

They meant it for evil, but guess what

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BIG SANDY, Texas—There are many stories in the Bible that edify. Which stories motivate you the most?

Let me share a scripture about a story in the Old Testament that has been an inspiration to me and to many of my friends as we have discussed it.

The scripture is Genesis 50:20: "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."

What was the evil?

You remember the story. Joseph had two dreams.

When Joseph told his brothers about the first dream, they were angry with him (Genesis 37:5). In the first dream the sheaves in the field of his brothers bowed down to his sheaf in the field (verses 6-8).

In the second dream the sun, moon and 11 stars bowed down to him (verse 9). When Joseph told his brothers about this dream, they added jealousy to their anger (verse 11).

That's how it started.

In Genesis 50:20 Joseph was saying that they planned evil against him. And they had.

You remember that some of the brothers discussed killing him. You remember that they threw him into an old well and later sold him to traveling merchants.

You remember that Joseph ended up in an Egyptian prison for years.

In verse 15 we read about the obvious concern that his brothers had after their father died. They said something like: "With Dad gone, Joseph will remember all the bad things we did to him, and he will repay us."

They expressed their forgiveness to him (verse 17) and offered to be his servants (verse 18).

That's when Joseph made his famous statement about evil and good.

Recognizing evil

Have you ever had the opportunity to practice the approach of Joseph? Have you ever been wronged by people and avoided the temptation to get revenge?

We must not be naive or gullible.

Some people have sought to do evil against others, some people are presently seeking to do evil against others, and some people will seek to do evil against others in the future.

I do not mention this to suggest that people spend time looking for imaginary evil or becoming preoccupied with real evil. I merely mention that this occurs.

Dwelling on good

I would rather focus on the rest of what Joseph said.

Although Joseph recognized the evil intent of his brothers, he focused on God's purpose in the matter.

Joseph believed that God meant the bad circumstances for ultimate good.

Friends and brethren: I don't want to quote this concept as some invitation to go into airheaded denial.

Are we mature enough to recognize the real acts of rudeness, meanness and, yes, sometimes evil?

By recognizing those negative realities, you will not feel trapped to continue in bad relationships. Those bad relationships can be with negative people, or they can be with negative systems.

If you choose to stay in a bad relationship with negative people or with negative systems, you can do so while accepting the freedom of Christ.

Some believers living under dictatorships often do not have the freedom to leave a situation. But they have the freedom of Christ in their minds.

Maybe the day will come when most believers in most of the world will lose the freedom to leave situations. If that occurs, all believers must claim the freedom of Christ in their minds. (Please remember the stories of Holocaust survivors.)

Does good always come now?

As I conclude, I want to ask a question: When people seek to do evil against others, does God always directly intervene to bring about good in this life?

Personally, I believe that God hears our prayers and oftentimes brings good to us in this life.

However, even though God hears our prayers I don't believe that He always brings good to us in this life.

In Joseph's case God brought good while Joseph was alive.

In Christ's case God brought good after Jesus died.