

The Result of the Hatred of Joseph's Brothers

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Life of Joseph

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Bible Text: Genesis 37:29-36

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The scripture reading this morning is Genesis 37:29 through 36. That is Genesis 37 and we start reading at verse 29 to the end of the chapter, verse 36, and this is also the text for the sermon this morning. And there we read God's word,

29 And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes. 30 And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child is not; and I, whither shall I go? 31 And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood; 32 And they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no. 33 And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. 34 And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. 35 And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him. 36 And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard.

So far.

It is really astounding what has all happened. Brothers who hate their younger brother so much that they want to kill him and as a way out, they decide to sell him into slavery while all along he had done nothing wrong to them. Sure, he had received revelations of being exalted, but now he is to become a slave. It's astounding what has all happened. In the family of the patriarch Jacob, it is true Jacob loved Joseph, but it's also true that Joseph was a godly young man, that there's no sin recorded in scripture, as far as we can tell, of Joseph, and what a contrast Joseph was to his brothers, his older brothers. They hated him without cause. And it's astounding now what's all happening in the family of the patriarch Jacob. Jacob, the man of God, the man who had received such revelations and look what's happening in his own family. His sons are going to sell or have sold their younger brother into slavery.

Well, the brothers never forgot what they did. It stayed with them the rest of their lives. It haunted them for as long as they would live because you know later when they stand before that strange Egyptian ruler, this sin comes back to them. "God is punishing us for what we did." The brothers would never forget what they did, and Jacob was going to enter upon the darkest period of his life of bitter grief, and Joseph would also enter in the bitterest period of his life. He would suffer in loneliness in Egypt. And we meditate now on Genesis 37:29 through 36 and we see "The Result of the Hatred of Jacob's Brothers." The result of the hatred of Joseph's brothers, and we've seen in the first place, Reuben alarmed, in the second place, Jacob deceived, and in the third place, Joseph sold. So the result of the hatred of Joseph's brothers: in the first place, Reuben is alarmed; the second place, Jacob is deceived; and in the third place, Joseph is sold.

Well, the Midianite caravan is slowly moving away, moving into the distance. Joseph is on his way to far away Egypt. Soon he is out of sight, never to return. And we imagine the brothers dividing the money and getting back to work. And after a while, Reuben comes to the pit. He was away probably doing some work around the flocks and he was not aware of what his brothers had done. He comes to the pit and he wants to pull Joseph out of it and to send him on his way home, and Reuben looks inside and the pit is empty. Where is Joseph? He tears his clothes in pieces as a sign of grief and he runs to his brothers and he cries out, "Where is Joseph? What did you do to him?" And they answer him, "Well, don't make any fuss. He's alive and well but he's gone. He's off to Egypt. We sold him as a slave to merchant men so we didn't have to kill him."

Reuben is alarmed. In verse 30 we then hear him saying, "The child is not; and I, whither shall I go? Joseph is no longer here, and what shall I do? Where shall I go? I'm the oldest brother. After all, I do have some responsibility for what's taken place here, and what shall my father say of me? How can I face my father? What must I do? Where shall I go?" Well, at least Reuben had some concern for Joseph. We can be glad with his pity and concern, right? No, not right at all because listen to what Reuben is saying: he's not grieving about Joseph, he's grieving about himself. He doesn't say a word about poor Joseph, no, he's saying about "poor me." He grieves about himself. He thinks about his own position, and he says, "Whither shall I go?" He doesn't say, "Terrible what you did to Joseph. We have to get right after that caravan right now and redeem Joseph." No, he's concerned about himself.

At the end of the day, Reuben was a coward. Why was he a coward? If a person is afraid, does that make him a coward? No. What makes a person a coward as if he is more concerned for his own safety than for that of others and here Reuben is more concerned for himself and for the misery of his brother Joseph. But the worst part of this, congregation, is that this mentality lives also in your and my heart. It ought to be that we should stand up as a lion to defend the truth and to stand up always for the honor of God, but too often we take refuge to a weak reasoning, and too often we are more concerned about our own ease and about our own honor and our own name than about what is right and just. We can keep silent when we should have spoken. But when there is no danger and when we run no risks, well, then we can be so ready to proclaim the honor of God. In a sheltered environment amongst those who think exactly as we do, oh then we can stand

up for the truth and honor of God. Or when we are somewhere else for when we are in temptation, we can say, "Well, it's not that bad." You and I, we can look also like this boy, this man Ruben, and what we then need is that God would shine with the light of his word into our heart and show us who we are. Our eyes need to be opened for the natural weakness, and we have to confess that we are weak, that we would not confess the name of God. You and I, we need to lose our natural pride. We should lay off the idea that we are so righteous and that we are so faithful and that we are so great defenders of the truth. We must see that our heart is cunning and then we will humble ourselves and then we will say, "O Lord, I'm inclined to forsake thee. I'm inclined to deny thee. I'm inclined to go my own way. Lord, deliver me from myself, deliver me from my foolish inclinations. O make me truly dedicated to thee. Make me zealous for thine honor, for thy name, the truth in love and in humility."

And when you see your own natural inclinations, that you are so easily inclined to forget the Lord, then we realize there was one who was always dedicated to his Father and to the honor of his Father. He was never ashamed. He always confessed the honor of his Father, and when you look to him then you see how far short you fall, and then you and I must humble ourselves before God and confess, "Lord, we are so easily led astray by our own foolish reasonings." And then you call unto him, "O Lord, deliver me from that natural weakness, that sinful inclination, and deliver me from my cowardly nature." Then you beg the Spirit of Christ to fill you, to teach you to be fully dedicated to the Lord and his honor, then it's not so much your own honor that is important or your own ease, but God's honor, God's name, and you learn that in the valley of humility where you become little, where you accuse yourself, and where you see there's only one who can deliver you, one who can save you, one who can keep you, Christ Jesus, and that's where the Lord leads his people, and in those circumstances they stop complaining about the hardships, or they don't complain about their own circumstances, but there they complain about themselves. There, you and I complain about our own sin, and there you need the Lord as the one who not only justifies the sinner, but who also sanctifies the sinner.

If we look at what happens in that family of Jacob, then we are shocked, especially if you remember that these were the covenant people of God, and we remember what the Lord said to Abraham in Genesis 17, "I am the almighty God. Walk before me and be thou perfect and I will make my covenant between me and thee." That was the covenant the Lord established with Abraham and it went on through Isaac and also to Jacob and his sons. And look how they are acting. They are not perfect, by far not. They are not upright, not in the least. Here they are selling their younger brother and the oldest brother is groaning about himself, and when they finally construe the splendid idea to make up a terrible lie and to dip the many colored coat in blood and to send it back to their father, then Reuben stops moaning. Then at least he doesn't have to bear responsibility and he is shot free.

Reuben, he appears to be alarmed but his concern is focused on himself. He tore his clothes but not his heart, that was because his heart was not right before God. Reuben was first concerned about his own name and his own well-being, but not about God. If Reuben would have considered the great sin that was taking place, he would have been

truly humbled and he would have been in a valley of humility. It's a blessing to be brought there. That's grace. That's not something natural, easily happens. That's grace when the Lord is pleased to stop you and that your eyes are opened and there you admit, "I have stolen God's honor." And then you say, "I'm the sinner. I need Christ." There in the depths, you groan and moan about your sin, and there you cannot live on without Christ, and there Christ is found by the poor and the needy, and there you can live daily from the fountains of salvation, and like Isaiah said in chapter 12, verse 3, that with joy shall ye draw waters out of the wells of salvation. And that's experienced by those who have been truly humbled by the Lord.

But then we notice also Jacob deceived. The brothers realize that they have a major problem. They have just sold their brother into slavery and now what are they going to tell their old father who's at home anxiously waiting for Joseph to come home? What are they going to do now? You see, unconfessed sins never remain on their own, other sins are added to it. You see, one tries to cover up one sin by committing another sin, and it goes from bad to worse, and that's what you see here where the brothers see how the development is in the lives of these brothers. First, they had been jealous because of a special gift his father had given to the younger brother. And then they become angry because God revealed matters to him in a dream. And then they hated him and they could not even speak friendly to him. And then they decided to kill him. They did not even hesitate to murder their own brother, but then they choose the easy way out and they sell him into a lifelong slavery, a life of misery. And now they will not hesitate to kill their own father. Not that they're going to actually literally kill him, but by their words they will plunge him into such horrendous grief that the old man wishes to die. And then on top of that, they will, in a hypocritical manner, comfort their father with more lies.

And so the brothers, they slaughter a goat. They dip Joseph's coat in the blood. And then they call a servant who was taking care of the flock and he didn't really know what had all happened and they told him, "Go quickly to our father. Bring him this coat, this coat we found in the field, and ask him, 'Does this coat belong to your son Joseph?' That's all you have to say, 'Does this coat belong to your son Joseph?'"

A day or two later we see an anxious father waiting for news from his sons, and then he sees a servant running up to his tent carrying something in his hands, and Jacob unfolds the coat, and horrified he looks at the bloodstains all over it and the rips and the tears, and he knows immediately, "This is the coat of my son Joseph." And then we read the awful words that would initiate the darkest period of Jacob's life in verses 33 and 34. He said, "It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days." What terrible depths of human wickedness are displayed here before our eyes. Consider the sea of grief that Joseph's brothers have poured out upon their father, and this grief broke their father for years to come. To lose a son is terrible, but then also to have to remain in uncertainty regarding what actually happened is even worse. Not knowing what actually happened can pain the heart, and at times there can even be the hope that the loved one will still come back. Well, Jacob went through this grief.

Now he was, of course, awfully deceived by his sons. It was a terrible thing the boys did. But then we think back for a moment to Jacob's life, what he himself had done, and here we see him so many years ago crouching beside his father Isaac with a goat skin on his neck and on his arms, wearing the clothes of his brother Esau and saying, "Father, I am Esau thy son. Bless me now." And he received the blessing and he deceived his father, and what a cry of shock went through Isaac when he found out later a few hours after that that he had been deceived, and now Jacob himself is being deceived. You see, God can visit the sins of the youth in older age. Certain consequences of sin we did in our younger years can be felt as we get older. Sins can come back to haunt us. Grief can weigh upon us because we can never undo what we did wrong earlier on in life. And therefore, young people, be careful how you walk. Young people, live close to the Lord, study his word, be serious about it and pour out your heart before God and ask the Lord to be your guide, to be your protector, to be your shepherd, that he would guard your footsteps, that he would hinder you from plunging yourself into certain sins that can happen so easily in the youth that can defile you and that give you so much bitterness, sins that initially taste sweet but very quickly they turn into gravel in your mouth. This world is a dangerous place to live in with so much sin readily accessible, so much sinful addiction readily present. Sin is at the door and who can stand against the tidal wave of sin, temptation? How can a young man stand against temptations and sin and defilement? You can only do that when the Lord Jesus Christ lives in your heart, when you know the love of Christ guarding you, guiding you, protecting you, filling you, motivating you, blessing you, gladdening you, that you know his love is the very best and that you look with disdain upon the world. Then it's your honor to walk undefiled in this world. That's what Joseph also knew in his life otherwise he could have never behaved the way he did in Egypt. Live close to the Lord. Sins you now do can haunt you later on, but sins you never did will never haunt you, and sins you never committed you never have to confess, therefore, search the scriptures and pour out your heart unto the Lord and see grace of the Lord to be resolved to walk in his ways, to have the very best, Christ, and his salvation.

Jacob the deceiver, he himself was going to be deceived in a most painful way. What an awful grief fell upon Jacob. The Bible pictures God's children not as great strong men of faith, then they would tower high up above us and then we will be no match for them, no comparison to them and all their experiences. Oh, we would fall so far short and we could not reach to them, they could not even serve as an example for us. We could never relate to them, but God's word shows God's children as they really are, as very human, very frail, very weak. And so they come very close to us in our daily lives and then we see how the Lord dealt with them, how the Lord instructed them, and then we can derive comfort from that because we recognize ourselves in the lives of these men. We can be comforted also when we go in a way of grief and of hardships or suffering. Jacob, the man of faith, Jacob, the man who wrestled with the Lord at Peniel, and here he has become a little old man wanting to die, refusing to be comforted in all his grief and weeping and mourning. In verse 35, he says, "I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning."

Well, this was a terrible blow. If we look at scripture, we can understand to some extent his grief, that Joseph was by far the best of all his sons, the most promising of his sons.

Joseph was also the son of many prayers being the firstborn of his beloved wife Rachel. And Joseph was the son who gave him comfort in the midst of distressing news that he heard regarding his other sons. Joseph was the son upon whom he had hopes, and had seemed to be founded upon divine revelations that his son had received. And on top of all this, how great must the remorse have been of Jacob that he sent Joseph away alone. And then Jacob must have thought that, "I myself am the cause of this terrible event. I should have never let Joseph go out alone. I know there are wild beasts. It hardly ever happens and one must have trust in life," and so on.

But now Joseph has been torn to pieces and in verse 35 his father wept for him. Wept. Continually weeping, grieving. Jacob had much grief but there's also something in life as an immoderate grief. It can also happen that we grieve too much for a loved one. Now you must understand well, grief is natural and there needs to be emotionally a process of grieving at the loss of a loved one, and it is good to grieve, it is good to have customs by which we can give vent to our grief. God's children also cry and they also shed tears because of the loss of loved ones. And then the devil can be very quick to say, "You're not allowed to grieve, you have to have faith and comfort, and where is your comfort now?" But God's children also grieve. Abraham, the man of God, he grieved for his wife Sarah. And David the man according to God's heart, he mourned for the death of Jonathan. And Jeremiah, that faithful prophet, he wrote a song of grief because of the death of King Josiah. And the disciples, the early New Testament church had grief because Stephen had been stoned. It's human to grieve.

It is good even in these circumstances to grieve but there is still the danger of immoderate grief. Before this, Jacob had gone through severe trials. Jacob, he had wrestled with God. And Jacob, he had to cope with many hardships, and he had borne it all. Jacob, he had been struck with terrible grief before, his beloved wife Rachel had died and he buried her along the road to Bethlehem. Oh, how he grieved, but he did not collapse. He continued on with his grief. But here with the death of Joseph, he just wants to give up. He just wants to die. Mentally the old man is collapsing. In Psalm 42, David speaks about great grief he suffered and yet he did not allow himself to be overwhelmed by it. He said, "Why art thou cast down my soul? Hope thou in God for I shall yet praise him." But that was something Jacob in his great grief could not say. And Calvin said yet Jacob could have found comfort from the consolation of a future life. Jacob knew that those who die in the Lord are not lost but they enter into a new life with the Lord in glory, and the main subduing power against sorrow is the comfort of the future life. Calvin says if we apply ourselves to this comfort, we will not be absorbed by excess grief. And Calvin, he knew what he was talking about. Calvin had been married two years and then he received his only child and the child, the son, died when he was two weeks old. And then another seven years, then his wife passed away and he had no one left. And Calvin wrote letters in which he expressed his grief but that also he found comfort in the meditation upon the future life in glory for those whom he had lost.

You see, Jacob's grief is immoderate. He indulges in grief and that borders on rebellion against God. He allows himself to be overwhelmed with grief as if God's sons do not pass through death to a better life. Job, he greatly excelled in piety, the grief he had to endure

when his sons and daughters were killed, and he bore it until finally it even became too much for this good man and he wished that he would die. But Calvin says if such holy men like Jacob and Job, if they were overwhelmed by grief, how much more shall we easily be overwhelmed by grief unless God, by the shining of his word and Spirit, would scatter the darkness and would cause us to look to the future life and cause us to realize that future life is forever.

In your grief, you may find comfort in Christ Jesus and you may ask of the Lord grace to look beyond the grief that's now resting upon you and you may ask him for strength and grace to realize that God takes his people to be where he is and that we are all on our way to our long home. Are we prepared for that change? Are we prepared to meet God? When others may grieve because of us, will they have good hope what we have made a good exchange? Are you ready to meet God? Are your sins washed in his blood? Do you have peace with God? This life is quickly spent. This life is quickly done. Our hearts must be united to the Lord. He must live in our heart, then his Spirit will lead you and comfort you and give you grace to walk the way the Lord has set before you. And let your hope be upon God for time and eternity because sorrow may endure through the whole night yet joy cometh in the morning for all those who hope in the Lord and his grace, and that joy shall no man take from them. When there is grief, even terrible grief, he can soothe it. The Lord can comfort as a mother. He can show compassion as a father. And the Lord knows what you need. Stay close to him. Look unto Jesus. That's what Jacob should have done but what Jacob did not do. Before this he had done it. Then he had said to the Lord, "I will not let thee go unless thou dost bless me." And later on in life, Jacob again is unable to do it. Then on his deathbed he will say, "Lord, I wait for thy salvation." Then he was looking unto the Lord but now in this grief he couldn't do it. He was overwhelmed. But by faith, he should have resisted it because in spite of all things, God can never forsake his people.

Jacob now was not living by faith and then in the midst of all this grief you have the height of mockery when in verse 35 you read, "And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him." His sons and their wives together with Dinah, their sister, they comfort him and there you see sheer mockery. They pretend that they are grieving, and they cry along with their old father, and they lay their arms around him, and they speak pious words of God's faithfulness, and of God's promises, and of God's covenant, and of God's strength, and that the Lord has still blessed Jacob with so many other blessings. He still has them as his sons and they would care for him, they would stay with him. But Jacob refused to be comforted and that's because he did not feel true compassion because a hypocrite cannot show compassion. A hypocrite cannot give real comfort, it's only cold phrases. Why not? Because Christ is not in it and only Christ can give true comfort. He is the compassionate high priest and he gives words to those who are called to show compassion, and he can give compassion through his word and Spirit in the lives of those who are in grief so that these people, in turn, can comfort others with a comfort whereby they themselves first were comforted. And what a blessing when you are in grief and one of Christ's disciples come to you. The soothing balm of Christ. You taste it. You know it's real. And it does help. Even a prayer. And that's what Jacob missed in his sons. Their words were cheap. And it could not be otherwise, because all their so-called comfort was

just one big show and a cover up. Calvin speaks of iron hardness in these boys that cruelly reigned in them. They were exceedingly cruel. They saw that their father was, as it were, dying with grief, and yet they do nothing to alleviate his pain. They add sin to sin. They add hypocrisy to hypocrisy. And thus his father wept for him.

And then we see Joseph sold. You see, what Jacob didn't know was that his son Joseph was still alive and the Lord was going to work a glorious salvation for Jacob because God is faithful. It's one of the most beautiful things in scripture that God is faithful. What Jacob didn't know was that Joseph at this time was standing in Egypt on a slave market somewhere along the river Nile where the heart of Egypt's economic life was established. The Midianites were eager to sell this young, strong man. They could make good money on him. And there happened to come on the slave market an important man looking for a strong young slave. The man was called Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's and captain of the guard. The name Potiphar means "belonging to the sun," And the name Pharaoh means "ruler" or also "the sun." You see, the Egyptians, they worshiped the sun, Ra, and they assumed that Pharaoh was a descendant of the sun and that he was divine, and that's why he could reign with absolute power because he was equal to the sun. His subjects were all dedicated to him and this Potiphar, by his name, is demonstrating that he belongs to Pharaoh, he belongs to the sun. And this Potiphar, he had an important position. He was an officer of Pharaoh. That means he was in Pharaoh's service. He received tasks and orders directly from Pharaoh, and more in particular, his position was captain of the guard. The word in Hebrew for guard means also the executioners, so that probably this Potiphar, that he was captain of the executioners, the ones who were called to execute criminals and enemies. So when a criminal was to be executed, he was handed over to Potiphar who put him in custody with his guards and kept him ready to be executed at an appointed time.

It was to this man that Joseph was sold. Potiphar became the master of a young Hebrew man, but little did he know that this young Hebrew slave would become his Lord and his master. And congregation, what must this all have meant for Joseph? He had received blessed revelations and promises of being exalted, and instead he was sold as a slave, humanly speaking, condemned to a life of misery, loneliness and suffering. And how did Joseph react? Well, he lived by the word of God. We mentioned that already in the previous sermon in Psalm 105:19, there the Holy Spirit sheds light upon what happened to Joseph, that the word of the Lord tried him. So Joseph there in Egypt was busy with the word of God that was going through his mind. He thought about the word of God the Lord had given him. He didn't understand what was all happening to him but God's words stayed with Joseph, the word of God revealed to him through those dreams, and in his sufferings those dreams came back to him and these words gave Joseph grace to carry on. In his heavy cross and in his sufferings that would become worse, the word of God comforted him.

You know, in Psalm 105:19 that word "tried" can also be translated with "purifying, purging." That's how they have it in the Dutch translation. So through suffering and seeing this all in the light of God's word, Joseph was purified. His faith didn't fade away. No, his faith became stronger. His faith was purged. The word of God purified him. He

could hope against all the circumstances that God would still remember him. His faith increased. He knew what the Lord had done to his great grandfather, how the Lord had delivered Abraham. He knew what the Lord had done to Isaac, that they couldn't receive children and the Lord did a miracle. And what the Lord had done for his father Jacob. Of course, Joseph had drunk in all those revelations and he trusted in the word of God and his faith in the midst of his sufferings was even purified.

Joseph had learned a great lesson. He learned to judge God's providences through his word and not the other way around. He judged God's providences through God's word and not the other way around. You see, too often we look at the providence of God in life, we look at his guidance and his dealings and then we take that as the norm, we take that as reality, and then we compare this fixed reality to the word of God and then we judge God's word to be right or to be wrong, or the Lord is unfaithful, or the Lord is forgetting me, is forsaking me, but that's wrong. It should be the other way around. We should look at reality through the word of God, that you take God's word as the norm and that becomes fixed and sure that he is faithful, that all things will work together for good to those who love God and who are called according to his will, and that if God be for us who can be against us? And who can separate us from the love of God which is revealed in Christ Jesus?

That's the comfort for a child of God that he is faithful, and then when I look at the providences when I go through hardships, still his word is true. He shall not leave me. He shall not forsake me. I hope in him in spite of the circumstances. He shall still undertake for me. He shall still apply his word in my life, and I hope in his word. That is faith and that's what Joseph had. He was purified by the word of God that came back to him in his suffering and grief. God's child, never think that the promise of a crown and rivers of pleasure is made void because presently you go through hardships, because presently you go through the cross. Many promises seem to have been forgotten by the Promiser but they were never forgotten. They have been exactly fulfilled in due time and we see this also here, because when Jacob seemed to collapse in the darkest night, God was still at work carrying out a plan of salvation for his people. God is always at work for his people. That's because he loves them with an everlasting love. His heart is united to them. Their names are engraved upon the palms of his hands. "Although a mother may forget her suckling child, I will never forget you."

God is always at work and maybe you at the moment see nothing of it, but God is faithful. Never forget that. Grasp hope in God. Strengthen the trembling knees and fold your hands and look above. Your Redeemer liveth. Joseph must have wrung his hands in sorrow and Joseph must have buried his face in grief at night, but the word of the Lord stayed with him. Joseph was humbled or strengthened. He was made willing to go this way. "With God's help, I will go. With God I can do all things for he strengtheneth me. Make me faithful to thee, O Lord, for thou art faithful."

Then we think for a moment of the deep humility, the greater than Joseph went through, Jesus Christ, who became man and he humbled himself through such deep humiliation to be able to save his people. He became so low, much lower than Joseph. He humbled

himself to the death of the cross, to outer darkness, and there you hear in the voice of Christ on the cross, "Lama lama, sabachthani." That means, "Why? For what purpose? He has forsaken, my God has forgotten me, forsaken me," where you and I ought to have been forever, and yet God delivered his Son, rose him up from the grave. It was so that sinners would be redeemed. Joseph went through a deep way but he didn't understand it that God was leading everything to his redemption, to salvation because God is faithful. Amen.