



The Sermon

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Genesis 50:15-21

"Dealing with a Troubled Past"

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TRANSCRIPT

So, it's good to be here and to be here with you, as we continue our journey through Genesis. And if it seems like I'm slowing down here at the end, you're very perceptive, and it is because so many times when you get to the end of a study of a book in the Bible, God has, really, the best for last, kind of like the wedding at Canaan in John chapter 2, you saved the best for last. And so as we look at our passage today which is in Genesis chapter 50, and we're going to be looking at verses 15-21, this really is the high ground for the entire book of Genesis. I mean, you're here as we scale the pinnacle and we stand atop Mount Everest of the book of Genesis. Everything has led and built up, really, for verse 20, which is an extraordinary text; but we need to see it in its whole context as this unfolds, so I want to begin by reading the passage. The title this message is "Dealing with a Troubled Past." I don't know if anyone here today has had a troubled past, but this has your name written on it; and the answer is every one of us has had a troubled past to one degree or another. So I want to begin reading in verse 15.

The Word of God reads, "When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, 'What if Joseph bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!' So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, 'Your father charged before he died, saying, "Thus you shall say to Joseph, 'Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.' And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also came and fell down before

him and said, 'Behold, we are your servants.' But Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for am I in my Father's place? 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. So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.' So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them."

This is the reading of God's Word. These are ancient words recorded 3,400 years ago by Moses, but they are so relevant and so up-to-date for every one of us here today. Your name, my name is written on these verses as well. Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are a blessed people to have the record of Your Word, that we're not dependent upon just oral tradition and things being passed down to us and how that would have been altered down through the centuries as it's passed from one generation to the next. But instead we have something far more valuable, far more precise, far more accurate: we have Your written Word that You have preserved over these many centuries. And so we are eager today to look into this text, and there's a sense of anticipation that we have. I pray that You would just flood our minds and our hearts with truth today, and that it would transform us, and even usher in a new wave of joy and peace in our Christian lives. So, Father, we ask now that You would take over in a very obvious way as Your word is unfolded. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. [End]

Again, the title of this is "Dealing with a Troubled Past." In these verses we see the next to the last scene in the entire book of Genesis, there's only one more scene left, and this is the final scene involving Joseph and his brothers. We have been looking at Joseph and his brothers not just for weeks, but for months, and this is the grand crescendo of their interaction with one another. And this passage really stands out to every one of us here today as an example as to how we process past disappointments and past hurts in our lives.

Many people carry hurts with them in their heart for years, even decades, wishing things had been different in their past. They carry these issues with them of what has been done to them, and it becomes like a ball and chain around their ankle. It prevents them from moving forward in their life. It seems that they're always stagnated. And so because of past troubles, they live with festering bitterness and suppressed anger because of what has been done to them. It may be suffering abuse as a child from a parent, from a sibling. It may be to have been abandoned by a spouse. It may have been for a parent to have died early. It may be the loss of an important relationship, the loss of health, the loss of a job, whatever it is in each one of these situations.

And none of us go through life growing up in a perfect house and a perfect family with perfect parents and perfect siblings and going to a perfect school and married to a perfect spouse and everything just works out perfect. No, we live in a fallen world, and there are all kinds of traumatic experiences that we go through, and our response is one of two things: either we become bitter, or we become better; either it's a ball and chain around our ankles, or it's a stepping stone to move forward in life. And those who become bitter because of what has happened to them from their past become angry people. They become angry with the world. They become angry with their lot in life. They become angry with themselves; and even far worse, they become angry with God.

As believers, you and I cannot allow ourselves to become bitter like the world, we have to become better; and better for us necessitates that we understand the doctrine of providence. I need weeks, if not months, to lay out the whole doctrine of providence, and time does not permit me in this one message to be able to cover the whole. But the doctrine of providence very simply is that God governs the affairs of our lives, a path that He has marked out from long ago, and it involves both prosperity and adversity. And if we're a believer in Jesus Christ, He is causing all things to work out for His glory and for our good. That's what we believe. Spurgeon called it the pillow upon which he rested his head at night. I mean we literally would go crazy almost to try to replay in our mind everything that's happened in the past if we did not believe in the doctrine of providence.

And so there are three attributes of God that I want to set before you before we walk through this passage, that if you understand these three attributes of God, they come together to form like one strand, a cord that cannot be broken. And the first attribute of God that we must understand as we consider the doctrine of providence is "the sovereignty of God," that nothing ever comes into our lives but that God either sent it or allowed it. And there is a difference; but the banner over both, whether He sent it or allowed it, is that God is sovereign. And even if He allowed it, He could have prevented it if He had so chosen.

So therefore, there are no accidents. There are no random events. There is no bad luck, there's no misfortunes, there's no inadvertent trial, but that it has all been included in the eternal sovereign providence of God. And this began when you were born and where you were born and who your parents were and what influences there were around you and everything up to this present moment. As R.C. Sproul says, "There are no maverick molecules in the universe."

The second attribute that you must understand is that "God is all-wise," the wisdom of God that all the affairs of His sovereign providence are designed with perfect inscrutable wisdom. And His ways are above our ways, and His thoughts are above our thoughts, and even that which we do not see or understand, God in His perfect wisdom, these lines intersect far above our heads. And wisdom means not only has God foreordained the highest end and purpose for our lives, the destination has been marked out before the journey begins. But wisdom also includes that God has chosen the best path and the best means to arrive at that destination. And God has gone before us and He has marked out our path with inscrutable wisdom, and you and I could not improve upon it one iota.

Now the third attribute you need to know and to be reminded of is what you already know, that "God is good." And included in the doctrine of the goodness of God is His love for His people, His grace, His mercy, His compassion, and the things that God purposes to either bring about or allow in our lives is for our good. God is good to His children, and He was good to us even before we became His children.

In Psalm 34:8 the Bible says, "O taste and see that the Lord is good." In Psalm 84:11, "The Lord is a sun and a shield; He gives grace and glory; and no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly." And the last time I looked, Romans 8:28 is still in my Bible when I woke up this morning, and it's right there in your Bible: "And we know" - not and we feel, because it doesn't always feel like it, but - "and we know that God causes" - God is actively involved, not a passive spectator just watching things unfold from a distance, but His hand is always on the throttle and always on the steering wheel and always involved in the unfolding affairs of life.

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good," - not some things, not many things, not even just good things, but even bad things - "to work together for good for those who love God, for those who are called according to His purpose." And so when we understand that God is sovereign, controlling all of life, that He is all-wise, that all of His choices and all of His paths that He has set before us are designed with perfect wisdom, and that God is good, then we can rest in the doctrine of providence. We can rejoice that we're not in control, we can rejoice that it's not left up to our discernment or discretion, and we can rejoice that God is full of goodness, far more than any one of us.

So this is precisely what we see in the life of Joseph and how he chooses to respond to his past. And oh, what a past has Joseph had! And I don't have time to walk us back through it, but it's a third - the last third of the entire book of Genesis is devoted to just Joseph and his trials and tribulations as well as his triumphs. I don't have time to walk us back through, but just to skip the mountain peaks just to remind you.

I mean, as a teenager he was sold by his brothers to slave traders and he was taken off to a foreign land, separated from his father, separated from his family, to a land that speaks another language, and he ends up in prison after being falsely accused. He went through trial after trial after trial all because his - I say this politely - no good brothers did evil to him. They did evil to him. And he comes to this end of his interaction with his

brothers and he says, "Listen, I know you meant it for evil; I know you, I grew up with you, and I know evil when I see it. You meant it for evil against me, but God." And as Martyn Lloyd-Jones has said, "Praise God for the butts in the Bible." "But God has meant it for good."

I don't know what there is in your past that needs to be viewed again with new eyes and seen as Joseph looked at his tragedies from the past, but I want to encourage you today, that whatever was meant for evil against you, God has meant it for good in your life. So let's walk through this passage. I mean, this is a blockbuster passage, this is a signature text. I mean, we're all here today on, really, a golden day in the life of this church for us to reach this high ground. And I want you to notice, first, in verse 15, "The guilty conscience. The guilty conscience."

In verse 15, "When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead," - I mean they've been around his deathbed, they saw him breathe his last, we saw him just collapse lifeless in that bed; and the full reality of that hit them like a 2x4 across the forehead - "and they said," - verse 15 - "What if Joseph bears a grudge against us." "Bears the grudge against us" is all one word in the Hebrew, by the way, and it just simply means, "What if he hates us? When if he is filled with animosity against us?" And the reason they're thinking this is they've had this very hatred and animosity towards Joseph in the past. They're very familiar with hatred and animosity and jealousy. And as long as Jacob their father is alive, there's a restraint they feel on what Joseph will do to them and say to them. "As long as dad is alive, as long as dad is in the room, we're all going to be on good behavior." But once dad passes away their fear is that "there will be no filter on Joseph's mouth and there will be no restraint on his heart and that he will nurse a grudge against us," and the reason they say that is because that's what's been going on in their own heart in the past. "And so now once father is dead, Joseph has his chance to get even with us."

And so verse 15 continues. And they're talking among themselves that, "What if Joseph bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full!" In full, yeah that's pretty heavy, because if Joseph was to return to them, to retaliate in full, wow, it's going to take the rest of their life to suffer under

that, if it was an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. "What if he pays us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!" They're talking among themselves. And the word "wrong" here is just way too weak of a word in our English translation. Literally out of the Hebrew it means evil, (e-v-i-l) evil, that causes great distress and misery and inflicts harm to other people.

So let me just tell you what's going on here. These brothers have a guilty conscience that is haunting them because they have – listen to this – they have never confessed their sin to Joseph, they have just remained silent and mute. And Joseph has poured out goodness and blessing upon them, and they have assumed that, "Just because Joseph has not said anything to us about what we did to him that everything is fine. You don't bring it up, we won't bring it up." But their conscience won't let it go. And God has given every man and every woman a conscience, which is an inside warning detector whenever we have done wrong. And so their conscience begins to kill them and haunt them. It's like a smoke alarm just going off inside of them, and it's been suppressed and it's been buried, but it just keeps coming back to the surface. And now that Jacob has died, they are frightened that Joseph is going to pay them back. And it is this unconfessed sin in their own heart that is eating them alive.

You see, unconfessed sin in the life of a believer is a haunting thing. Just because we're under grace and just because Christ died at the cross for all of our sins does not mean that there are not consequences for unconfessed sin in our lives. I want you to listen to Psalm 32:3. David after he committed adultery with Bathsheba and after he set up her husband to go to the front lines and be killed, David had kept quiet about his sin, until Nathan the prophet came and said, "Thou art the man!" And in Psalm 32:3 David writes, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long." Verse 4, "For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality" – meaning my energy, my zest, my zeal, my passions for life, he says – "my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer."

If you have wronged someone, you need to make it right, and you need to go to them and confess your sin to them and ask for their forgiveness, or

it's going to be like an acid inside of your soul and strip away layers of peace and joy. It's not dealt with until you ask for the forgiveness. So that's the guilty conscience we see in verse 15. And I trust that you will keep short accounts with the Lord and with others.

Now, second, in verse 16, I want you to see, "the group confession." Beginning of verse 16, "So they" - the eleven brothers - "sent a message to Joseph." You know why they sent a message to Joseph? Because they were too frightened to have a face-to-face visit with the brother to whom they have wronged. "So they sent this message to Joseph, saying," and so now they recount what their father told them, their father Jacob before he died. And to just summarize it before we look at it, Jacob said to these eleven sons, "You guys need to get along, and you need to go to your brother Joseph who you did wrong to and you need to ask for his forgiveness, because you have not done that yet."

So this is what Jacob had said to them. And the eleven brothers sent this message: "Your father" - and let me just stop right there. Please note, they don't say, "Our father." They feel so distant from Joseph that they refer to him, when they talk to Joseph about Jacob, "Your father," not, "Our father." So already there's a wall of separation emotionally, psychologically, relationally between the eleven and Joseph, because the eleven have never made this right.

"Your father charged" - that word means commanded - "before he died, saying." And so there was a time when Joseph was not in the room, probably attending the affairs of the nation of Egypt, and it's just the eleven around the bed, and Jacob before he dies, he gives them this charge: "This is what you guys are going to have to do. Thus you shall say to Joseph, 'Please forgive.'" It clearly implies that they've never done this the first time. They just thought, "As long as Joseph is good to us and we move on down the road that everything is fine." But no it's not, because there is a haunting conscience within them. There is a bitterness, there is an anger that rises up. "And so you need to go to Joseph and say, 'Please forgive.'" And this word "forgive" is a Hebrew word *nasah* that means to lift a heavy load off of someone or something and take it away, like a huge boulder on

the shoulders of someone. And forgiveness is to remove this weighty, heavy burden upon your conscience and for it to be removed. "So you need to go to Joseph," Jacob says, "and say, 'Please forgive.'"

I said this at the early service with my wife Anne on the front row, when we were raising our twin boys, and they're like three and four and five years old, I mean how many times – I mean this is just basic Christianity 101, this is just a basic life principle – that, "If you have wronged your brother or your sister, you need to go to them and not say I'm sorry because I'm sorry that you're sorry. You need to say, 'I have sinned; and will you forgive me?'" because the matter is not dealt with if you just put a Band-Aid on the cancer. You need to confess your sin. And how many times we had a come to Jesus meeting in the living room over this. And Jacob is having to do this not with a three-year-old or a four-year-old. How sad with adult sons to teach them how to make things right with your own flesh and blood. "So please forgive." You need to humble yourself and even say, "Please, could you find it within yourself to forgive me?"

Verse 17 continues, "I beg you, I beg you," – you need to beg for this forgiveness; and then – "the transgression of your brothers and their sin." You need to call it for what it is. "It's transgression and sin that we have committed against you, Joseph." It's not an uh-oh. It's not a boo-boo. "It's not a mistake, it's a transgression that we committed against you." And the word "transgression" means rebellion and crime against God. And the word "sin" means a violation of what's right.

And then we read, "for they did wrong." That's a third word. And the word for "wrong" is the same word used earlier, and it really is evil. So you're going to have to call it for what it is: transgression, sin, and evil. "And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of God and of your father. You need to humble yourself and present yourself as mere slaves and servants to your brother and beg for his forgiveness."

This will be the first time these brothers have ever done this. And sin will always be, unconfessed sin will always be a heavy burden upon a guilty

conscience, until the sin is confessed. James 5:16 says, "Confess your sins to one another." And I don't know what is unresolved in your life from your past and if you have participated in a wrong done to someone else, but your conscience will not let it go until you have confessed that transgression to the offended party.

Well, this leads now to, third, at the end of verse 17, "the grieving heart." What affect did this have on Joseph after all these years to finally hear this? "And Joseph wept." This sounds like John 11:35, "Jesus wept." Joseph wept. And this word for "wept" in the Hebrew, it means to burst into tears, it means to weep bitterly and openly and audibly. "Joseph wept when they spoke to him."

Joseph had already forgiven them in his heart, just like Jesus on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He weeps here just over the loss of years of relationship. He weeps here over the loss that it's been for his brothers to have carried this around, this unforgiving spirit and this unconfessed sin in their heart, until now, finally, his brothers come clean and ask for his forgiveness; and he just wept. I think we should always weep over sin that's never been made right.

Jeremiah was the weeping prophet who wept over the sin of the people of God. Jesus wept over Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! I would have gathered you in; but you would not have it." Paul wept over the Galatians. Paul wept over the Corinthians. I mean, we are to weep over sin.

And so, verse 18, "Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, 'Behold, we are your servants.'" Though it is not directly stated in this verse it is nevertheless clearly implied from verse 17 that they did come to him and they did ask for his forgiveness and they did name the sin of their evil that had been committed against Joseph, and they see Joseph now weeping over their confession, and they just fall to the ground, because the heavy weight of unconfessed sin has finally been rolled off of their haunting conscience and their trembling shoulders, and finally at last now

they have a clean slate in this relationship with Joseph. They no longer have to pretend that everything's just okay because nobody says anything.

"And so they fell down before him and said, 'Behold, we are your servants. We are your slaves,' - more literally - 'we are lower than being even being your brothers. If there was a basement underneath where we're standing we would go lower and come down into the basement to humble ourselves beneath you.'" This is a passionate, emotional scene. And when these things work out in our lives, it involves deep emotion as well.

Please note in verse 19, "the godly response." How will Joseph now respond to their humbling themselves before him and asking for his forgiveness? Verse 19, "Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid.'" That's the last thing in the world they expected to hear. They thought it was going to be revenge, it would be retaliation. They thought that Joseph would be like towards them as they had been towards him. But instead, Joseph takes the high road and he says, "Do not be afraid," literally, "fear not," as if to say, "there will be no revenge on my part." And again, this implies that Joseph has already forgiven them. The need of the hour was for them to confess their sin. And this grievous offense committed against him, it had been buried long ago by Joseph. He's not nursing a grudge. There's not festering bitterness and welled up anger inside of him.

No, he has a very forgiving spirit. He knows the grace of God in his own life, and he says then, "for" - which introduces an explanation - "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place?" And there's a question mark after that. This is what we call a rhetorical question, which is in reality a statement. by asking the question, he's answering it. He's actually saying, "I am in God's place, that's why everything is fine for me, that God has used your evil to put me into God's place. I'm exactly where God wants me to be. And God has used your evil and your transgression and your sin and your wrongdoing that was aimed at me, it was all part of a master plan by God to put me in God's place." What a mature perspective in life. Joseph is not nursing this grudge within him, he understands that "it was a part of God's plan to put me where I am, over the nation of Egypt in these days of famine."

So he says in verse 20, and this is the high ground for the book of Genesis. He says in verse 20, "As for you," - he speaks very directly to the eleven brothers, yet with a tone of love and compassion - "you meant it for evil." Now I have to comment on this word "meant," (m-e-a-n-t). It's a Hebrew word that means to think something out very carefully, to calculate something, that this wasn't a haphazard evil that they committed against him. It was very premeditated, it was very intentional, it was very well thought out. Listen to these two words: "It was schemed, and it was conspired. You went barreling into this evil against me. It was premeditated." And "evil" here, it's the same word that was translated for "wrong" earlier, and "it's a moral evil that has inflicted much harm on me." That's what Joseph is saying.

So he not understating what they did to him. No, "You did evil against me, but God meant it for good." And I want you to see the word "meant," it's use a second time here: "You meant it for evil, God meant it for good. You conspired and you schemed against me, but God took your scheming and masterminded it for my good. God, whose ways are above our ways, God calculated it, and God planned it, and He took your evil plans and He overrode them and used them for good in my life." Listen, God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick, and He's used their crookedness for good in his life.

And notice the end of verse 20, "in order to" - so there's a higher purpose - "in order to bring about" - which means to accomplish and produce - "in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive." I mean, do you see what he's referring to? "God used your evil for my good, which was good for the whole nation, that because you sold me into slavery, and all of the evil that was thrown upon me, out of all of this God has elevated me to be the Prime Minister over Egypt, and God gave me the plan that we would save for seven years, because there's a seven year famine that is coming that will kill everyone in the entire nation. But we've stored up for seven years; and so the lives of millions of people have been spared as a result of your evil."

How stunningly brilliant is God, that God takes the evil of man and uses it for good, that God uses the devil for good, that God uses false teachers for good, that God uses apostasy for good, that God uses demons for good, that God used His death for good. God's never out of it. God never has to have the circumstances just right and just perfect for God to bring about good.

God used the betrayal of Judas for your good, did He not? God used the mistrial of Pontius Pilate for your good. God used that angry crowd that cried out, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" as they were filled with hatred coming from a heart of unbelief and apostasy; God used that for your good. God used the stoning of Stephen for your good to bring about eventually the conversion of Saul of Tarsus in the writing of 13 New Testament books. God used the persecution of the early church for the good of the known world because it spread the Christians, it moved them out of Jerusalem; and they carried the gospel with them, as they were strangers and aliens, and they end up in Europe and Asia Minor and Northern Africa. That's how God spread the gospel. It was through the evil of the persecution that came against the church.

I would not be standing before you today if it had not been for the evil of men against me. I've been a pastor now for 40 years, and this involves thousands of people; and there has been evil done against me. I walk with a limp, I have scars from the battlefield, but God has meant it for good; and not just for me to be here, but for me to be the kind of person who is here, to be humbled, to be matured. What evil has there been in your past brought against you that continues to occupy your mind when you're driving your car, when you're laying in bed, when you're sitting at a table and your mind keeps going back to it, "Why did they do this to me? and it continues to just eat and eat and eat and eat at you? We all need to rise to the level of verse 20: "They meant it for evil, God, God meant it for good in your life as a believer." It was painful, it was harmful, it was a violation of the holiness of God that was inflicted upon you, but God meant it for your good, to make you more like His Son, to use you for His kingdom to be spread because of that.

Listen to Acts 2:23, Acts 2:23, Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost as he stands before the nation and addresses the very crowd that called for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ 50 days later. Listen to this. Peter says, "This Man," - referring to Jesus - "this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to the cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." If you want to try to understand this doctrine of providence and God using evil for good, look no further than the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, that evil men rose up and with premeditated hatred called for the murder of the second Person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ. It was the crime of the ages. It is the greatest sin that's ever been committed in the history of the world, and Peter says it was according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, that the greater good has come to mankind as a result of the evil that was committed against the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it's further reinforced in Acts 4:27, "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, 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." Listen, predestination is your friend; it means God's got it all under control. And we're still working Plan A. There is no Plan B. So whatever evil has been used against you, you need to understand how God has used it for your good and the good of others; otherwise, you're not even going to be able to go to sleep at night.

Now finally, in verse 21, "the gracious care." So, verse 21, Joseph speaks, "So therefore," - there's a summation feel of this. He's boiling it all down to the bottom line. He's like an accountant getting to the bottom line - "so therefore, do not be afraid," - do not be in dread literally; he repeats what he said in verse 19 - "I will provide for you" - that means, "I will take care of you"; and then he adds - "and for your little ones." It's like their cup is overflowing, these eleven brothers, and he promises now to provide for them and for their sons and for their sons' sons. The generosity and compassion of Joseph virtually knows no limits here, as he proves to be the most forgiving, the most gracious man.

And the reason he's able to say this is he understands the doctrine of providence. He's not going back to the past and digging up a bone to chew on and choke on. He understands, "It was a part of the plan, it was a part of God's purpose for my life to move me from point A to point B and to make me the man that I've become."

"And so he comforted them" – and here are the last words of this and we're finished – "and spoke kindly to them." Even the tone of his voice, it wasn't a reprimanding tone. It wasn't, "When are you guys going to learn this?" He spoke kindly, gently. The word "kindly" here comes from the Hebrew word for "heart," and the idea is he spoke from his heart. And I have a New American Standard, and out in the margin there's an alternate way it could be translated, which is, "to their heart." And I think both are true. He spoke he spoke from his heart to their heart. And to reach someone else's heart you have to speak from your heart. And so Joseph models for us how to deal with a troubled past, where it doesn't make him bitter, but has made him better, has catapulted him forward onto the right path, and to make him mature and complete in the Lord.

So think about your life. As I said earlier, none of us grew up in a perfect home with perfect parents. And you know what; they didn't have a perfect kid in you either. Yeah, you heard that. You didn't go to a perfect school. You didn't have perfect friends. You didn't have perfect neighbors. You live in a very imperfect world. And there have been things inflicted upon everyone in this room that was not right in one form or another, some of us here today more so than others. But this needs to be inscribed upon the tablet of our heart that, "They meant it for evil, God meant it for good," for your good, and for the good of others."

And this all begins to become a reality in your life when you commit your life to Jesus Christ. Remember I said Romans 8:28, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good." It's not true for everybody: for those who love God, for those who are called according to His purpose. And to love God very simply is another alternate way of saying, "You're a believer in Jesus Christ. You've been called effectually out of darkness and out of this world into a saving personal relationship with Jesus Christ."

And so if you've never committed your life to Christ, if you've never repented of your sins, then I call you to do so this day. I don't ask you to get up out of a seat and walk forward. I don't ask you to raise a hand. I don't ask you to do anything, because what matters is in your heart, right where you sit, right now, "Have you ever committed your life to Jesus Christ? Have you ever believed in the Son of God? Have you ever submitted your life to His lordship? Have you ever surrendered your life to the King of kings and to the Lord of lords? Have you ever stepped out of this world, this evil world system and entered through the narrow gate into the kingdom of God?" And if you've never done that, then I call you this day to do so; and everything that has been meant for evil, God will mean it for good. But this doesn't apply to everybody. In fact, if you die an unbeliever, everything that has ever happened in your life will be for your bad; it really will. It'll take you down, not up.

So it all begins with this simple faith, simple step of commitment to Jesus Christ, to become a follower of Christ. So if you've never done that, hear the invitation and the call of God upon your heart. Answer that call today, this very moment. Let us pray.

[Prayer] Father, what shall we say in response to what Joseph has said other than, "We embrace this." We need new lenses through which to see our past. We need a new, higher, better understanding of what has happened to us that does not hold us back. They're stepping stones to move us forward into becoming the person You want us to be.

So, Father, I ask now that You would bless Your people as we are dismissed, that they would carry with them back to the car and back to their home the truths that we have considered today. I pray that we would not be merely hearers, but doers of the Word. Incline our hearts to trust You more and more. And I pray that You would shower Your goodness and Your blessing upon these people who are Yours, in Jesus' name. Amen. [End]

I leave you with this short benediction: "To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen." May the King reign in your heart this day. You are dismissed. God bless you.