

# God's Purpose with a Dysfunctional Family

*The Life of Joseph*

By Rev. Garrett Eriks

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**Bible Text:** Genesis 37:1-11  
**Preached on:** Sunday, February 23, 2014

## Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church

5101 Beechtree Street  
Hudsonville, MI 49426

**Website:** [www.hudsonvilleprc.org](http://www.hudsonvilleprc.org)  
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This morning we begin a series on the life of Joseph. The text that we look at this morning is found in Genesis 37. It will be the first 11 verses of the chapter. Before we read that the text there in Genesis 37, I'd like to go back to Genesis 34 and read that chapter because that chapter gives us a better understanding of the family life and the home in which Joseph grew up. So Genesis 34.

1 And Dinah the daughter of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land.

And this is in the city of Shechem. Jacob brought his family to live near that city of Shechem and we find that it's a very ungodly city. It wasn't a good place for Jacob and his family to be. Now continue in our reading,

2 And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her. 3 And his soul clave unto Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel, and spake kindly unto the damsel. 4 And Shechem spake unto his father Hamor, saying, Get me this damsel to wife. 5 And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter: now his sons were with his cattle in the field: and Jacob held his peace until they were come. 6 And Hamor the father of Shechem went out unto Jacob to commune with him. 7 And the sons of Jacob came out of the field when they heard it: and the men were grieved, and they were very wroth, because he had wrought folly in Israel in lying with Jacob's daughter; which thing ought not to be done. 8 And Hamor communed with them, saying, The soul of my son Shechem longeth for your daughter: I pray you give her him to wife. 9 And make ye marriages with us, and give your daughters unto us, and take our daughters unto you. 10 And ye shall dwell with us: and the land shall be before you; dwell and trade ye therein, and get you possessions therein. 11 And Shechem said unto her father and unto her brethren, Let me find grace in your eyes, and what ye shall say unto me I will give. 12 Ask me never so much dowry and gift, and I will give according as ye shall say unto me: but give me the damsel to wife. 13 And the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor

his father deceitfully, and said, because he had defiled Dinah their sister: 14 And they said unto them, We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one that is uncircumcised; for that were a reproach unto us: 15 But in this will we consent unto you: If ye will be as we be, that every male of you be circumcised; 16 Then will we give our daughters unto you, and we will take your daughters to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people. 17 But if ye will not hearken unto us, to be circumcised; then will we take our daughter, and we will be gone. 18 And their words pleased Hamor, and Shechem Hamor's son. 19 And the young man deferred not to do the thing, because he had delight in Jacob's daughter: and he was more honourable than all the house of his father. 20 And Hamor and Shechem his son came unto the gate of their city, and communed with the men of their city, saying, 21 These men are peaceable with us; therefore let them dwell in the land, and trade therein; for the land, behold, it is large enough for them; let us take their daughters to us for wives, and let us give them our daughters. 22 Only herein will the men consent unto us for to dwell with us, to be one people, if every male among us be circumcised, as they are circumcised. 23 Shall not their cattle and their substance and every beast of theirs be ours? only let us consent unto them, and they will dwell with us. 24 And unto Hamor and unto Shechem his son hearkened all that went out of the gate of his city; and every male was circumcised, all that went out of the gate of his city. 25 And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males. 26 And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out. 27 The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and spoiled the city, because they had defiled their sister. 28 They took their sheep, and their oxen, and their asses, and that which was in the city, and that which was in the field, 29 And all their wealth, and all their little ones, and their wives took they captive, and spoiled even all that was in the house. 30 And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house. 31 And they said, Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot?

Now we go to chapter 37 and read the first 11 verses there and that's the text this morning.

1 And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. 2 These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report. 3 Now Israel

loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours. 4 And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him. 5 And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more. 6 And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed: 7 For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf. 8 And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words. 9 And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. 10 And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? 11 And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.

Thus far we read God's word.

Let's pray together.

*Father in heaven, we ask for thy blessing upon us as we begin this new series on the life of Joseph. We pray that as we look at this Old Testament history that we would see our Lord Jesus Christ, we would see thy covenant faithfulness, we would see the beauty and the wonder of thy grace as thou hast preserved thy people and keep them pure and holy unto thyself. We pray, O Father, that thy will open our hearts to receive this word and have the ability through the working of the Holy Spirit to apply it to our own lives. And today, too, we pray as we begin this series and look at the beginning of the life of Joseph, that we would see the wonder and the power of thy grace and that we would be encouraged in the sufferings that we face in this life. All these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

As we begin our series on the life of Joseph, it's important that we understand what it is that we're going to see as we look at Joseph. The life of Joseph testifies of the victory of God's covenant and grace in the lives of his people. The life of Joseph really has to be looked at from the perspective of a confession that Joseph makes for the end of his life after his father, Jacob, died and his brothers started that time that Joseph was going to retaliate against them because of what they had done to him. You remember what Joseph said in Genesis 15:20, "Ye meant it for evil but God meant it for good." And that's what we see in the life of Joseph. There was evil done to him but God meant it for good.

This is what we're going to see, then, as we look at the life of Joseph; we're going to see that God is sovereign over the struggles and the hardships of this life, especially family troubles. Along with that, we're going to see the power of God's grace to preserve Joseph

through seemingly insurmountable temptations. There's a temptation that Joseph faced in this test as being the favored son, and also being hated by his brothers. It would be easy for him to justify retaliating against his brothers, even at the age of 17 years old, but he doesn't because of the grace of God. Later on when he's in the land of Egypt, he goes from being a slave and then being in prison, to being second in command in Egypt, having power, having wealth, having a wife who was the daughter of one of the chief priests of the pagan gods in Egypt. Think of all the temptations that Joseph faced as a man of God in this wicked land, and yet he was faithful. What explains that? Well, the only thing that explains that is the grace of God.

So we're going to see the marvelous powerful grace of God in his life, but we also see the grace of God working in this dysfunctional family. We're going to see how it is that God worked all things, not only for the salvation of Joseph, but also for the salvation of his brothers, but even more than that, we see God's faithfulness in the line of generations. God's faithfulness doesn't stop in a generation but it goes forward and the reason that it does is for the coming of Jesus Christ. And that's part of what we want to see here too, we want to see Christ and how do we see Christ in this history, that's the question that we have to face as we go through it. So these are the things we will see: the greatness of God's grace, his covenant, faithfulness, and all of this as it points us to Jesus Christ.

In the text that we consider this morning, we are introduced to the family of Joseph. We see what kind of a home Joseph grew up in, and in today's language, when we look at the home in which he grew up in, this home would be characterized as a dysfunctional home. There are many things that were often wrong in this home. Jacob was not the leader that he should have been. He had four wives. There's constant fighting and hatred and envy here in this home. There's great sin and wickedness that was part of it. We're going to see all of that this morning in great detail. It's exposed here in the text, and also in what we read this morning in Genesis 34, but also we see here the power of God's grace to preserve and protect Joseph through all of this, and in that we see the power of God's grace to preserve and protect us in the hardships we face and especially family hardships that we may face in our own lives.

So we begin looking at the life of Joseph under this theme, "God's Purpose with a Dysfunctional Family." God's purpose with a dysfunctional family. We look, first, at this dysfunctional family; secondly, at the godly response, we want to see the response of Joseph to this and the explanation of that, God's grace; and finally see that there's a sovereign purpose for this. It's important we see and understand this morning that God placed Joseph in this home where he grew up. It was God who placed Joseph in this dysfunctional family. The environment in which Joseph grew up was awful. None of us would want to grow up in a family that was like Joseph's family. It was certainly dysfunctional. There's a family in which there was envy and hatred and constant fighting. But there are two ways, particularly in the text, that we see the dysfunction of this family. In the first place, we see that it was dysfunctional because Jacob showed favoritism to Joseph. This is part of what created an environment that was dysfunctional in this family. There was favoritism shown to Joseph. Jacob was not a faithful servant leader in his home. It doesn't mean he wasn't a child of God. In verse 3, in fact, the name that's given

of him here is Israel, which was the name that was given to Jacob when he wrestled with God, and through that Jacob learned to trust in God. Jacob was conniving. Jacob often liked to take things into his own hands, but God was teaching him to trust in him, and Jacob was learning that. But still one of the sins that he committed in his home was showing favoritism.

Now that favoritism came about through the family situation that Jacob created. He married four wives. His four wives were Leah, Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah. Joseph was the son of Rachel. Joseph therefore was the favored son. We read in the text that Joseph in verse 2 was feeding the flock with his brethren and he was doing that when he was 17 years old. Joseph was the 11th son out of 12 sons in the family. We find that these sons were not all born of the same wife and mother. There were four. And of course, Joseph was the son of Rachel, and Rachel was the favorite of Jacob. Remember that Jacob, when he was working for his uncle Laban worked seven years thinking that he was going to get Rachel to wife and then Laban pulled the switcheroo on him and gave him Leah, and then he worked another seven years so he could have Rachel for his wife, and then when Rachel was barren and didn't conceive, she gave to Jacob her maid and then Leah did the same thing and that's how Bilhah and Zilpah became his wives. But Joseph was the son of Rachel and because she was the favorite, and then Joseph was the first-born son to Rachel, he became the favorite son of Jacob. He became the pride and joy of Jacob, and that became evident to his other brothers.

This favoritism was shown by Jacob to Joseph, and that was dangerous, that was a dangerous position for Joseph to be in, it was a dangerous position for his brothers to be in as well. It became shown this way: Jacob and Joseph became constant companions. They were always together and when they were together, Joseph would tell his father about the sinful and evil things that his brothers did. Well, we'll come to that a bit later, some of those sinful and evil things. They were awful. They weren't just little things, these were major things that they were talking about. But then we read especially in the text that Jacob showed this favoritism to Joseph by giving him a coat of many colors. Now that word "coat" here indicates two things about it. It may not have even been a coat that was all different colors, but these two things we know about it. First of all, this kind of coat that Joseph had was not a single piece of cloth. Most of the coats and the coats that his brothers would have had, would have been a single piece of cloth. But that it wasn't one single piece, but that there were different pieces of cloth indicates that it was a more expensive coat. So Joseph had a more expensive coat than his brothers. The second thing we learn about it is that it was a long coat, that means it was not the kind of coat or robe that would be worn by shepherds or by workers. It was the kind of coat or robe that would be worn by royalty. That Joseph was given this coat indicates that he was promoted in the family business. He was promoted to management and we find out later in chapter 37 that Joseph wasn't out with his brothers taking care of the flocks, he was back home with his father. He got promoted. Here's this young son, only 17 years old, bypassing all of his older brothers to a position of management when they didn't have such a position themselves. That must have angered them. That must have really bothered them that Joseph had that promotion and that position. And we see here that it was foolish for Jacob to do this. He should have known better, and especially he should have

known better because he should have seen that in his own father. His own father showed favoritism too only it wasn't to Jacob, it was to Esau. But as it often goes, people can be blinded to sins in their own generations, and they carry out the sins of their own fathers.

This is foolish then, for Jacob to do that. It was foolish, first of all, because this became the occasion for Joseph's brothers to be jealous of him and to be filled with hatred toward him. This doesn't excuse what they did, their response to this was wrong, but it became the occasion, not the reason, not the cause. It became the occasion for them to be filled with hatred against their brother. Jacob should have seen that coming, but along with this, this was foolish for Jacob to do because it put Joseph in a dangerous position. Think about it. We as kids, no matter how old we are in our families, we might think it would be great to be the favorite child. Some kids would dream of being the only child because they want to be that favorite. They want all of Mom and Dad's attention, and they want all kinds of things that Mom and Dad could give them. We would think that favoritism is great but it's not. It puts a son in a dangerous position. The position of being proud. The position of being self-righteous.

Now we don't see that in Joseph, and that's only because of God's grace, but Jacob put his own son, that favorite son, in a dangerous position by showing favoritism to him, and we must see that foolishness too as parents. We have to be very careful and we know that, that we don't show favoritism to one child over another. It's foolish to do so. It creates a dysfunctional home but it puts that child in danger too that they become proud and self-righteous. We learn not to do this here. Now, of course, that doesn't mean we treat every child alike. Every child is different, and your kids and young people must understand that too. This doesn't mean everybody is treated the same. You're all different. We all have different strengths and weaknesses and so parents ought to tailor their instruction, the things that they do to the particular child. We understand that. That's different than favoritism.

Now this favoritism was the occasion for Joseph's brothers to hate him, that's part of the dysfunction of this family too, the hatred that was there. Well, before we look at that in the text, we have to understand something about these brothers of Joseph, we have to understand what kind of young men these were. They were wretched and ungodly young men. In fact, when you look at their lives at this point, I would wonder if any of these older brothers of Joseph were converted at this time in their lives and that's because of what we read in Genesis 34. When we read Genesis 34, we find that Joseph's brothers were liars, thieves, and murderers. These were the brothers of Joseph in a home where he had a godly father who loved the Lord and a desire to teach his sons in that, these were the kind of men they were. In Genesis 34 we find that these young men were the gangbangers in the city of Shechem. They were the mafia in Shechem. That's what kind of men they were.

Let's just recap what we read there in Genesis 34. That's part of what Jacob did here, he led his family to this wicked land, and then Dinah has premarital sex with Hamor, a prince in Shechem. Now Hamor wants her to be his wife so he goes to them through his father and asks what can they do so that Dinah can be Hamor's wife, or rather Shechem's

wife. Well, the brothers tell him, "If you're all circumcised then we'll let you have our sister to be his wife." Well, they were lying through their teeth. They didn't intend for that to happen at all. So instead, these men in that city, all of them as adults, circumcise themselves and when they're still sore from that circumcision, Levi and Simeon come and they kill Shechem, and they kill Hamor, and then their brothers come right behind them and kill the men of that city. They take their spoils, they're thieves, they take everything that they have, and they take captive their women and their children. Now they justify it, "Sin was committed against our sister." Well, there was truth in that and they seemed justified in what they did, but here's the reality: these men were thieves, these men were liars, these men were murderers. These are the brothers of Joseph. So if you think their hatred was just some words that they said, a few looks that they give, you can be assured it was more than that. And when Joseph then told his father about the wicked things his brothers did, it wasn't just some small things that they were doing. These men were ruthless. These men were hard. These men were criminals.

Now it's in that context that we read of the way in which they despised Joseph for the favoritism that Jacob showed him and for his godliness. Their hatred is manifest in this way, they couldn't speak peaceably to Joseph, we read that in verse 4, "And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him." They could not speak Shalom. They could not say peace to their brother. They were so filled with wrath and anger towards their brother they couldn't say a kind word to him. They couldn't even greet him. They couldn't even say hello. But they despised him. They looked down upon him. There was nothing about Joseph that they liked or appreciated.

How awful that is if that happens in a family. It can happen. It can happen in a marriage. It can happen between siblings. It can happen between parents and children. Maybe some of you have experienced that in your lives and families, and even at times between believers. And we can justify it because of things that have happened long ago and sins that have been committed and all the rest but we see here that this is dysfunctional. It's not the way it ought to be, and the word of God here reminds us of that. This is not the way it ought to be in homes and in families.

But now this isn't the end of it. This hatred intensifies when Joseph has his dreams. You can imagine Joseph coming to the breakfast table in the morning telling his brothers and parents there too, "I had a dream last night. We were working out in the field and the sheaf that I put together, it stood upright and the sheaves that you guys put together they all bowed down to my sheave." And then we read of their hatred in verse 8, "Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words." And if that wasn't enough, then there was a second dream and Joseph goes to the breakfast table in the morning, "Had another dream." We don't know how long after it was but he had another dream. Sun and moon and 11 stars bow down to his star. And he reports that dream to his brother and they're angry all the more because of this. That's the hatred that existed in this family. They envied him, we read there towards the end of the text. Envy is a form of hatred that resents another. Envy is wanting another

out of the way, and one thing what another has and because one wants what another has, they want that person out of the way. That's the envy that Joseph's brothers had for him.

We see the awfulness of this sin in this home and what we have to see is we have Joseph, a covenant child of God, a child of God saved by grace, growing up in this dysfunctional home and family. How awful that is. And we talk about dysfunctional. Of course, there are different levels of that. All of us to one degree or another have dysfunctional homes because there's sin in our homes. There's dysfunction we see in our families when it comes to sin. No home is perfect but certainly we don't want homes that are like the homes of Jacob and the home that Joseph grew up in. But what we have to see in this is the godly response of Joseph here as he grew up in this environment. That's what's so striking and amazing here in the text. Joseph is surrounded by bitterness, by hatred, by envy. He's surrounded by a father who has four wives. He's surrounded by ungodliness as well. Joseph's own mother was an idol worshipper. Remember Rachel who stole idols from her own father and kept them. This is all of that characterizes the home in which Joseph grew up. But Joseph, we don't find, is like his brothers and he doesn't retaliate in any way against his brothers.

We might expect that Joseph would become like his brothers or worse. We might expect that Joseph would have every right to do evil to his brothers in the same way that they did to him. We would expect that Joseph would be self-serving. According to modern psychology that's what would be expected because it's all about the example that others set. You've got a father that shows favoritism, puts him in a bad light in front of the rest of his brothers, and then he responds out, he lashes out in his pride. He lashes out because he's picked on by his brothers and hated by his brothers. Modern psychology would say it's fine if Joseph would respond in anger. It's fine if he would retaliate. It's fine if he would get them back. And it would be expected as well that he would be just like them because it's all about the environment. Joseph grew up in this unhealthy environment so this could be expected of him. But we see and understand here that anger is not justified, it's wrong, and Joseph understands that. He understands that he should respond in a godly way. He doesn't follow the example of his ungodly older brothers who had led the way in so much ungodliness and sin.

He doesn't respond in the way that his brothers respond to bad treatment. That's the contrast here in the text. Joseph's brothers were not treated well by their own father. They weren't. There's no doubt about that. In the favoritism that Jacob showed to Joseph, he showed that he was in certain ways against his other sons. Joseph, he experienced the hatred of his brothers but there's a contrast, the brothers respond to the favoritism of their father with hatred, with anger, with envy. And they carry it out. It's not just inside them, it can't be held inside, it comes out. But Joseph responds differently. We never read that Joseph despises his brothers. We never read that. We never come to that in the life of Joseph. Remember what he said at the end of his life, "You meant evil against me but God meant it unto good. I'm not going to retaliate. I'm not going to do anything against you." Joseph continued to love his brothers. He maybe had his moments. We simply don't read that he despised his brothers. Not only that but Joseph perseveres in a bad situation. Not only do his 10 brothers hate him, but they're walking in great sin. Joseph does not



walk in that same sin, he doesn't follow their example. He's not a murderer, a liar, and a thief like they are. Joseph is obeying God. He's responding rightly. He loves God and he serves God.

What explains that? What explains that is an amazing display of God's grace. This can be the only explanation for why Joseph is different from his brothers. It's the grace of God working in the life of Joseph. Joseph and his brothers have different hearts. That's brought out in the text too. That's brought out in these dreams and the brothers' response to these dreams. Who sent these dreams to Joseph? Well, it was God who sent these dreams to Joseph and Joseph then as the one who received these dreams, became then a prophet of God. He was to bring these dreams to his family. This was a revelation of God that he then brought to his family because God had brought that. We don't read in any way that Joseph brought these dreams to his family to show his brothers, "Well, one day I'm going to have the last word or I'm going to have the last laugh." There's nothing in the text that indicates that but instead, as one who received revelation from God, he brings that to his family and to his brothers. And how do his brothers respond? Well, their hatred grows. They're filled with envy. They're seething as they look at their brother Joseph. They hate him. They could kill him. We find out later in the chapter that's what they want to do at first, but the point is this: it's not just their attitude towards Joseph but this reveals their attitude towards God, what's in their hearts towards God.

This is the revelation of God. How did they respond? It's kind of like a water bottle with the cap off. You squeeze it and the water comes out. The question is what comes out when the suffering comes? For Joseph's brothers, what came out was hatred envy, ungodliness that shows their hearts, their hearts are exposed here. They don't love God. But Joseph showed something else. He's squeezed by suffering too, the hatred of his brothers. What comes out? What comes out is godliness, obedience, love, love for God and love for his brothers. We see the different hearts here in the text.

Joseph did not live like his brother because of God's grace. He did not live like his brothers because of the work of regeneration in his own heart. He didn't respond with vengeance, hatred, or angry because of what God had done in his own heart. The life of Joseph is a testimony of the preserving grace of God. And notice his age: 17 years old. A young man. I know at 17 years old if I were in a situation like this and grew up in a home like this, it would be hard to make sense out of all of that. God gave to Joseph a spiritual maturity so he responded in obedience. May that be an encouragement to young people too, that when there is suffering, there's hardship, to respond in a right way to that even though we can't make sense of it all. And maybe Joseph didn't understand either why he was put in such a family and why he was surrounded by such hatred, but he responded in faith and obedience. That's what we learn, then, we learn from the text how we are to respond by the grace of God when suffering and injustice is done to us.

One of the things that we see here in the suffering of Joseph is that it foreshadows the suffering of our Savior Jesus Christ. The question always when you look at the life of Joseph is where do you see Christ in this? And then more specifically, is Joseph a type of Christ? Is he a picture of Christ? Usually in the Old Testament when we have one who is

a picture of Christ that's shown clearly in the New Testament that that believer in the Old Testament is a picture of Christ, like David and the kings of Judah, very clear. It's found in the New Testament. It's identified as such. But you don't find that same identification with Joseph. And so I'm not going to set before you that Joseph in that way is a direct picture of Jesus Christ, yet there are certain things we see in the life of Joseph that point to things that happen in our lives but also that point us to Christ, and the one main thing through Joseph's life is suffering. And the New Testament teaches us about how suffering is related to Christ. We have a suffering Savior and because we have a suffering Savior, a suffering head, that means for his people that they will suffer. That's true for his people in the Old Testament too, it's because of their connection to Jesus Christ even though he has not yet come. So in the suffering that Joseph goes through we do see something of Christ here. We see the suffering of Christ and the suffering that all of God's people go through who follow him. Our Lord Jesus Christ was hated without a cause. They hated him because of his words we read in John 8:40. That's why Joseph was hated, because of his words. He brought the word of God in those dreams. They hated him because of it. Jesus brought the word of God. "This is truth. I'm the Savior. I'm the way and the truth and the life. I'm the bread of life." And he was hated for the words that he brought. The world hates Christ because he testifies that their works are evil, so also Joseph testified that the works of his brothers were evil.

So it points us, then, to that suffering of Christ and, of course, that suffering was to pay for our sins. This is why the world hates God's people. It's because we belong to Christ. It's because we speak the truth of God's word and they hate that. They want nothing to do with that. And so we can see from the text that we can expect suffering. Sometimes we can expect that suffering in our own families. At times we would never think that we'd have to go through such suffering in our own families, that we would be hated for our stand on something but it happens and that's part of following the Lord Jesus Christ. This world hates suffering, wants nothing to do with suffering. We should see and understand suffering is a part of the Christian life. It was part of Joseph's life. The suffering that he went through was awful suffering, and that suffering can include being part of dysfunctional homes where sin is condoned, but here we learn how to respond to that suffering. Again, we have to look at our Lord Jesus Christ. We look at his example in how he responded to that.

We read of that in 1 Peter 2. 1 Peter 2, one example of that in verses 19 and following is talking about the suffering that we go through and how to respond to that and then points us to Christ. Beginning in verse 19 or 1 Peter 2, "For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently?" So the idea is if you commit some sin, you do something that's wrong and you suffer for it, you ought to expect that. But if you do what's right and then you suffer, that's what's hard and a grief to us as well. Then it goes on, "but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." It's acceptable when you endure suffering patiently, respond patiently. Now he points us to Christ, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again;

when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." Then verse 24 says, well, that suffering goes beyond an example, that suffering was the way in which he paid for our sins. But there is an example for us to follow. Now, think of that. Joseph in his life didn't have that example of Jesus Christ. God gave him grace to suffer patiently even without that example. We have the example of Christ, of how he suffered when he was suffering and he was mistreated. No one has been as mistreated in this life as our Lord Jesus Christ. Just look at the history of that and you know well he was mistreated by his enemies, despised by them, hated by them, many attempts to kill him as well until they finally nailed him to the cross. How did he respond? He didn't retaliate. He didn't so much as speak a word to them. He suffered silently and patiently, and that's the example that we are to follow. That's the example we see in the life of Joseph because God gave him the grace to do that.

Now this is how we are to respond as well. That's not how we often respond, is it? We often excuse our own sinful behaviors in our relationships because of the sin that's been committed against me, because I have been wronged. I'm mad at my wife because look what she did. I'm mad at my husband because look what he did. I'm angry with my parents because look what they did. I'm angry with my children because look what they did. I'm angry with my brother. Do you know what he did? And it all seems perfectly justified. We've been wronged. We've been sinned against. I have a right to my anger, don't I? I have a right to it. God says, no. We don't have a right to it. That's not the right way to respond.

The brothers of Joseph were sinning against God. Joseph, he responded rightly. He responded patiently. How hard that is for us to do that when we've been sinned against to respond rightly and not to use that as an excuse for our own anger, for our hatred, for our envy for the hurtful words that we speak. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount at the end of that chapter, verses 43 through 45, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven," and it explains why, "for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?" So he's pointing out if someone does good to you it's easy to love them, but what about those who do evil to you? And that's where Jesus commands us to love them. Pray for them. Serve them even. That's the response of Joseph. That's how we have to learn to respond in our marriages, in our homes to one another when we're hurt, in our relationships here in the church as well because when the suffering comes and we're squeezed what comes out reveals what's in our hearts. What's in our hearts? Is it hatred of God? Love of self? Or is it love of God and loving self in the right way in that love of God? That's what we have to see in our own hearts and in our lives.

But in all of this dysfunction that surrounded Joseph, there was a sovereign purpose in this. The sovereign purpose is set before Joseph in the dreams that God gave to him. God revealed that sovereign purpose in those dreams. These brothers who determined evil

against Joseph would one day bow down to him. Remember that part of the dreams? The first dream that the sheaf sheaves of the brothers would bow down to the sheaf of Joseph, and then the sun and moon and the 11 stars bowed down to that star of Joseph. The prophecy was that one day these brothers would bow down to Joseph. Again remember who sent these dreams to Joseph? It was God who sent these dreams to Joseph, and they were sent so that these dreams would be announced. These dreams were the revelation of God not just to Joseph, but to his family. And so he was to bring these dreams to them. We don't have any indication that Joseph brought these dreams in such a way that he wanted to point out he would have the last laugh, he would have the last word, that in pride they were going to one day bow down to him, "And I'll show you."

That's not the way in which Joseph brought those dreams. He's being a prophet of God bringing the word of God to his family, but the point we have to see is that God is revealing that he has a purpose for all of this evil in Joseph's life and in his family's life. There's a purpose for it. Now at this time, Joseph didn't understand what that dream meant, how that it would all come to pass, what God was saying as far as that purpose went, but God is saying to Joseph, "This won't continue." God's saying to Joseph, "There's going to be a change that takes place." I wonder if even Joseph understood that there was going to be a radical change that took place in his brothers, and if that dream may have indicated that to him, that they would not continue this life of sin and ungodliness that they were living, and maybe that's part of the joy that Joseph found in that. We don't know how much Joseph understood of what these dreams meant at that time but knowing the history, of course, we know that's exactly what happened. His brothers were radically changed and you see that when they go down to Egypt and they're looking for food. There was a change that God had worked in their hearts and lives. But God's saying to Joseph, "Joseph, there's a purpose for all of this. Don't give up. There's a purpose. Keep responding in obedience."

That's a beautiful word of God to us this morning too. God speaks to us in the struggles and hardships of our lives where there may be hurt and pain because of dysfunction in our homes and with family members. We've all experienced it to one degree or another, but being part of an extremely dysfunctional home is extremely painful, to have a home like Joseph's home where brothers and sisters hate each other or where there's hatred that's found more broadly in the church. Hatred between spouses. Hatred between parents and children. Hatred between classmates in the school. It's awful, and it's painful to go through those things if you've gone through some of those things. The pain of being hated by others who are so very close to you, and maybe not constant but just a few words here and there, even those are extremely painful.

God speaks to us in this and says he has a purpose for all of this. He promises that he will work it out for good. There's no revelation of a dream here for us. God doesn't reveal in that same way. We don't need dreams, we've got the holy scriptures. And that's the promise he gives to us in his word, he works all things, all things together for good as we read in Romans 28, and that's the promise of God through the scriptures, "I will never leave you nor forsake you. I will be with you." So in the confidence of that God says to us now this morning: respond rightly. You've been hurt by your spouse, you've been hurt

by your parents, you've been hurt by a brother or sister, think on this, how does God want you to respond? Part of that is faith, trusting that God is going to work through that and he's going to bless that, that he has a good end for all of that, he has a purpose. So faith and obedience go together here in the life of Joseph. May that be true in our lives as well. May God give us that grace. We need that grace so that we respond rightly to the sufferings and struggles in our own lives, Amen.

Let's pray.

*Our Father in heaven, we are thankful for this word this morning. We're thankful for the encouragement that it gives, for the promise that is set before us, that thou art a God who works all things for our good. In the sufferings that we go through, especially the sufferings in our relationships, we pray, Father, that we would have this confidence that thou art a God who is good and who is working good for the glory of thy name. Bless us, Father, as we meditate upon this word and we take this word home with us. May it be a constant blessing to us as the Holy Spirit works in our hearts. We ask, Father, that thou wouldst forgive our sins, forgive our wrong responses to the sufferings that we've had in our lives, and teach us to trust and obey. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*