

*You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good... (Genesis 50:20)*

The remarkable words above were spoken by Joseph. Do you remember the story? Joseph's father Jacob had 12 sons, but Joseph was the favorite, and Jacob didn't hide it. Joseph received an ornate coat from his father, and it caused his brothers to *hate* him (Genesis 37:4). It didn't help that right after that, Joseph had two dreams that heavily implied that his brothers – along with his father and stepmother Leah – would at some point bow down in homage to him. So, what did his brothers do to take care of their 'problem'? They sold Joseph into slavery, and he ended up in Egypt. Then, they lied to Jacob about Joseph, claiming he had been killed by a wild animal. Surely, Joseph's brothers *meant evil against him*.

But! God meant it all for good. How can that be? In the story, of course, God used Joseph to save countless lives from a coming famine. In a powerful, personal way, though, Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers ultimately showed that, no matter how much sin a person endures from others, the love of God can overcome. What jealous, envious brothers did in the name of evil, God used for his good purposes. *God meant it for good.*

*You meant evil against me...* There are so many times in our lives when we suffer because of sin. I imagine it's not hard for you, even as you read right now, to think of all the times that you suffered because of your own sin. In those instances, though, we know exactly why we are suffering. If I put my finger in a socket, I'll be electrocuted. If I push someone, he'll punch me back. If I steal money, I'll end up in jail. If I betray someone's trust, a relationship will be strained – or broken. This all makes sense to us. It's simple cause and effect. It's much harder to grasp, though, why God would allow so many terrible situations to befall us apart from specific cause and effect. Why would God allow someone to hurt my children? How can God stand by as the tyrants of this world persecute his beloved Christians? What in the world can be good about the devil being allowed to tempt and drag down even God's own people?

The answer, as you might expect, is "We don't know." God almost never gives us a clear, unambiguous answer to the 'whys' in life, despite our questions. And, as you might imagine, we aren't the first to ask. The Scriptures – especially the Psalms – are filled with the cries of God's suffering people. Some of that misery can be explained. David suffers because of his sins against Uriah and Bathsheba. Other suffering can never be explained. Job, for example, never gets to know 'why'. Instead, God exhorts him to remember his place in the created order. We, too, may never know 'why'. What we do know is that whatever is meant for evil against us, God uses it for good. *We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose* (Romans 8:28).

How can we know that this is true? Because it was true for Jesus. Jesus endured the worst evil in history. The Son of God was arrested, beaten, mocked, and crucified – killed! – despite committing no sin. Even Pilate, a corrupt Gentile ruler, realized Jesus' innocence! How could God let this happen? Why would God allow this? Theoretically, God could have brought us salvation any way he wanted. Yet, from before the foundation of the world, God planned to use the evil of crucifixion for good. *Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and by his wounds we are healed* (Isaiah 53:5).

This Lent, we will be tracing the story of Jesus' Passion as it appears in Luke's Gospel. Using thoughts and ideas originally penned by Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs of Concordia Seminary, we will consider the ultimate purposes of God in pain and suffering. God brings us into salvation, but he does so through suffering – the suffering of Jesus. May God focus our eyes, ears, and hearts on the Lord Jesus. Surely, though the devil means evil against Jesus – and us – God uses it for good. He will bring the dead to life!

-Pastor Squire

"My God has all things in His keeping; He is the ever-faithful friend. He gives me laughter after weeping, and all His ways in blessings end. His love endures eternally: What pleases God, that pleases me."

("I Leave All Things to God's Direction," *LSB 719*, v. 4)