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 twenty shekels of silver.

And 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?

[ 4 : 43 ] 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 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 sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of the Lord endures forever. Father, we pray now as we open up this word and begin the story of Joseph, Lord, would you give us our proper perspective on the suffering that comes into our life?

[ 5 : 52 ] Would we see it in light of the promises you've made to us in Christ? We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated. Amen. God permits what he hates to accomplish what he loves.

These ten words changed Joni Erikson Tada's perspective on her suffering. You may be familiar with the story of Joni Erikson Tada. She suffered a tragic car accident as a teenager that broke her neck and left her for life, suffering as a quadriplegic, suffering all sorts of physical distress, obviously as a paralyzed teenager, but as well as emotional distress and spiritual distress. She wondered and she asked, well, how could a good God allow something like this to happen to me? How could a good God allow someone like me who has all of my life ahead of me to go through such suffering?

And these ten words shared by a friend of hers put everything into proper perspective. God permits what he hates to accomplish what he loves.

When you read through the scriptures, you'll notice that believers, they have a kind of strange way of thinking about suffering and injustice. You read the book of James and you'll see he tells us, count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.

[ 7 : 26 ] That's strange. Peter tells us, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you. John tells us, don't be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.

And Paul tells us, we rejoice in our sufferings. I mean, don't you wish that you knew the secret to how we can actually view suffering and injustice with that kind of perspective? This morning, we get to see the secret from the story of Joseph.

And the secret is this, it's the absolute certainty that God is at work in all things, even the hardest things in our life, for good.

Now, this seems to be the big picture message of Joseph's story. I'm excited to dive into his story over the next several weeks together. This is an innocent man, a teenager, 17 years old, who faced harsh and unfair circumstances.

He's the victim of great injustice. And yet, in all of it, what we see as we walk through Joseph's story together is that our God was at work for good.

[ 8 : 34 ] So let's take a look here this morning and we'll ask the question, how should believers think about our suffering? And we'll see four answers this morning. This will be our outline if you're taking notes.

How should believers think about our suffering? Four answers. First, we should understand that here in a fallen world, believer, people may hate your favor.

People may hate your favor. Look there with me to verse one. We see this in verses one through four here at the beginning of the passage. And here we see how loved Joseph is by his father.

Joseph, by the time that we catch up with him here in chapter seven, he's now 17 years old. You might remember how he was the only son that Rachel bore to Jacob until finally she gave birth last week to Benjamin and ended up dying in childbirth with him.

But we see that Joseph, he holds a special place in his father's heart. I mean, he is clearly his father's favorite son. Jacob loved Rachel more than all his other wives. She was his favorite wife.

[ 9 : 42 ] And now we see that he loved Joseph more than all his other sons. And I'm sure you realize, right, parents in the room, this is not a good idea. We ought not play favorites with your kids.

But Jacob does. And we see this tension building up in the family as a result. Look there to verse two. It says that Joseph grew up with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah.

And he brought a bad report of them to their father. Younger brother Joseph is a tattletale. And you can just imagine Joseph coming and spilling all the dirt, sharing all those bad things his brothers are up to.

And how do you think his brothers are going to feel about that? Right? You probably are familiar with the saying, snitches get what? Help me. Snitches. Yeah, snitches get stitches, right?

Nobody likes to be told on. And here's Joseph, his father's golden child. He's spilling all the family gossip at his father's feet. So that's strike number one against Joseph. Strike number two comes here in verse three.

[ 10 : 43 ] Look there. Verse three says that Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons. And again, this isn't a surprise. We've seen this building already, haven't we?

You remember how when Jacob feared meeting Esau on the way back into town, how he strategically thought about how to handle the situation. What did he do? He put all his other kids at the front of the line and he put Rachel and Joseph all the way at the back so that if Esau came and was angry, he would take care of all of them first and maybe Rachel and Joseph would be able to escape.

This is nothing new here. Everybody knows that Joseph is the favorite. And again, we get to see how Israel's sin is having this negative ripple effect on the whole family here.

He loves Joseph the most. And to make that abundantly clear, just so that everyone can see it, Israel gives him this special multicolored robe.

It's like a visual reminder to everyone every day, to all his brothers, everybody that sees him, that I'm special and I'm the one that's loved by my father. You don't have one of those, do you?

[ 11 : 53 ] Right? And we see in verse 4, when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, how did they respond? They hated him. They could not even speak peacefully to him.

This is strike number two. They hate that he is so loved by his father. Now, none of us are Joseph. This story is not ultimately about us. But, if we are in Christ, then we can draw a connection here and draw some similarities here to the experience of Christians here in this world.

You remember John told us, do not be surprised that the world hates you. And one reason why the world might hate you, even if they don't recognize it, is because you, Christian, are so beloved of the father.

Now, just think about who you are in Christ for a moment. If you are in Christ, you are a beloved child of God. And sure, yes, of course, God has a certain general love for all his creation and the most general way of speaking that we are all children of God and that he has created all of us.

[ 13 : 11 ] But the Bible tells us that the Lord has a special, particular, saving, steadfast love for his people in Christ that not everyone in the world shares.

Those who are in Christ are children of God. The Bible tells us those who are not in Christ are children of the enemy. The church is the very bride of Christ.

And I can tell you I love all of you, but I can assure you I don't love you the same way that I love my bride. Ephesians 5 tells us that he loves the church and gave himself up for the church.

And sometimes we sing the line in the old hymn that from heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride. With his own blood he bought her and for her life he died.

We are his own body. He nourishes us and cherishes us and he washes us as with water, with the word of God. We're told in Ephesians 1, in love he predestined us for adoption as sons.

[ 14 : 16 ] We're told in Romans 8 that nothing can separate us from the love of God for us in Christ. This is the special love that God has for his people.

We may not be robbed in material goods, and some are, some aren't, but the Lord robes his people in joy and in confidence and in hope and in holiness.

And one day, church, we will be robbed in glory. But you see, those who don't know him, they don't share this special favor. They don't share this place of privilege.

And they don't share this extravagant love of God. And so what happens when you speak to them or to your father about their sin and this thing called repentance of sin, what happens?

How do they respond? Some may listen and repent and prove themselves to belong to the Lord, but others, guess what? They will hate you for it.

[15:19] Do you notice that when you come to Christ and some of those relationships that you had before, they get a little bit tougher, a little bit harder to navigate? There is a spiritual division between those who know the Lord and those who do not know the Lord.

And there's a reason why. Jesus tells us in John chapter 15, if the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own, but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, we could say with Ephesians 1, I chose you in love out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

Don't be surprised by this. Not only this, but second, we should also know in a fallen world, people may hate your future.

People may hate your future. Look there with me starting in verse five. And here we see strike number three. Joseph has a dream.

And it says that when he shares this dream, when he told him his dream, they hated him even more. What could he possibly say that would make them so angry? Look there to verse seven.

[16:35] He says, we were all there binding up sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf stood up, and all of your sheaves gathered around my sheaf, and they bowed down to my sheaf.

And it seems like they all understand the meaning. Are you really going to reign over us? And so they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

But he's not done. I mean, you'd think this guy, maybe he would have gotten the message by now. But verse nine says he dreams again, and he goes and opens up his mouth, and he goes and tells them again, just no awareness at all, right?

And he says, well, this time, listen to my dream, guys, the sun and the moon and the 11 stars were all bowing down to me. Can you imagine the brothers?

These 11 brothers. Now, every word that Joseph is saying at this point is just cranking up the heat right now, right? Are you kidding me, Joseph? These 11 stars are bowing down to you and the sun and the moon, mom and dad too.

[17:37] And it says, when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebukes him and says, what is this dream you've dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers really come down and bow ourselves to the ground before you?

And it says, his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind. Now, I make no excuses for what happens next, right? I mean, the brothers are clearly 100% in the wrong, but you can understand why they're upset, can't you?

I mean, who is this guy? Who does Joseph think he is? He's already got it all. The dad loves him more than all of us and now he's telling us this dream he has of all of us bowing down to him.

Really? They hate him for what God has revealed to him about his future. And again, Christian, I don't think we have to work too hard to draw a parallel to our experience, do we?

A Christian, you understand, don't you then? That you have ahead of you a glorious future. If you are in Christ, you are destined for glory and we know that without a shadow of a doubt, if you are in Christ, you are going to be with him in glory.

[18:55] We have ahead of us, we get to inherit the new heavens and the new earth, all the world renewed and freed from sin's curse. That's our future in Christ. And we can say even more than that, we know that when Christ returns, Christian, we are going to reign with him in the new heavens, in the new earth.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6 that the saints are going to judge the world. In Daniel chapter 7, you remember when we went through Daniel, it tells us the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High.

That's us, church. His kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom and all dominions shall serve and obey him. That is our future in Christ.

But again, not everyone shares this future. And those who don't may resent you for the future that you have. They may mock you.

Are you serious? And what is this talk of eternal life? Are you kidding me? You? You who have no money and no status and no position of authority here on this earth, you're going to reign over me?

[ 20 : 10 ] You're going ahead of me? I say, that's exactly right. Earthly status and earthly positions of authority and earthly accumulations of wealth, that matters very little.

It matters nothing in the kingdom of God. The meek will inherit the earth, Jesus tells us. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, Paul tells us. It's incomprehensible to the natural mind and people may hate you for believing it.

And we know the enemy certainly doesn't love your future. The enemy wants to keep you from getting there at all costs. The enemy and all who belong to him, they work as hard as they possibly can to keep you from reaching your glorious inheritance in Christ.

And so we see people may hate you for the favor you have. You are loved of the Father. They may hate you for the future you have. Your glorious inheritance in Christ.

And so, third, because of this, we should realize that here in a fallen world, people may seek your failure. People may seek your failure.

[ 21 : 22 ] Look there, starting in verse 12. And this dream that Joseph dreamed was clearly strike three, right? His brothers have had enough. They go out to pasture their father's flock in the field and Israel sends Joseph out to join them.

Why? So that the tattletale can report back. How are they doing? How are they doing what I've asked them to do? And so he goes, but apparently it says he has a hard time finding them because they're not in Shechem where they're supposed to be.

They're over in Dothan, which is not in Alabama. That's about a day's journey north of Shechem.

Already he's got a little bit of dirt to share on his brothers. So he goes and he finds them and verse 18 says that his brothers, they see him from afar and before he makes his way to them, they start to talk amongst themselves and they conspire against him how to kill him.

They said, here comes this dreamer. Let's kill him and throw him into one of the pits and then here's what we'll do. We'll say that a fierce animal has come and devoured him and we'll see what becomes of his dreams.

Except Reuben speaks up and why he's the only one I don't know but I'm grateful for Joseph's sake that he does and he says, no, no, no, no, no, shed no blood. Just throw him in the pit but don't lay a hand on him and we're told he said this because his intention was to come back and to rescue him and to bring him back to his father but regardless, all the brothers agree they think it's a good plan and so Joseph comes, they strip him of his robe, they take him, they throw him into the pit and they leave him for dead.

[ 23 : 03 ] This is a terrible injustice, isn't it? Joseph has done nothing wrong, he's an innocent man, he's their own brother, can you imagine? And before you say, well, that's crazy, I mean it is crazy, before you say I would never do anything like that, do you remember how all this started?

They didn't just wake up one day and decide to throw their brother in a pit, this has been festering in their hearts for a long time, hasn't it? This tiny spark of jealousy and pride turns into hatred hatred, hatred turns into a plot to betray and to murder their brother, turns into this premeditated deception that they're going to have to tell everyone to cover it all up, you see this small spark of sin left unaddressed has now turned into this raging fire that is burning everything down around them and that's how sin works, isn't it?

And on top of that, look at verse 25, they don't even seem bothered by any of this that they've done.

Verse 25 says they throw their brother into a pit, they leave him for dead and what do they do?

They sit down to eat and their sin has blinded them to what they've just done but they're not finished yet, are they? As they eat, they look up, they see a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead and Judah has this bright idea.

Verse 26, he speaks up and he says, what profit is it if we just kill our brother and conceal his blood and you wonder, there's this moment of hope, maybe just for a moment, is Judah going to be the one to speak up and stop all of this?

[ 24 : 52 ] Judah, who's the ancestor of Christ, maybe he'll put a stop to it, right? No, look what he says, what profit is it if we just kill our brother and conceal his blood?

Let's sell him instead to the Ishmaelites. Come on guys, he's our own flesh and blood after all, right? So they take Joseph out of the pit, they sell him to the Ishmaelites for 20 shekels of silver, which by the way in today's dollars would amount to about \$500 and they take Joseph to Egypt and Reuben, when he comes back, he's devastated and they have to come up with this deception to lie to their father when they do this, their father as well is devastated as much as anybody tried to comfort him, he won't receive it.

He said, I'll just die in mourning. Do you see the impact that sin has had on this entire family? Joseph's own brothers have sought to destroy him, they wanted to make certain that his dreams did not come true and again, Christian, draw the connection to us in Christ.

are we surprised when the world around us hates us? Don't you realize that since you now belong to Christ, the enemy hates you and wants to destroy you?

Don't you realize that we face a great and powerful enemy that the enemy and all who belong to him actively seek your downfall? The way the New Testament talks about the Christian life, we're not in peacetime, Christian.

[ 26 : 31 ] We are in wartime. The enemy wants to keep you from the love of God if that were at all possible. He wants to keep you from your inheritance if that were at all possible.

And one tool in the toolbox that they use, one of their primary weapons that they use, is suffering in the life of the believer. In their hands, suffering is a means to destroy you and stop the spread of the gospel through you.

But, Christians think about suffering differently. We know because we're told in the pages of Scripture nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Not even the worst imaginable suffering in your life. we're told nothing can keep us from this glorious inheritance ahead of us. It is kept in heaven for you who by God's power are being guarded through faith but for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

I love the story of Acts chapter 5. Peter and the apostles they're filled with this new boldness to go and preach Christ and the high priests and the Pharisees they're all telling them they've got to stop talking about Jesus.

[ 27 : 49 ] And so they beat them up and they charge them not to talk about Jesus anymore they let them go they just tear them to bits and how do they respond? It says in verse 41 they left the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

And every day in the temple and from house to house they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus. they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ. How can they see it that way? It's because in all of this we know fourth and finally in all things God seeks your welfare.

In all things believer God seeks your welfare. this is the perspective that we're called to have. Let's finish our verses.

We're told count it all joy brothers when you meet trials of various kinds. Why? For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you but rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

[ 29 : 20 ] We rejoice in our sufferings why? Knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope and more than that he says I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Church we know we rejoice to know that our God is at work in every moment of our lives even the most difficult moments of our lives for good.

I hate to spoil how all this story works out but we have to go there because it helps us frame this whole story of Joseph in chapter 50 verse 20 all the way at the end but we get the point.

Chapter 50 verse 20 Joseph gives us the Christian perspective on our suffering and he says to his brothers you meant evil against me but God meant it for good.

You meant evil against me but God meant it for good. His brothers meant evil against him but even in this don't you see God is at work for good.

[ 30 : 37 ] God is at work to save Joseph. He worked even through the greedy hearts of his brothers to have him sold into slavery. He was at work even in their plans he had bigger plans to send Joseph ahead of them to Egypt not only just to save Joseph but to save all of his family from a famine that they have no idea is right around the corner.

And you zoom out even bigger than that go to Exodus and what do we see there? We see God's plan is to bring his people into Egypt so that he might redeem them out of Egypt he might display his glory in Egypt and call them to himself as his own people God is at work in all of it to point us forward to an even greater act of redemption in the gospel of Christ.

Now how much of this do you think Joseph was aware of in the moment while he's down in the pit? None of it. But church we have the bigger picture here God is always doing infinitely more than we possibly are even remotely the slightest bit aware of at every moment of our life.

God is working redemption here even in this act of horrible evil. He's at work to magnify the glory of his name even in this dark moment where sin and evil and injustice and suffering seem to take center stage.

God permits what he hates to accomplish what he loves. What could that possibly be? Two aims of God in our suffering the display of his glory and the eternal good of his people.

[ 32 : 25 ] The display of his glory and the eternal good of his people. I'm so thankful aren't you? God loves our eternal good more than our temporary comfort.

The thief takes a knife he takes suffering like a knife and he cuts us to kill us but the Lord like a skilled surgeon takes that same knife and he cuts us to heal us to make us well and to make us whole and to make us like Christ who is by the way right at the heart of Joseph's story.

Do you see how all this points forward to Jesus? Joseph's story is ultimately about Jesus. Jesus Christ is the beloved son of the father robed in glory his only begotten son.

Jesus is the one who was prophesied over and over and over again that this Messiah will be exalted as king over all the earth and Jesus is the one who came humbly to his own brothers and how was he received?

He was welcomed with hatred and envy and betrayal and greed and ultimately Jesus was delivered over to death.

[ 33 : 48 ] Those who did not belong to him hated him and rejected him and crucified him and put him down in the pit of death but praise God and the greatest injustice in the world in the death of Christ was at the very same time the greatest good ever accomplished.

The greatest moment of darkness putting the son of God to death was at the very same time in the plan of God the greatest victory. Satan's plan of destruction was at the very same time God's great plan of redemption for sinners like us.

He died that he might conquer death. He became sin so that he might rescue us from the powers of sin. he was raised to new life so that in him we too might be raised to newness of life.

What man meant for evil God meant for good. This Christ is risen and reigning now and one day we know church he will come again and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Do you know this Savior by faith? If not what keeps you from coming to him now? The truth is we will suffer in this life.

[ 35 : 23 ] I'm sure you all have stories of your own life right now of suffering and injustice but in him and only in him can we have this perspective on our suffering that whatever we face here and now we believe all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purposes.

Father we praise you for this hope that we can have in the face of great injustice and great suffering. Lord whatever trials are brought into our life Lord in your hands God are meant for good. While the enemy would seek to destroy us Father you seek to mold us into the image of Christ and so we rejoice in our sufferings yet we pray Father for the day when Christ would come and put an end to all our suffering and all our trials and we would be with you free from sin and death forever. We praise you for this in Christ Jesus name. Amen.