



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for the 15th Sunday of Pentecost
September 16 & 17, 2017

God Meant It for Good

Genesis 50:15-21

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." ¹⁶ So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died, ¹⁷ 'Say to Joseph, Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." 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.

What magnificent words of God we have to feed our hungry souls this morning – words of comforting truth that God reverses evil in the lives of His people. So, if you've come here today looking for Good News, you're in the right place.

The first thing you should note from our text is that God is the One who reverses evil in our lives. He's the One on the other end of the line when we pray: deliver us from evil. It's not the Virgin Mary, important as she was, it's not the saints, it's not Allah, Muhammad, or some other man-made god. And, though He uses other people to bring us the things we need, it's not men to whom we owe our thanks; not princes or politicians, no matter how gifted they might be, for the Scriptures declare that we should not place our trust in princes, nor in man, in whom there is no help (Ps. 146:3-4). Without God calling men to their vocation and empowering them to be of service, the bread they bake will not rise, the medicine they give will not heal, and the house they build will not stand. Truly: In God we trust.

And without sending Jesus into the world, God's wrath would never be appeased, sin would never be atoned for, consciences would never find any peace, and we'd all spend eternity weeping and gnashing our teeth as the just reward of our transgressions against the eternal ordinances of God.

But the Good News is that, as Joseph was innocently sold into slavery, accused of sins he never committed, suffered a type of death and resurrection, and ascended to the right hand of Pharaoh – so our Lord Jesus accomplished these things on behalf of all mankind. He too was loved by His Father and hated by His brothers, He too was stripped of His garment and soaked with blood – Joseph with the blood of a goat, Jesus with the blood of a Lamb, that is to say, His own blood, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and you, brothers and sisters, are the "world" whose sins were taken away. Truly: In Christ, we trust.



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

*Sermon for the 15th Sunday of Pentecost
September 16 & 17, 2017*

Let's also remember today the thing we often seem to forget: God reverses evil. He doesn't banish it from the world, much as we'd like; at least He hasn't yet, though the Day is coming when He will; He doesn't prevent it from happening, though He surely could; rather, we learn from the Bible that God not only permits bad things to happen, but sometimes He personally brings them about! (Deut. 28:15; Rom. 1:18; John 5:14) – and when He does, know this: that His intolerant Law is at work, teaching us to despair of any power to save ourselves, and to put our trust in Christ the Lord, who reverses evil in the lives of His people.

But the same Bible also tells us that God limits the evil of this world; that He puts boundaries around it; sees us through it; and supports us in it – so that it always serves His purpose – always works for our good, our benefit, and our advantage.

If the life of Joseph tells us anything, it's this: that what the world intends for evil, what the devil plans for your destruction, your Heavenly Father means for good. Things are not what they appear to be. The fears that now annoy, shall be laughter on the morrow (TLH 409). In the meantime, the Church proclaims what Christ has done to destroy the works of Satan and to give Life and Liberty to sinful men. (1 John 3:8).

After all, God doesn't just permit distressing things to happen to us – or to Joseph, for that matter – He did the same thing with His own Son. God did not spare His Son, the Bible says, but gave Him up for us all (Rom. 8:32). God intended for Jesus to humble Himself, to be made man, to be betrayed and forsaken, to suffer, to bleed, and to die a sinner's death, so that in His infinite wisdom, by that death, He might bring life to the world, life to the dead, life to you and to me. What love! What compassion! What mercy and goodness to give His only-begotten Son into such a fate as this! What could the Heavenly Father have been thinking to make such a gift? How valuable must we be to Him that He would make such a sacrifice for us? For, if ever an evil thing happened to a man, it happened to Jesus – for us – at the behest of His own Father! Now, you may object and say that God is not the author of evil. True enough, but who says that when He does these things, that they're truly evil?

I'm sure Joseph thought they were evil. How could he think otherwise? Sitting at the bottom of a dark and lonely cistern, abducted by strangers, ripped from his home, worried to death about his dear father who would positively die when he didn't come home. What else could he think? When he was falsely accused of sexual impropriety and thrown into prison – and not the kind of prison with a cafeteria, televisions, and basketball courts. This was hard time! What else could he think?

Some of you have done hard time! In fact, you're doing it now. Oh, not in a jail cell, but under the watchful eye of the devil, as he torments you day and night like he did Job, as he keeps you locked up in your own personal hell, your own prison of illness and temptation and failure and dissatisfaction and envy over the conditions of everyone else. Joseph, who was innocent of any wrong-doing, must've been convinced that God had abandoned him. But Scripture makes it clear that if you belong to Christ, such suffering is intended not for evil, but for good. When the God of Joseph is involved; when God, who has a long view of history, is part of the equation; when the God who spared not His own Son, but gave Him



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

*Sermon for the 15th Sunday of Pentecost
September 16 & 17, 2017*

up for us all, has claimed you in Holy Baptism and made you His own – you can't judge by appearances. The devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh may have meant our suffering for evil, but God has meant it for good.

When you consider the tragedies some people go through, it's astounding. We hear reports from the fires and flooding – in many cases the complete loss of property and possessions, as well as loved ones; we hear other stories of families with small children whose policeman father was suddenly and violently killed in the name of who-knows-what; we hear of people seriously injured, who face years of surgeries, pain, and therapy, and the list of such tragedies goes on and on. But what's so shocking is to hear these people talk about how God has done things for them they never would've thought possible, how He's sent people into their lives they never could've imagined, and though they're numb with grief and staggered with loss, and though they never would've chosen that kind of path for themselves . . . they see a light they would never have otherwise known.

That light is Christ, beloved; the God of Joseph, the true Light that lights every man who comes into the world. The Light that the darkest prisons in the world cannot extinguish and which even the grave can't diminish, which is why Christians can sing in the hymn (TLH 409): The grave which shuts us in, shall but prove the gate to heaven.

Hear this Good News from Hebrews, my friends (12:5): "The Lord disciplines the one He loves and chastises every son whom He receives." Our suffering is a sign of God's love. I know that darkened human reason can never fathom this. I know that cowardly Christianity, which no longer preaches the Law or the Gospel, has no room for this message – but God is treating us as sons, doing His own special work within us, conforming us to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29), preparing us for an eternity of maturity, joy, and satisfaction the likes of which no heart can now imagine. And though no discipline seems pleasant at the time, this the Bible concedes (Heb. 12:11): later on it produces a harvest of righteousness beyond compare.

This is what Paul means when he writes in Romans 5(:1-6): "Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly."

Brothers and sisters, Christ reverses evil in the lives of His people. You are those people. You have hope. However sin has invaded your mind, your life, your heart, your home, your family, your children or your church, know this: that what the devil intends for evil, the God of Joseph means for good, for the saving of life and preserving of many people. You are those people. In the end, all things, even the most distressing, will work and must work for good, for blessing, for benefit, for advantage. This is God's promise.



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

*Sermon for the 15th Sunday of Pentecost
September 16 & 17, 2017*

You were baptized into this truth and that day your eternal fate was sealed, a future of good and not evil, in which your own soul will be saved (Acts 16:31).

If sin plagues you and it appears that your faith is faltering, let the treasured words of absolution beam the light of Christ into your heart. And though it becomes more challenging each day to remain in the genuine Christian faith, we receive the body and blood of Jesus with this blessing attached: "The true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you in the one true faith to life everlasting." As the Heavenly Father glorified Joseph through suffering, as He glorified His own Son through suffering, He will glorify you through suffering, too. You can depend on this. For the God of Joseph – your God and my God, the Father of the Lord Jesus – reverses evil in the lives of His people. Thanks be to God!

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen