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The Faith of Joseph

Genesis 37-50

Prayer: *Father, we just again thank you for your peace, we thank you for your love, we thank you for your kindness. We thank you for all of the gifts that you just abundantly share with us, not the least of which is your word. And Lord, this morning once again we're going to open up your book, we're going to read it, we're going to look into it and pray that your Holy Spirit would guide us because it's your spirit that makes these words have meaning. It's your spirit that makes these words have the ability to be a permanent part of our lives. And so we pray that you would give us this grace, this power and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

God loves you and has a perfect plan for your life. How many of you have ever heard that phrase? I mean, it's a statement of absolute truth and it's become a cliché that you seldom hear any more, but it is a statement of absolute truth. One of the problems is that it contains an inherent misunderstanding that centers around our understanding of the word "perfect." I mean if you ask me what kind of a day I had and I said, well, I had an absolutely

perfect day, you would rightly assume that I was saying that anything that could go right went right and at the end of the day, a grand time was had by all. That's the subtext of the statement "God has a perfect plan for your life." Ask Jesus into your life and he will show you a perfect solution to all of life's problems. That's a hundred percent true. What is not stated or even implied in that statement though is that asking Jesus into your life is going to automatically bring about a whole new set of problems that you never knew existed before. Asking Jesus into your life means choosing sides in a war that's gone on since the fall of Adam. You know, previously you could just kind of blend into the woodwork of the working of this world but now if you're a citizen of the kingdom of God, you have declared yourself to a world that promises to hate you for doing so. Jesus himself said so. In *John 15:19* he said: *"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, therefore the world hates you."* See, as a child of God you are now part of God's perfect plan not just for your life but for the kingdom of God as well. I mean you may not have realized it, but you've become part of a much bigger agenda than you've ever imagined. And God has every intention of transforming you into the image of his Son, and in the process he's going to use you to bring honor and glory to him and to his kingdom. That's what you signed on to when you became -- when you accepted Christ as your Lord and

Savior. And Jesus as king of the world was never evasive about stating the cost of identifying with him. In fact he said this in *Matthew 16:24*, he said: *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* And in *Luke 14:33* he said: *"Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."*

So this is serious business. See, God has every intention of shaping and molding you as his disciple into the very image of his Son. And *Romans 8:28* tells us that every single event in the life of those who love him is pointed and aimed in one specific direction. It's pointed and aimed at a process and God uses all things to work together for good but as he defines it, not as we do. God's intention is that all of us would be perfected in our faith. So you can say God does love us and he does have a perfect plan for our lives, but when you say that, understand that perfect plan, well, it's by his standards and not ours. My perfect plan might be for a sickness-free life with a lovely home and a paid off mortgage and healthy, well-adjusted kids, and at least two vacations a year. You know, God's plan for me could be that very thing or it could be like God's plan for Joseph which was anything but that.

This morning we're looking at God's perfect plan for the life of Joseph. And it's a classic example of how Joseph fit into a far greater kingdom agenda than even he could imagine. And it was that kingdom agenda that was the source of a great deal of Joseph's pain. But here's the part that we just wrestle with all the time, here's the part that we don't really grasp. God never sat down and said, "Joseph, Joe, you're just a successful shepherd boy. My intention is to make you the vice regent of all of the Egypt and to use you to save my people, to feed them, and save them as a nation." So far as I know, God never sat down and said, "I have a perfect plan for your life, Joseph. It's going to include some very difficult hiccups here and there and you're going to be wondering frequently if I'm still there, but trust me, trust me, I've got all of this taken care of." Instead, God made his plan known to Joseph in steps and in stages that happened only after he had walked through circumstances that shouted, well, if God indeed had a plan, then it must have gone off the rails somewhere because Joseph's life was anything but perfect. I mean it was a plan that included betrayal and abandonment and kidnapping and false accusations and prison, but it was an absolutely perfect plan for Joseph. And it was perfectly planned and executed according to God's agenda for Joseph and for his people, and here's where faith becomes a crucial part of our walk. Here's really where the rubber meets the road. You see, God does love us and God does have a

perfect plan for each of our lives but it's according to his agenda, which doesn't always agree with ours. My agenda is to be content, it's to be safe, it's to be sure of where I am and what I am doing. God's agenda is for me to be a faithful, sanctified image of his Son living to advance the kingdom of God. Sometimes those agendas produce lives of peace and comfort but sometimes they don't.

Now according to Open Doors ministry, 322 Christians are killed for their faith every single month. 214 churches and Christian properties are destroyed, 772 forms of violence such as beatings, abductions, rapes, arrests, and forced marriages are committed against Christians. Now that's more than a thousand lives plunged into horror like Joseph experienced each month. And so we wonder, where's God in all of this? I mean, is he missing in action during these times or is his agenda like Joseph's, much, much bigger than we imagine?

We're doing this series called "Now You See Me, Now You Don't." This is about God's presence or his absence in our lives. It is about growing faith when the evidence for it seems scarce. I mean it's what Paul declares in *Hebrews 11:1*. He says: *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* And what God is most concerned about building into our lives

is an assurance of the one thing that we all hope for and that is that my relationship with Jesus Christ will define and empower me for living life here on this earth for his glory. And along with that is a conviction that in spite of the fact that we can't see, hear, feel, taste, or touch the God who we believe in, we still, like Abraham, are going to spend the rest of our lives growing our capacity to trust in these things that are not seen. And what makes our faith unique is the idea of faith itself, I mean, every other religion tells you there's a way to get right to God and that way is to work at it. God tells us over and over and over again in the pages of scripture that we are fallen, broken creatures incapable of producing works acceptable to a perfect God. And God's solution to that was to become one of us and to live a life that we could never live and then offer that life as a substitute for our broken lives. So we get a right standing with God not by working at it but by trusting in God's perfect plan that he accomplished for us on the cross. So right from the get-go, God's agenda for you and me is to grow in his children this capacity for faith, this ability to trust. Now that was the agenda that defined Joseph's life and it's what defines our lives as well. God had an agenda for Joseph that he could neither see nor even begin to fathom but he didn't need to. You see, like Abraham, he simply had to believe in God and then just move forward. *Romans 4:3* says: *For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was*

counted to him as righteousness." And if we understand that the capacity to believe God is really what God is interested in growing in us, then we're going to be able to better understand God's agenda for us. And his "perfect plan" for our lives is that we, like Joseph, would simply trust in him and move forward.

Now the first part of God's agenda in your life and mine is the growth in our lives of faith. And that's why God sometimes inserts himself into our lives and then he pulls back. Why it is that when it comes to God, "now you see me and now you don't" is often the way our faith develops. I mean we saw that a few weeks back in Abraham's life. God powerfully interacts with Abraham repeatedly and then he just appears to disappear and we say he is perceptively absent because we know he's not. I mean we know from Romans 8 that God's promise that nothing is going to separate us from his love. And we also know from studying the lives of those whom he poured that love out on that God frequently asserts himself into our lives but then he pulls back. And he pulls back to allow us to grow in our efforts to trust him to develop our capacity for faith.

And so this morning I want to look at the life of Joseph who was one of the great saints of scripture, to see God's faith building process in action because Joseph is a classic case study in "now you see me, now you don't." There's a reason why Joseph's story is

there for us to read and study in scripture because it's the story of faithfulness on God's part that hardly looked anything like faithfulness from Joseph's end of the story. This is the story of God's agenda superimposed on Joseph's life and we have the benefit in scripture of seeing it all laid out. I mean we get to see Joseph's life at the ten thousand foot level. But Joseph had to live it at street level. And from that perspective, you would be hard pressed to find someone who struggled more than Joseph. I mean, he was a person who seemed to do everything right and still have everything go so wrong. I mean Joseph's life constantly seemed to go from bad to worse even though every step of the way his conduct was exemplary. At street level you might say of Joseph's friendship with God, with friends like these, who needs enemies? I mean it's only when you look at the big picture that you begin to see God's big agenda and you begin to understand God's interaction with Joseph. And then the more you understand how deeply beloved by God Joseph was, the more you will gain insight into how God might be growing faith in your life.

So let's look at Joseph. Joseph was the favorite child of Jacob and Rachel. His life consists of a series of events that takes him from his life as a favored child in a family of shepherds through a series of circumstances where he repeatedly becomes the victim of other people's sins. An outsider looking at Joseph's life might

conclude that if Joseph was chosen and deeply loved by God, then it's far better to be unchosen and unloved. So our story starts out with a tale of intrigue. Joseph had jealous brothers who hated him, and they hated him because he was clearly his father's favorite. We pick the story up in Genesis 37, starting at verse 3. And it says: *Now Israel -- I should point out that Jacob and Israel are the same, God changed Jacob's name to Israel but for purposes of our discussion, his name is now Jacob. Now Jacob loved Joseph more than any 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. Joseph was handsome, he was gifted, he was doted on by his father, I mean, you've all heard about the many-colored coat, you know, Joseph and the amazing technicolor coat. He had this incredible coat that was given to him by his father. If you ever want advice on how not to raise a large family, take a look at Jacob. Because Joseph received this special treatment, his brothers hated him. And he was either naive or swell-headed when he decided to tell his family about this dream that he had. This is what he says in Genesis 37:5. He says: 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 around it and bowed down to my sheaf." 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.

Well, his father Jacob makes another very large mistake. He sends his brothers out to graze the flocks and then later on he sends Joseph out to check up on them. And Joseph gets lost and he's searching for his brothers and finally he sees them and they see him and they see him a long way off. *Genesis 37:18* picks up on it, it says this: *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."* Now, at this suggestion his brother Reuben steps in, he says, no, no, no, no. There can be no bloodshed! At the very

least, just throw him in a cistern and he figured if he just had him thrown into the cistern he can come at a later date and get him out. So they take him and they strip him of this fancy coat, and they throw him in this old cistern and they sit down to celebrate. As they begin to eat, they see a caravan, it's winding its way to Egypt. And again we pick up in *Genesis 37:26*: *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. They took Joseph to Egypt. Now to make matters worse, it says: *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."*

Now I want you to note something in what they just said. If you want to talk about wickedness and wicked family situations, they said, "your son's robe." They didn't say, "Is this our brother's

robe?" "Is this Joseph's robe?" They said, "Is this your son's robe?" Verse 33 says: *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.* This is breathtaking hypocrisy. This is depraved wickedness. I mean you read they rose up to comfort Jacob. Joseph wasn't dead. They knew that Joseph wasn't dead. Verse 36 says: *Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.* So Joseph goes from a life of comfort to a life of slavery simply because he was obedient to his father. Where's God in all of this? You see, "now you see me, now you don't" often takes place like it does in Joseph's case when God seems to be conspicuously absent. Joseph's simply obeying his father's commands and he winds up first being thrown into a cistern and then bought and sold as a slave. This is a 17-year-old kid whose obedience gets him thrust from a life of a shepherd into the life of a household slave in a foreign country and culture. And so we have circumstance shouting to Joseph that life is some kind of crap shoot unconnected to a sovereign God and that at any moment bad luck and bad people can rob you of your life and your future. I

mean, isn't this the place where you'd expect God to kind of break through and sit down with Joseph and tell him things may look bleak but that God's got everything under control? Well, things didn't just look bleak, they were bleak. And God appeared to be absent. Well, thankfully we get to see the big picture in Joseph's life and we find out in scripture that not one step of Joseph's life was unseen and uncared for but that information was not directly revealed to Joseph. The very next verse, *Genesis 39:2* says: *The LORD was with Joseph*. Now we need to stop, we need to park here for a minute. We need to just let that sink in. Because God is insisting that in the midst of betrayal, in the midst of abandonment, in the midst of enslavement, God is saying I'm here, I'm in the center of this.

What's the first thing we think of when things go south on us? God, where are you? I mean, if we're trying our best to do everything right and things still go south, we think, God, how could you let this happen? I don't imagine those thoughts were far from Joseph's mind as well. But the scripture says *the LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he*

had.

So Joseph goes on to excel in his new position as Potiphar's house slave only because God is actively guiding every single step that Joseph takes. We pick up at verse 6. It says: *So he left all -- this is talking about Potiphar -- So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"* Now, in what's probably the first instance recorded of sexual harassment on the job, we see Joseph repeatedly resisting and then we see and then eventually while she's in a jealous rage, Potiphar's wife frames him for rape. And for all of his efforts to do the right thing, Joseph gets thrown into jail. Now from Joseph's standpoint this is not a case of "now you see me, now you don't," I mean, Joseph has not yet seen any direct evidence of God's presence. In fact all he's really seen is mounting evidence that he's a victim of circumstance. I mean everything that he did was true and noble

and right and proper, and his reward for his loyalty and faith is a dungeon.

If you were Joseph and you're sitting in that jail cell, I mean, how do you think you would feel? Now my guess is you'd be feeling abandoned, bewildered, alone, and yet we know from scripture that nothing could be further from the truth. We know from scripture that prison is exactly where God wanted Joseph to be. Now I look at the situation, I say, God, if you only had sat Joseph down and said, "Joseph, be patient. I have great plans for you. They're going to unfold slowly but eventually you're going to see that I've got your back in this." But that never happens and there's a reason why. You see, what God is doing here is he's forcing Joseph to trust in him in spite of circumstance and in spite of an explanation that would take the reason for faith away. See, apparently God knows what he's doing. There's nowhere in scripture any record of God giving any explanation whatsoever to Joseph for why he's sitting in a prison cell. You see, we have a privilege that Joseph never had. We have the privilege of seeing Joseph's life from the ten thousand foot level. So we're looking at Joseph's life the way God saw it. We get to understand that prison would be the launching pad that would get Joseph into the presence of Pharaoh himself. This is God's perspective on Joseph's prison experience. This is verse 21 of *Genesis 39*. It says: *But the*

LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed. Now, you might be noticing a pattern here. God is right in the center of Joseph's life. He's involved in every single aspect of his imprisonment. But there's nothing to suggest that Joseph has any clue of that by virtue of an explanation. He simply has to trust God's love and sovereignty when events seem to shout that that is a fool's errand.

Now have you ever suffered for doing the right thing? Have you ever found yourself in a position where you were forced to make a right choice and you made it and you thought somehow, well, God's going to at least give me a good result. I know I've been in that situation a number of times and I know precisely how I felt when I made a right choice. I mean, I thought God's certainly going to be pleased and therefore my good choice is going to be rewarded. And on those times when the opposite happened, I was at first astounded. And I was astounded because I thought there was a linear relationship between good behavior and good results. You do good and you get good. Well, often times there is. Often times

that is the relationship. But many times it is not, not when God's main goal is to grow us in faith. I mean have you ever noticed that your faith seldom grows at all in the midst of good times, in the midst of easy living? It's only when things start to go south that we're forced to decide what we're going to place our trust in, either in our good circumstances or in the God of all circumstance. And for some reason we are constantly taken by surprise when we encounter trials even though God has promised us they are the primary way that God grows faith in us. *James 1:2 says: Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.* Well, Joseph is a living example of trials producing steadfastness in faith.

And so now he's in prison. And while he's in prison, he interprets a dream of Pharaoh's cupbearer and he tells the cupbearer that within a short period of time he's going to be completely restored, and just like he states it, it happens. And he tells the cupbearer, when you go up there, please don't leave me in this place. Well, the cupbearer is restored and he completely forgets about Joseph, that is until Pharaoh himself has a dream that no one can interpret. Pharaoh has this bizarre dream about seven fat cows being eaten alive by seven gaunt cows and he describes how

disturbed he is by the dream, and the cupbearer suddenly remembers the pinpoint accuracy with which Joseph interpreted his dream. And so he explains there's this guy, and Joseph is yanked out of prison and he's cleaned up and he's presented to Pharaoh. And Joseph tells Pharaoh that the dream means that seven fat years are coming to Egypt and they're going to be followed by seven lean years that are going to eat the fat years right up. So Pharaoh winds up appointing Joseph to head up Egypt's response. Joseph spends Egypt's seven fat years storing and saving a huge surplus of grain. And during the seven lean years, Egypt becomes the food bank of the Middle East. And so people from all over the Middle East are forced to turn to Egypt to avoid starvation. And you'll never guess who one of the groups is that are forced to do that. It's Jacob and his 11 remaining sons. And after seven years of famine, they are starving.

And so we pick up the story at *Genesis 42:1*. It says: *When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?" And he said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. God down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die."* So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. Now this is a very long story. I'm rocketing through about 15 chapters here, so there's a lot of details that I can't really give you. But the

brothers, they show up and they're instantly recognized by Joseph even though they don't recognize him. I mean after all it's been 16 years, Joseph now looks completely like an Egyptian. And they could not in their wildest imagination picture that this shepherd boy that they sold into slavery is now the vice regent of Egypt. We pick up in verse 5. It says: *Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan. Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground.* That reminds me of something. Reminds me of a dream that took place about 16 years prior. This is the dream I said at the very beginning: *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 around it and bowed down to my sheaf."* 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. What a a marvel this is. I mean, it's taken 16 full years but God has done precisely what the dream claimed he would do right at the beginning. And during those 16 years, how many times was it that Joseph felt completely abandoned? I mean, he sat in that prison cell for two full years before the

cupbearer remembered his ability to interpret dreams, but it was all part of God's perfect plan. And over the course of those 16 years, God never left his side. And what appeared to be a random set of bad circumstances was God's grand agenda for Joseph and for the people of Israel playing itself out moment by moment, day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year. Timing was everything. And only God knew the perfect way for circumstance to unfold and all God required of Joseph was for him to trust him, that is to trust that he was with him empowering everything he did as a victim of a kidnapping, as the head of Potiphar's household, as he sat in the prison cell and yet nowhere, nowhere in scripture do we hear or see revealed God sitting down to explain to Joseph, "Hey, this is what's going to happen." That's because God had bigger plans and a bigger agenda than that. And again, it takes too much time to explain the details, but understand what's going on here. God is clearly using Joseph to work a transformation in the lives of his brothers and in the life he his father Jacob and in the nation of Israel and all the while God is also transforming Joseph. I mean this is a classic example of God's big agenda at work. On the macro level God has taken Joseph from the life of an obscure shepherd and made him prime minister of Egypt in order to keep the nation of Israel from facing starvation. And on the micro level he has nurtured Joseph all of these years and in all of these years to a profound level of trust so that even when things seem to

be going incredibly bad, Joseph knows that God is still in control. I mean those years transformed Joseph from a prisoner in Pharaoh's dungeon to the prime minister of Egypt but they also served to teach us how God works in our lives as well.

And so we go back to the story and Joseph's father grows old and Jacob dies and his brothers begin to panic, and they panic that now they understand Joseph is free to work whatever kind of vengeance he's been hiding. Now that dad is dead, he's going to do whatever he wants to do and so they say to him this in Genesis 50:16: *So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father" -- our father -- "Your father gave this command before he died: 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." Another reminder of that dream. But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."*

You see we see 16 years of struggle and it's produced in Joseph exactly what God was after. And Joseph spoke a principle then that

applies for us even now. And this is what he's saying. What he's saying is this: It doesn't matter what this world throws at you. It doesn't matter. Because God so perfectly controls this world that even evil intentions he can superintend to accomplish his goal in you. God does indeed have a perfect plan for all of our lives. But it's a perfect plan according to his plans and not necessarily ours. And a huge part of that plan is faith, *the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*. And what I want us to understand is that God never for a moment abandoned Joseph even though there were many times in his life when it appeared to him and to us as observers of his life that that's exactly what happened. Have you ever had a time in your life when you felt oh, God, you've abandoned me? I mean have you ever had a time in your life when you did the right thing only to find out that it got you nowhere, that you genuinely suffered for it, and when you turned to God somewhere to find God somewhere in that suffering, you came up empty? Well, welcome to Joseph's world.

Now here's what we need to take away from all of this. God had a master agenda for Joseph. God has a master agenda for you. I mean I said at the beginning of this message, my agenda is to be comfortable, content, and safe. God's agenda is for me to be a faithful, sanctified image of his Son living to advance the kingdom of God. And whether you are Joseph or Jack or Mary or Kathy, if

you are one of God's own, if you have confessed with your mouth and believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord, you have done so because you are uniquely chosen of God for an agenda that may include saving the nation of Israel from starvation. Or maybe bringing a hot meal to your neighbor. And you may be called on to forgive your family of jealousy, of betrayal and of kidnapping or maybe simple thoughtlessness and gossip and backbiting. What God wants to produce in your life and mine is an attitude of certainty that says even bad intentions are superintended by a God to serve the ultimate purposes of his sovereign will for your life. And what God did in Joseph's life he's doing right now in your life and mine. My point is God does have a perfect plan for your life. And God's agenda for you is going to include some very difficult hiccups here and there and you're going to be wondering sometimes if God is still there. But trust me, he's got all of this taken care of. It's all been laid out and eventually you and I are going to see with the same level of precision that God's agenda for each one of us was just as precise with us and it was with Joseph. And in conclusion I can sum it all up with these words from *1 Peter 2:9*. God says: *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* Let's pray.

Father, I just I thank you for Joseph. I thank you for just being able to see the bewilderment, the sense of abandonment that pervades his story and yet also to have the view from the ten thousand foot level that shows us that never once was he ever left alone, that you were there through all of the misery, through all of the miserable times you were working your great agenda in his life. It may have been an agenda that he wouldn't have chosen. In all likelihood it was an agenda that no one would have chosen. And that's the same for our lives, Lord, we don't get to choose the agenda. We just get to trust or not. And so I pray, Lord, this morning that you would give us the ability by your Holy Spirit's power to understand that what God is doing, what God has done in Joseph's life he is doing in our life. Give us the ability to trust him implicitly, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.