

January 15, 2006 by Steve Brandon



The Sovereignty of God

Genesis 50:20

1. You meant it for evil (verse 20a).
2. God meant it for good (verse 20b).

I would like us to center our attention on Genesis 50:20. I will use this verse as a guide to my message this morning. Many of you may find this verse familiar. Perhaps you have even memorized it. Let's read it together: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Gen. 50:20).

As I studied this verse, one remarkable event in the history of Christian missions came to my mind. Fifty years ago last Sunday, five American missionaries were speared to death on the beach of a river in Ecuador. Jim Elliot, Ed McCully, Pete Fleming, Nate Saint, and Roger Youderian were engaged in efforts to bring the gospel of Christ to the Huaorani (pronounced wow-rani) people. The Huaorani people were a tribe of natives who were well-known for their violence in spearing people to death. They killed each other. They killed outsiders who crossed into their lands. So violent was this tribe, that 60% of the men in the tribe died from being speared to death.

The missionaries first made contact with the tribe by flying over them and dropping off gifts. They found that if they flew a plane in a circle, they could suspend a bucket on a long rope in a single location. They gave gifts to this tribe in this way. The Huaorani were even able to place their own gifts in this bucket for the missionaries by way of this ingenious method, which they did! Later, these five men decided to try to make personal contact. They landed their plane on the beach, which they called, Palm Beach, where they remained for several days, hoping to make contact. After some contact with a few of these people, they were ambushed and speared to death upon the beach. The date was Sunday, January 8, 1955.

The evils of this attack are beyond words. Without provocation, these five missionaries were killed in cold blood. They had demonstrated nothing but love and kindness to the Huaorani people, but were paid back with the end of a spear. It was a sad day in the lives of these missionaries. It was a day of great anticipation, only to turn out to be a day of death. It was a sad day in the life of their families. All five of these men were in their late twenties or early thirties with promising futures to look forward to. Each of them were married. Together they left behind nine children. And yet, as terrible as this event seems, we must admit that much good has come from it. Truly, it illustrates well the verse I read that I read: "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." You might say, "These Huaoranis meant evil against these missionaries, but God meant it for good."

It is difficult to even begin to describe the good that has come from this event. When it occurred, it became the central news story across the nation. Many were glued to their radios to hear if there was any update on the missing missionaries, who made contact with this violent tribe of people. When the story finally came out that they were speared by the tribesmen, it stunned the nation. I'm told that the event was so significant that many people who were alive 50 years ago can tell you where they were when they heard the news. Many heard the stories of these men, who gave up all to serve Christ. This event caused many to hear the testimony of Jim Elliot, who said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." The gospel was shared far and wide. Many were converted as a result of their testimony. >From the example of these men, interest in missions abounded. Countless thousands were motivated to give up their own lives and serve the Lord as missionaries across the world. And as is always the case, "The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church." This event turned out to further strengthen the church. God meant it for good.

In addition to the people who have gone out to serve the Lord as a result of this event, many others have witnessed the amazing power of forgiveness that comes in the gospel. Several of the family members of the martyred men returned to the tribe to minister the gospel to them. Elizabeth Elliot returned to minister to those who had killed her husband. Valerie Elliot, Jim's daughter, returned to minister to those who had killed her father. Rachel Saint, Nate Saint's sister, went to minister to those who had killed her brother. Steve Saint, Nate Saint's son, returned to minister to those who had killed his father.

It is an amazing story of reconciliation that has caused the world to stop and take notice. It has given opportunities for Steve Saint to be interviewed all across our country to tell the story once again and speak of the reconciliation that he has found in Christ with the very man that killed his father. The reconciliation is so great that his children consider him to be their "grandfather." Fifty years after the fact, the story of these killings is still having an effect. Opening in theaters this Friday (January 20, 2006), is a movie entitled, "End of the Spear" which tells the story of what took place. It's an amazing story. "Huaoranis meant evil against these missionaries, but God meant it for good, to bring about this present result."

In recent years, Steve Saint has had opportunities to speak very candidly with those who were involved in the killing of his father. There were so many strange events that took place before and during the killings that Steve Saint said, ...

As [the killers] described their recollections it occurred to me how incredibly unlikely it was that the Palm Beach killing took place at all; it is an anomaly that I cannot explain outside of divine intervention. [\[1\]](#)

Do you hear what Steve Saint is saying? He is saying that divine intervention is the reason why his father was killed. In other words, the reason they were killed on the beach wasn't because God pulled his protection away from these missionaries and simply allowed them to be killed. Rather, it was because God intervened in the situation and caused all of the circumstances surrounding his father's death. As I have heard Steve Saint say, "God planned the death of my father." [\[2\]](#)

The story of the Huaorani is the story of Joseph, that we have the privilege of considering this morning. Please consider again the verse from Genesis 50:20, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20).

This verse is the story of Joseph in a nutshell. His brothers had done great evil against him. We will see in a few moments how great it was. But, the amazing thing is that this very same evil that was meant to harm Joseph was meant by God for the good of His people. The point that you need to see here is that Joseph doesn't say, "You meant evil against me, but God *allowed* the evil and *turned* it to be used for good." It's not that God merely adjusted the circumstances of their evil actions after the fact to produce a good result in the end. Rather, it's that God was scheming and thinking and acting just as heavily as Joseph's evil brothers were doing. Notice that the same verb is used for what the brothers were doing and for what God was doing. Joseph's brothers "meant" to do evil for harm. God "meant" their evil for good.

The Hebrew word that is used here is the word *hashav*, which is a pretty common Hebrew word. It means to "think, account, devise, plan, scheme, regard." It's a word that describes a mental process that works itself out in some time of action. And in the same way that Joseph's brothers schemed for evil against Joseph, God was scheming for that very evil to work out for good. In other words, both God and Joseph's brothers were involved in their evil actions.

Joseph's brothers intended to get rid of their snotty brother. God intended to use the wicked actions of Joseph's brothers to achieve a bigger purpose. He intended to preserve the people of Israel in accordance with His promise to Abraham. This is what the last portion of the verse says, "to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Gen. 50:20). Among those who were kept alive were the descendants of Abraham. Last week we considered the greatness of the promises that God made to Abraham. He promised to give Abraham a land (Gen. 12:1). He promised to make Abraham a great nation (Gen. 12:2a). He promised to bless Abraham abundantly (Gen. 12:2b-3).

Some natural questions might easily come out of such huge promises. "How do we know that God can fulfill these promises? Is He capable of doing so? How can God guarantee that His promises will extend through His people? Will His promises continue to stand?" To these questions, the story of Joseph stands ready to prove that God is powerful enough to carry His promises to completion. I'm entitling my message this morning, "The Sovereignty of God" because that is what the story of Joseph tells us.

The story of Joseph tells us that God is in control of all of life's circumstances. He is sovereign over the actions and choices of men (Genesis 50:20). God is not only sovereign over the good choices that men make. God is also sovereign over the sinful actions of men. It matters not whether men are sinful or righteous, God orchestrates the history of the world to accomplish His purposes. The story of Joseph instructs us that God is sovereign over the weather. It is God who controls when the rain will come and cause the crops to grow in abundance (Genesis 41:28-29). It is God who controls when the rain will stop and cause a famine in the land (Genesis 41:28,30). God is sovereign over thoughts and dreams. And if God can control the actions of men, and can control the weather patters on the earth, then certainly, God is able to orchestrate history in such a manner to guarantee that His promises will come true.

This is the story of Joseph. It is the story of a sovereign God exerting His power and control upon the world to accomplish His purposes. The story of Joseph shows us that however sinful men can be (even against their own brother), and however unjust and cruel circumstances may appear to be, and however forgetful men can be to help their friends, and however long it may take, God will bring it all together in His time to fulfill His promises to His people.

1. You meant it for evil (verse 20a).

Let's pick up the story of Joseph where it begins in chapter 37. At the beginning of Genesis 37, we find Jacob living in Canaan with his family. In verse 3, Joseph comes quick to the forefront as Jacob's favorite son. "Now Israel [the name that God gave to Jacob -- Gen. 32:28; 35:10] loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age." (Gen. 37:3).

Jacob has four wives. None was as precious to him as Rachael was. He was willing to work for her father for fourteen years to have her hand in marriage (Gen. 29:18). Jacob loved Rachel so much that these 14 years "seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her" (Gen. 29:20). But Rachel was barren (Gen. 31:31). After many years, "God remembered Rachel and opened her womb" (Gen. 30:22). Her firstborn was a son named, "Joseph" (Gen. 30:24). Because of Jacob's love for his wife and her barrenness, Joseph became a special object of his love. Or, you might say, "His favorite son."

Jacob let his favoritism be seen by all, as he made him a tunic (Gen. 37:3). There is some doubt as to what this tunic was like. Most translations say that it was a multi-colored tunic (NAS, ESV, KJV). But many commentators point out that a literal translation of these words would leave us to believe that this tunic was described by its length not its color. It was a "full-length robe" which extended to the wrists and ankles. A working man's robe would have short-sleeves (or no sleeves at all). But, the robe of a nobleman would be full-length, as there was no need to engage in the hard labor. When Joseph wore this robe, it reminded all that he was exempt from the difficult work that his brothers were required to do, simply because he was Jacob's favorite son. This didn't help Joseph at all in dealing with his brothers. In verse 4 we read, "His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms" (Gen. 37:4). There was a natural envy and jealousy that existed between all of Joseph's brothers (Gen. 37:11).

While we are on the topic of favoritism, let me just briefly point out that this story is a demonstration of the devastating effects that parents can have upon children by having favorites. Through no fault of his own, Joseph was hated, simply because he was loved more than the others. Parents, you can easily create the same sorts of hostilities between your children by having favorites as well.

If you look closely at the story of Joseph, you will see that his brother's hostility toward him wasn't entirely Jacob's fault alone. In verses 5-11, Joseph did much to stir the pot against him by being a braggart. He told them of several of his dreams. In the first one, he and his brother were binding sheaves (verse 7). When it came time to gather these sheaves together, Joseph's bundle was standing erect, while all of the other bundles were bowing down to his sheaf (verse 7). In the second dream, he said, "Behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars were bowing down to me" (Gen. 37:9). At some point, Joseph interpreted these dreams for his brothers and to his father to indicate that these all represented how they will someday bow down to Joseph. Needless to say, they didn't like his dreams, nor his interpretations. His brothers said (in verse 8), "Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?" His father likewise said in verse 10, "Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?"

The result of these dreams is that his brothers came to hate Joseph. Their hatred for him is mentioned in verse 5, "they hated him even more." In verse 8 we read, "So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words." In verse 11 we find out that "His brothers were jealous of him." Now, these dreams are a simple foreshadowing of things to come. They came true. These weren't vain dreams. They were God-inspired dreams. God meant for them to come true. To do so, God meant for his brothers to do evil to him. We see this evil coming about as chapter 37 unfolds. His brothers were out shepherding Jacob's flock (verse 12). Jacob sent Joseph to find go and see how they are doing (verse 14). He first went to Shechem (verse 14), but then was directed from that place to Dothan (verse 17), where Joseph finally found them. Verses 18-25 tell the story much better than I can:

Genesis 37:18-25

When they saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death. They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer! 'Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, 'A wild beast devoured him.' Then let us see what will become of his dreams!' But Reuben heard this and rescued him out of their hands and said, "Let us not take his life." Reuben further said to them, "Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hands, to restore him to his father. So it came about, when Joseph reached his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the varicolored [or full-lengthed] tunic that was on him; and they took him and threw him into the pit. Now the pit was empty, without any water in it. Then they sat down to eat a meal.

Picture the scene with me. Joseph's brothers see him coming from a distance. Their hatred for him is so great that they plan on killing him! Only the gracious counsel of Reuben delays their plans. Rather than killing him, they capture him, throw him into a dried up well, and sit down to have a meal. These brothers had a hard heart against their brother. They enjoyed a meal, as their brother was captured as a prisoner in a makeshift prison.

I'm sure that they were discussing among themselves what they might do with Joseph. Should word get back to Jacob what they have done, it wouldn't be good. They would certainly be punished for this cruelty to Joseph. So, they needed to do something. We don't know how long they were thinking about their dilemma, but we know that it was a while, because their solution came when Reuben wasn't around to protect his brother a second time.

We read in verse 25, "as they raised their eyes and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, .. on their way ... down to Egypt" (verse 25). Judah then comes up with the idea to sell him (verse 27). Killing him would be of no profit, but selling him would mean that a few shekels of silver might find their way into their pockets (verse 26). So they went ahead and did this very thing (verse 28).

When Reuben finally returned, he returned to the pit and was surprised not to find Joseph in the pit. Rather, he found his brothers callously dipping his special tunic in the blood of a goat, to make it look like he was killed (verse 31). They brought the tunic back to their father and told them that they had found this tunic (verse 32). When Jacob looked at it, he said (in verse 33), "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces." Jacob mourned for several days (verse 34), refusing any comfort that his sons and daughters tried to give him (verse 35). With his favorite son dead, Jacob lamented, "Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son" (verse 35).

The evil that Joseph's brothers meant to do was great. It brought hardship upon Jacob; he was now a grieving father! It brought hardship upon the brothers; they were now liars, who would be forced to live for years in their lies and deceit. It brought hardship upon Joseph; he was now a slave in Egypt! But this was only the beginning of Joseph's troubles. We see them continue in chapter 39.

When the Ishmaelites came to Egypt with their newly purchased slave, they sold him to a man named Potiphar, who was "an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the body guard" (verse 1). Joseph proved himself to be a faithful man. Potiphar noticed the favor of God that was upon this man and placed him in charge of his entire house. Verses 3-6a tell the story of the extent of God's blessing upon Joseph.

Genesis 39:3-6a

Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and how the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge. It came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house and over all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the LORD's blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field. So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate.

Look at how many times we are told that the LORD was blessing Joseph. "The LORD was with him" (verse 3). "The LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand" (verse 3). "The LORD blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph" (verse 5). "The LORD's blessing was upon all that he owned" (verse 5).

At this point, things are going very well for Joseph. He has been blessed of the Lord. He is respected. He is given much responsibility. Perhaps they were going too well. Potiphar's wife noticed his handsome appearance (verse 6b) and sought to seduce him. She said, "Lie with me" (verse 7). But Joseph refused the temptation, knowing that to lie with her would be a "great evil and sin against God" (verse 9). But day after day, Potiphar's wife tempted him. "Come, lie with me. ... Come, lie with me. ... Come, lie with me." But Joseph "didn't listen to her" (verse 10). And then, the day came when Joseph was alone with her in the house that she saw her opportunity. "She caught him by his garment" and said "Lie with me!" (verse 12). Joseph refused. In order to leave the situation, he was forced to leave his garment in her hand, as he fled the house (verse 12).

Being rejected and shamed, Potiphar's wife made up a lie about Joseph. So, she told her husband, "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me; and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside" (verses 17-18). As is natural for any husband, Potiphar's anger burned against Joseph and he was thrown into prison (verses 19-20).

Here again, Joseph finds himself unjustly punished. He had done nothing wrong against Potiphar. Instead, he had served him faithfully. Throughout that time, Potiphar's house was greatly blessed (verse 5). We have no indication of anything that Joseph had acted inappropriately in any way at all. And now, because of a lie, Joseph finds himself in another pit. He was in the place where the "king's prisoners were confined." It was only the mercy of God that he wasn't killed, for those who were thrown into the king's prison were often those who had committed a crime against the king himself and quickly put to death (i.e. see the baker in 40:22).

God's hand of blessing remained on Joseph. Soon, Joseph finds himself in charge of the jail. The LORD had blessed him again!

Genesis 39:21-23

But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. The chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible for it. The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper.

In these things, Joseph becomes a great role model for us. Things were going very badly for him. His brothers had conspired against him. Potiphar's wife sought to seduce him and then had slandered him. Now, he finds himself in the prison of the king. And yet, what was Joseph's response? He was faithful. He was obedient. He worked hard. He did so for years. He was faithful in his service to Potiphar. He was faithful to resist the temptation from Potiphar's wife. He was faithful in his service to the chief jailer!

When you do the math, you find out that Joseph had served either Potiphar or as head-prisoner faithfully for thirteen years before he ever got out of his oppressive situation (Gen. 37:2 and Genesis 51:46). That's a long time. Perhaps this day finds you in a difficult situation. How are you responding? Are you responding like Joseph? Are you being faithful? Are you being obedient? Are you working hard?

How did Joseph endure the hard times? How is it that Joseph continued to be faithful? He was faithful even when being betrayed by his brothers, even when finding himself to be a slave, and even when being tempted by Potiphar's wife. He was faithful even when being falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, and even when being unjustly punished. I believe that it was his understanding of God that brought him through these hard times. Joseph understood that God was sovereign over all the circumstances of his life.

Do you remember when Joseph was tempted? His response to Potiphar's wife demonstrated that he clearly knew that he was in the presence of God. He said to her, "How can I do this evil and sin against God?" Joseph understood God's abiding presence. Joseph knew that God never left him alone. Joseph knew that God was with him in Egypt, accomplishing His own purposes. Joseph knew that God was sovereign.

Joseph didn't know exactly what God's plans for him would be. Oh, he had an inkling that things would turn out well for him with the dreams that he had of his brothers falling down and worshiping him some day (Genesis 37:5-11). But in the midst of his affliction, I'm sure that he found it hard to believe. Yet, he trusted in God's plan for his life, even when he didn't understand what was going on. In this way, Joseph was following in the steps of his father, Abraham.

Now here is the amazing thing: We have a similar promise as Joseph had. Romans 8:28 is as clear a statement as you can find in all of the Bible speaking about God's purpose for our lives. It says that "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Joseph was told that his brothers would one day fall down before him. We are told that God is "causing" all things to work together for good for all who love God and are called by Him (Rom. 8:28).

So, be encouraged this morning. Though your life may be in the valley right now, though things aren't going to well for you. In you love Christ and are called by Him, trust in God's goodness this morning. Rely upon God's power to bring it about. He was working in Joseph's life for the good. He is working in your life for the good as well. Do you believe this? This will be the thing that carries you through your trial: a trust that God is working in your circumstances for good. He is powerful enough to bring the trial. He is powerful enough to end the trial. He is good, working this trial that you are going through for the good.

Let's turn our attention back to Joseph and see how it is that God meant the evil actions of Joseph's brothers for good.

2. God meant it for good (verse 20b).

At this point, I would love to walk us through chapters 40-45 to show you how good God was to Joseph, but we simply don't have time. Let me summarize them ever so briefly. When Joseph was in prison, with the help of God, he interpreted a few dreams for a few fellow prisoners (Gen. 40:9-19). As it turns out, his interpretation of the dream came to pass exactly as he had said that they would (Gen. 40:20-23). Several years later, Pharaoh had a dream which none of the Egyptian magicians or wise men could interpret (Gen. 41:8). And then, Pharaoh's

cupbearer remembered that Joseph could interpret dreams (Gen. 41:9-13). So, he was called into Pharaoh's presence to interpret Pharaoh's dream (Gen. 41:14-36). The interpretation of the dream was that there would be seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of famine.

Joseph urged Pharaoh to "gather all the food of these good years that are coming. ... Let the food become as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land will not perish during the famine" (Gen. 41:35-36). And so, Joseph was set in charge of overseeing this entire operation. He goes from being a prisoner in the king's prison to becoming the prince of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh, himself (Gen. 41:44). He began overseeing the storing of food during the seven years of abundance. After seven years, the famine came, and it spread throughout the entire earth (Gen. 41:57), but Egypt was prepared to deal with it.

In chapter 42, the focus of the story returns back to Canaan, where Jacob and his other sons were living. Verse 1 finds them attempting to figure out how they are going to survive this famine. Finally, Jacob sends ten of his sons off to Egypt to purchase grain for their household. And who should they encounter, but Joseph, himself. This is the first time that they had seen each other in more than 20 years. The last time that the brothers saw Joseph, he was 17 years old. Now, he is 38 or 39. His face has changed, and his appearance has changed. He is speaking in the Egyptian language. It is no wonder that Joseph's brothers didn't recognize him!

When Joseph's brother's came to him, asking to purchase some grain, they "bowed down to him with their faces to the ground" (Gen. 42:6) in total fulfillment of Joseph's dreams. Rather than revealing himself to them at first, he toys with them a bit to test them to see if they were really sorrowful over what had taken place over 20 years ago. Through a series of discussions, he sent them back to Canaan with the grain that they needed, but without Simeon, who was being held as collateral, to make sure that they would come back.

Eventually, they did come back. This time, they brought their youngest brother Benjamin. This gave Joseph the opportunity to see his youngest brother. After a series of events, Joseph sought to send his brothers back home, without their brother Benjamin, who he wanted to keep as a "slave." Surely, Benjamin wouldn't remain a slave for long in Joseph's household. I'm sure that he would have treated him very kindly, being his own brother.

To such an offer, Judah objected strongly. Judah pleaded with Joseph to allow Benjamin to return to his father, Jacob, or else it would kill him. After twenty years, Jacob was still troubled by Joseph's death and to lose Benjamin also would devastate him entirely. Judah offered to take his place and remain in Egypt as a slave instead of Benjamin. Judah's speech was too much for Joseph to bear, as he saw the love that his brother's had for Benjamin and their father. And so, he finally reveals himself to his brothers. The story is nicely told in chapter 45.

Genesis 45:1-9

Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried, "Have everyone go out from me." So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard of it. Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. Joseph said, "Please come closer to me." And they came closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, "God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay." (Gen. 45:1-9)

This is the point of the story of Joseph! It is a sovereign God who decrees evil to accomplish His own purpose. To be sure, God doesn't do evil. Nor does He sin in any way. But don't think that this means that God isn't sovereign over the evil that takes place in this world. He sovereignly uses evil to accomplish His own sovereign purposes. Notice how many times Joseph tells his brothers that it was God who had sent him to Egypt and made him lord of the nation! It comes first in verse 5, ... "Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for *God sent me* before you to preserve life." When reading the story back in Genesis 37, it sure looks like it was Joseph's brothers who sent him to Egypt. They were the ones who threw him in the cistern (Gen. 37:24). They were the ones who came up with the idea of selling him as a slave (Gen. 37:27). They were the ones who exchanged the boy for twenty shekels of silver (Gen. 37:28). This is certainly all true, and yet, Joseph insists that it was ultimately God who sent him to Egypt.

In verse 7 we see the same thing. Joseph says, "*God sent me* before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth" (verse 7). He had promised to Abraham that he would be a great nation. God demonstrated the extent to which He would go to preserve His people alive on the earth (i.e. verse 7). He would even use evil to accomplish His purposes.

Verse 8 gets even a bit more precise. He said, "*it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father* to Pharaoh and lord of all his household *and ruler* over all the land of Egypt." We might easily say, "It sure looked like His brothers sent Joseph to Egypt." But, Joseph would insist otherwise. "It was not you who sent me here, but God." Joseph is placing the emphasis where it needs to be. The ultimate cause of all things is God. Joseph even saw this in how he arose to be second in command of the mighty nation of Egypt. It wasn't his own doing, but God who "made him a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt" (verse 8). It was through the power of God that Joseph interpreted all of his dreams (Gen. 40:8; 41:16). It was through the power of God that Joseph was even placed in a position to interpret the dreams. It was through the power of God that Joseph was raised to be ruler in Egypt.

One last time, this same emphasis comes up in verse 9. "Go up to my father, and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, "*God has made me lord* of all Egypt;" (verse 9). Five times in five verses, Joseph insists that God was working behind the scenes of history to accomplish his purpose: to "preserve ... a remnant in the earth" (verse 7). He was working through the sinful actions of men to accomplish His purposes.

This is the thrust of the life of Joseph. This is the reason why we can be confident that God's promises will be accomplished. There is nothing

that can thwart the mighty hand of God. Romans 8:28 is true because nothing is able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. This is why Paul can affirm, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)

At the beginning of the Bible, we see how true this is. We see sinful brothers, thinking of murder. We see sinful women, thinking of pleasure. We see forgetful friends, thinking only of themselves. Yet, it cannot stop the plans of God. He will be faithful to the promises that He made to Abraham. As we go through the entire Bible this year, please realize that there is a sovereign handprint over the entire Bible. The good and the evil is all under the sovereign hand of God. When sinful, evil things take place, know that God has never lost control, but that He plans to use it to accomplish His purposes. (1) You meant it for evil (verse 20a); (2) God meant it for good (verse 20b). No better place is this demonstrated than in the cross of Christ.

There is no greater evil that has ever been done, than the crucifixion of the Son of God. Jesus was God Incarnate. He always spoke the truth. He was compassionate and gracious. He healed many. He taught many of the kingdom of God, directing them to eternal life. He never sinned. He always gave glory to God. He never returned malice with hate. He never retaliated. He prayed for His enemies. He was perfect in every way! He came into His own, but His own did not receive Him. Instead, they crucified the Lord of Glory. They killed God! You may name any sin in the Bible, but this one is the worst! It was worse than the lying of Abraham. It was worse than the sin of David with Bathsheba. It was worse than Sennacherib's taunts against the living God. It was worse than the pride and arrogance of Nebuchadnezzar. It was worse than the drunkenness of Lot and the incest that came as a result. It was worse than the harlotry of Israel. It was worse than the stoning of Stephen. It was worse than the child sacrifices of Molech. It was worse than the rebellion of Adam and Eve who fell from perfection. It is worse than our own unbelief.

You consider any sin ever committed, and they all pale in magnitude when compared to the crucifixion of Christ. And yet, no other event in history required the active hand of God more than the crucifixion of Christ did. And yet, before time began, God determined to redeem a people for Himself through the Crucified Messiah. As Jesus walked upon the earth, He submitted Himself to His Father's will. He said, "Not my will, but Thine be done." God's will was to see Jesus crucified. The Bible even goes so far as to say that God killed His Son, "The LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief, If He would redeem Himself as a guilt offering" (Isaiah 53:10). Perhaps the clearest place in all the Bible to see this is in Acts 4:27-28.

Acts 4:27-28

For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

In these verses, we see God predestinating and causing the death of Jesus through the sinful actions of Herod, Pontius Pilate, Gentiles, and the people of Israel. It was God who determined that these men would live in these places at these times and have these positions of authority (Acts 17:26). It was God who determined that Jesus would be betrayed (Matt. 26:24). It was God who determined that His own disciples would flee (Zechariah 13:7). It was God who determined that Jesus would be condemned as a criminal and pierced upon a cross (Isaiah 53:5, 9).

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ wasn't a plan run amok. It was decreed by God. And yet, the abundant good that God has brought out of the cross is indescribable! He has reconciled a countless multitude of people to Himself. Forever will those in heaven sing of the crucified lamb (Rev. 5:9). Forever will God be magnified for His grace in what took place on the cross (Eph. 1:6; 2:7).

The truth of Genesis 50:20 is as true in the cross than in any place: "You meant it for evil; But God meant it for good."

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 15, 2006 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Christianity Today, September 16, 1996, p. 25.

[2] Steve Saint made this remarkable comment while speaking at the Suffering and Sovereignty of God Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota on October 8, 2005.