

## **Preaching Copy: Genesis 50:19-21 “In All Things God is In Control”**

Proper 19 – 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday @ Pentecost

Sunday, September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020

### **Text: Genesis 50:19-21**

<sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

### **Exegetical Statement**

After the time of mourning for their father Jacob was over Joseph's brothers have an epiphany about their future. They live in a foreign land where the second in command is their brother who they once considered killing, and instead sold as a slave. And the only thing that might save them from his wrathful vengeance, their father, was now beyond helping them. Even though Joseph had already assured them of his forgiveness and their role in God bringing about the greater good of the salvation of many people, their guilt over their sins moves them to fear. So they send a message to Joseph that his father, on his death bed, desired that Joseph forgive all the evil his brothers had done; these men who are his brothers and servants of his God. The brothers feel they need to move Joseph's heart to have mercy through his love of his father and a desire to obey the Patriarch's wishes. But this message was unnecessary. Instead Joseph weeps for his brothers who are still plagued by guilt over the sin that both God and he has forgiven them for. They in humble repentance come and bow before Joseph and place themselves as slaves at his mercy. But Joseph restores them with the truth of God's word and Gospel forgiveness. Joseph assures them that the only one who can bring about vengeance upon them is God. And Joseph reminds that them God has not only forgiven them but He has shown them how He used their evil intent to bring about a far greater good, not only themselves and their families are being kept alive because Joseph was sold into slavery, but many surrounding nations as well. Then Joseph comforts them with the promise to care for them and their children as long as he lives and rules in Egypt. And He continued to share with them words and comfort from his heart which had been molded and changed by God.

### **Focus Statement:**

God's will is always done and evil cannot cancel it out or overcome it. God's stated desire is that all men hear the Gospel and come to the knowledge of the truth that is Jesus Christ who has saved the world from eternal death. In Christ He cancels all debts, forgives all wrongdoing, and brings about the means for you to live forever with Him.

### **Function Statement:**

#### **Why it's important to know:**

We look at the world and the presence of evil which seems to be winning the day and see only defeat and the closing of doors for the Church to make a difference. We feel that we are under attack and things are heading out of control

#### **What the hearer should do as a result:**

Realize that God is always in control. He is not reacting to the threats of evil but is already using them to accomplish His ultimate good. Prayerfully we are to ask Him to show us how we can, through the evil and unrest surrounding us, be His tool to share the faith, love, and forgiveness of Christ as part of His end time plan for the Church.

### **Subject Sentence: God is in control so the Church fulfills His will**

## **Introduction: A world that is out of control**

Do you remember the movie, Bruce Almighty, that came out in 2003? Morgan Freeman played the role of God, who calls TV reporter Bruce Nolan (played by Jim Carrey) to put his money where his mouth is after Bruce is constantly complaining that God has not been fair to him. God gives Bruce His power to rule, in what turns out to be a limited fashion. And of course “Bruce Almighty” uses that power for selfish means, and in doing so messes up everything, creating riots and mass hysteria. Then God steps back into the picture and in a symbolic scene where the two of them are mopping a floor proceeds to help Bruce clean up the mess. Now this is an entertaining movie, but it is not a Christian movie. For one thing it makes no mention of the One the Father sent to clean up the mess we humans make, who is His Son Jesus Christ. And for another, it appeals to a popular yet wrong concept of how we sometimes view God at work in the world.

In the movie God is portrayed as One who can step in only after things have gone off the rails, at which point He cleans up the mess. He is portrayed as a God who must submit to the free will of mankind and so can only react when evil things happen but is unable or unwilling to be proactive to make things right again. As we look at what is going on in the world, we can fall into this kind of thinking too. We might admit that God has a plan. But it seems at times that evil is able to stand up and throw a wrench into that plan. As we learned last Sunday, God has provided government to keep the peace. Yet in city after city we have the opposite of peace: violent protest, unrest, and calls to remove the very agents placed there by God to be His peace keepers on behalf of society. With all the evil that is currently at work in the world: the Pandemic, the divisiveness that is the current political climate, and the racial unrest, we the Church are left to wonder how on earth we are supposed to do our job of proclaiming the Gospel in such a time as this. Our world is spinning out of control, and we are praying that God would step in and slow it down, stand up to evil, and clean up the mess, make things right again. But our Old Testament Lesson can give us a different view of how God is at work when evil rears its ugly head.

## **How Joseph Learned God is in Control**

To understand this we need to turn back the pages of Genesis to Chapter 37. Jacob the Patriarch has 12 sons but does not treat them all equally. Two of them are his favorites, especially Joseph who was the first born of his favorite wife Rachel, who tragically died giving birth to the second favorite son, Benjamin. Jacob didn't hide his favoritism to Joseph, which caused deep anger and jealousy among the other 10 brothers. The final straw was Jacob's special gift to Joseph: the “Coat of Many Colors”.

When Jacob sent Joseph out to check on his other 10 sons and bring back a report, they saw their chance. They had roamed far from their father's camp in search of pasture for the sheep. It was just them out in the field. And here comes the dreamer boy Joseph in his pretty coat. The boy who had the audacity to tell them he dreamed that they would one day all bow before him! The original plan was to simply kill him and throw his body into a pit. But then a better idea came to them: instead of being guilty of murder they should sell Joseph as a slave to passing traders. And that is what they did. Then they took his beautiful robe and smeared it with Lamb's blood and made Jacob think that Joseph had been killed by wild animals. Jacob's grief was inconsolable. The 10 brothers could not bring themselves to tell him the truth. Instead they remained unrepentant, and the guilt lay heavy upon their hearts. It laid there and grew and they struggled to live with themselves over what they had done.

Meanwhile Joseph is sold as a slave in Egypt to the Captain of Pharaoh's palace guard. The LORD is with Joseph and He excels as the Captain's servant. Seeing his gift of honesty and his God given administrative ability, the Captain puts this slave in charge of all the affairs of his household. And just when it appears that good has overcome the evil deed of the brothers, the lust of the Captain's wife and her false accusations against the non-compliant Joseph to have an affair with her ruin everything. She accuses him of trying to rape her and he is thrown into prison.

But this is no ordinary prison for common criminals. This is the prison where those of Pharaoh's household and employ are sent. Not what we would call a maximum-security prison, but one where the prisoners had some freedoms. There in prison once again Joseph excels because the LORD is with him. The Head guard of the prison puts Joseph in charge of all other prisoners. And the LORD gives to Joseph the ability to interpret prophetically people's dreams. He does so for Pharaoh's baker, telling him his dream means that in 3 days he will be restored to his position in Pharaoh's palace. Joseph only asks that the Baker might remember him and say a kind word for him. But after the Baker is restored, he forgot all about Joseph who languishes in prison as an innocent man for 2 more years.

But then Pharaoh has a dream that bothers him extremely. None of his wise men can tell him what it means. It is then that the Baker remembers Joseph who is cleaned up and brought before Pharaoh. Joseph tells Pharaoh that the dream means there will be 7 years of fantastic crop growth followed by 7 years of historical famine. Joseph, through the wisdom given by God suggests to Pharaoh that he build cities with huge grain storage facilities so that what is harvested in the years of plenty will last the people through the years of famine. Pharaoh is so impressed by the God given abilities of Joseph that he makes Joseph second in command of all Egypt, with only Pharaoh himself greater. And under Joseph enough grain is stored to carry not only Egypt through the famine, but to sell to other nations and peoples affected by it.

It is here that Joseph's 10 brothers re-enter his life. They come to Egypt because the famine in Canaan is bad and they need food. Joseph recognizes them but they do not recognize him. He uses this as an opportunity to test them; to see if they are still the same self-centered murderous conniving brothers that had sold him into slavery. Joseph is not interested in revenge; he is interested in their heart condition; have they changed and begun to live a different life? Have they repented of their sinfulness? He forces them to bring Benjamin, the other favorite son of their father Jacob. Joseph shows favor to Benjamin to see how they react. Then he frames Benjamin as a thief who stole his special cup. He tells them Benjamin will be thrown into prison, but the rest of them may return home with their grain. The brothers who sold him into slavery would have jumped at this chance, telling Jacob how they tried to free Benjamin but could not, or maybe even making up another tale of a wild animal attack. But Joseph witnesses a change of heart among the brothers. Judah speaks for the rest and asks that Joseph imprison him and let Benjamin go free, for to return home without Benjamin would break his father's heart. This unselfish love shows Joseph a heart change that has taken place.

So after breaking down and weeping over all they have been through Joseph reveals to them the truth. **Genesis 45:4-8** <sup>4</sup> **So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.** <sup>5</sup> **And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.** <sup>6</sup> **For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest.** <sup>7</sup> **And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.** <sup>8</sup> **So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.**

This is the message that Joseph again reiterates to his brothers after his father's death. They struggled to see the truth of all that had happened in Joseph's life. And as the result they could not believe that Joseph or the LORD had forgiven them. They saw their father as the only thing that held back Joseph's wrath. And now that he is gone Joseph, using his power and position will certainly get even with them. They lie about their father's last wish that Joseph forgive their sins and be merciful to them. And then they appear before him, bow before him, and place themselves at his mercy to be his servants, his slaves, if he will only let them live. Once again, seeing the power their guilt has had over them causes Joseph to weep for them.

Joseph responds with words filled with God's gracious love and mercy. **Genesis 50:19-21**  
**19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?" 20 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. 21 So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.** He asks them "Am I in the place of God?" In other words is it my place to enact the vengeance and punishment that belongs to God alone? And what about God? How does He feel about what you did to me? He was the driving and controlling force all along. What you planned as evil was already, even before you did it, part of God's gracious and loving plan. His plan to save you, and not just you, but the Egyptians and countless other peoples from starvation. Do not fear God nor fear me. You are forgiven. I am here to love you and care for you and your children as for as long as I live.

## **How God Used Evil for Good in Jesus Christ**

God has no problem working through the evil plans and actions of men. He works not in reaction to the evil they plan in opposition to Him. He is already at work before they plan it and at work as they carrying it out. He doesn't have to change their plans into serving His good. In ways that are beyond human comprehension their evil plans and ways do in fact serve His good and gracious will and plan for mankind. Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave out of jealousy and murderous hate. But it was all part of God's plan already at work before it happened to save all of Jacob's family and many more beside.

There must have been many times in Joseph's life when he wondered if God was in control. Wondered if God had forgotten about him, or if evil was being allowed free reign over him. It wasn't until God elevated him to his position under Pharaoh and his brothers showed up in his presence that God's whole plan and work all through his life became clear. Only in hindsight could Joseph see how God was at work in man's evil plans for His good and gracious will. And Joseph shared this wonderful witness of how their loving and forgiving God had been at work to save his whole family and even more.

But Joseph is only a foreshadowing of a greater work of the LORD to come. That greater work involved the Father sending His only Son to earth to become a man like Joseph. A man who was innocent of the crimes he was charged with and yet was made to suffer ridicule, was mocked, was struck and whipped, and was crucified like the lowest of common criminals. As the disciples saw all this playing out, they thought evil ruled the day. Their hope in Jesus as the Messiah was dashed when He died on the cross. It appeared that the devil who Jesus fought at every turn of His ministry had finally won. Yet the exact opposite was true. The Father was at work through the plans of evil men to bring about the greatest victory ever. This victory was God's plan from the beginning, to save all men from something far worse than a famine. To save all men from the destiny of suffering apart from Him in eternal hell. The devil thought he had secured our eternal torment. But his

most dastardly plan wasn't just redeemed by Jesus' actions. Jesus suffering, and death was God's plan all along and the devil could do nothing else but make sure it happened.

God works through means in our world. He works through evil to accomplish His eternal good. He did it through the suffering and death of His only Son, declaring this to be the victory He always planned as Jesus rose from the dead. He worked through the plans of evil men to squash the Church the Spirit had called into existence on Pentecost as they sought to kill the believers. And one of the ringleaders in this effort, a certain Saul of Tarsus whose bloodlust against Christians moved him into a position of prominence in the movement to kill the Church, Jesus called him to faith. Jesus used him to spread the faith throughout the Roman Empire. This is all because God works through the plans of evil men to accomplish His purposes.

## **How The Church Should See the World**

And what are His purposes here today? To bring salvation to all men through the Gospel. To bring you to faith and keep you in faith toward Jesus Christ. He is at work through all the evil things that are going on in the world, through all the suffering that you encounter in your life, things the devil means to cancel your faith and separate you from Jesus. The Spirit is instead at work through these things to draw you closer, to strengthen your faith in Jesus even as He lessens your faith and reliance upon yourself. Why? Because God works through means. He certainly works through the good deeds of the Church in the world. But He is also at work through the evil works of evil men to accomplish His purpose of bringing salvation to all those who are called into His kingdom. People just like you.

So how should we the Church see all the evil things that are going on in the world? How should we see the Pandemic, the rioting and looting, the nastiness and divisiveness in politics? These are evil things that the Church certainly needs to oppose. But these are not signs that evil is winning. We need not sit back and wait for God to come and clean things up. Our God is the God who loves to work through means, even the evil plans and purposes that are afoot in our world today. As His Church we should confess our faith in Him and the reign and rule of our Lord and Savior at the right hand of the Father. We should not be afraid and think that things are spinning out of control. Instead we should be in prayer that the LORD would show us how He is at work through these evil things. We should be looking for ways and doors that He opens to share the same message that Joseph shared with His brothers. God loves even evil men. God loves you. Jesus came to share His love and forgiveness, a love so strong that it changes lives. It turns hearts from doing evil to be obedient out of love for Christ and love for others.

## **Conclusion**

God is at work in this world as I speak. God is still in control no matter how things look. We just can't see it from where we stand right now, just as Joseph couldn't see it when he was languishing in prison. God had plans for Joseph. God has plans for you as His precious child. His plan is to carry you through the evil in this world so that you join Him in eternal life. God has a plan for His Church. That the evil in the world would prepare the hearts and minds of the lost to stop trusting in themselves and in the plans and purposes of men, and instead hear the Gospel of love and forgiveness, so that they would come to faith in the One who is far greater than evil. The One whose will is always done. The one who is restoring creation in the hearts of men one soul at a time. The One who will protect His Church so that the gates of hell will not overcome it. The One who will bring us to His side to spend eternity with Him on the Last Day. Amen.