

GOD'S MEANING

"But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." Genesis 50:20

To be able to read the meaning of God in the events of life is a magnificent attainment. Very few seem able to do so. Few things are more trying and disconcerting than to be misunderstood; to have our intentions and actions misconstrued; to mean one thing and have someone think you mean another. Yet this is being done every day between man and man, and it is being commonly done with God. It is quite common, in the presence of some troublesome experience, some accident or misfortune, for the soul to cry out, "What does God have against me?" So often we misinterpret God and misunderstand His ways. We do not get His meaning. The words of our text are the words of an enlightened soul.

I. God's Meanings Have One Great Object.

This object is our good -- "God meant it for good." God is a good God. This word "good" is so widely and generally used by people that it has lost much of its real significance. We have such inferior ideas of goodness. One day a rich young man approached Christ and greeted Him with the words, "Good Master," to which Christ replied, "Why callest thou Me good? None is good save One, even God." That was a gentle warning to the young man not to use lightly or carelessly the word "good." In its absolute sense goodness is something that belongs only to God. Some people are better than others, but there is none good. Goodness in God's sight is something far removed from goodness as men and women ordinarily understand the word.

God is good, and goodness directs and determines His activities. It determines the object He has in mind for us. "God meant it for good." God desires the best things for His own. God has no other object in view than that which is in keeping with His holy nature. Romans 12:2 urges us to "prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." God's will is always only good. For that reason we are counseled to pray, "Thy will be done." When this is realized, we are conscious of life at its highest and best. And yet, many fancy that their will is better. To some, doing God's will is anything but lovely. It is through experiences in walking with God that the goodness of His will is demonstrated to our own hearts.

"God meant it for good." What a philosophy of life! How glorious to understand God's meanings; to see what God is about and what He purposes for us! I wish every young person believed this. It would save them from many a tragic step. Satan delights to misrepresent God's desire and purpose. He triumphs when he can persuade us to believe that God's will means frustration and a narrowing existence. Joseph knew better, and a multitude of believers in the world today know better. They see clearly that "God meant it for good."

II. God's Meanings Often Travel Over Strange Paths.

This is why we are so slow to discover them. Sometimes they are disguised in strange circumstances. Joseph's life is an outstanding illustration of this. To appreciate fully the words of our text we must review some of the great events in Joseph's life.

Jacob had twelve sons, ten of whom were away in the fields, so one day he sent Joseph to inquire about them. They saw Joseph in the distance, and their long-standing

jealously came to a head. They first threw him into a pit, and then sold him into slavery. As a trusted house slave in Egypt he was tempted by Potiphar's wife, but he refused her solicitations. By her lies concerning this to her husband Joseph was sent to prison and left there for years.

What a shock to this young idealist that he should be imprisoned because he wanted to retain his purity! Perhaps he was tempted to be bitter, but the record shows that he was not. Had he not known God, it might have appeared to him that it pays to sin. The secret of his endurance is given in the repeated statement, "The Lord was with him."

In prison Joseph interpreted the dream of the butler, who assured him that he would remember what Joseph had done for him when he was restored to royal favor. Because he was forgotten by this man, I can imagine Joseph being tempted to lose faith in human nature altogether. But his faith in God stood the test and it is significant that he did not again ask a favor from man, not even from the king. Cruelly sold into slavery by his brothers, suffering because he would not sin, and forgotten by someone he had helped were enough trials to shatter his faith had it not been for the fact that God gave him the inner assurance that He was with him through it all.

A turn came in the fortune of Joseph when Pharaoh, the King, had a dream which no one could interpret. Then the butler remembered Joseph as one who could interpret dreams. Willing to consult anyone, Pharaoh sent for the prisoner; and was impressed with his ability and modesty. To the surprise of many, he offered him the second place in the great kingdom of Egypt. As there was soon to be famine in the land, he wanted someone of exceptional wisdom to take matters in hand.

People came to him from all parts and asked for rations. One day several men appeared, speaking a strange language. Joseph listened, remember it as the tongue of his boyhood days, and recognized the men as his brothers. At first he did not disclose his identity, but on a later visit for further supplies of food, he said, "I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him for they were troubled at his presence." They thought Joseph would have vengeance on them for selling him when he was a lad. They realized that their brother had such power in Egypt that he would do what he wished. When Joseph had no strength they were bullies, but now he is the mighty one, so they feared what he might do. Joseph said, "Now be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life." He was too conscious of God's over-ruling in his trials to be bitter with those who had injured him. The thing he was interested in was the fact that God had transformed their evil deed, and changed the course of his life.

Joseph looked back at his trials and saw that the very things he thought at the time were evils had turned out to be blessings. He had been led over a very strange road -- sold by his brethren, imprisoned for adherence to principle, and neglected by those whom he had assisted. As he looked back, Joseph could see that his troubles had been stepping stones to a higher and richer life. Calamity had been the gateway to success. How God uses hurtful things, and makes them contribute to His purposes, is illustrated by the way we make the venom of the snake into a healing agency. The sufferer from rheumatism has been helped by the stings of bees.

When Joseph and his brothers returned to Egypt after they had taken their father's body back to Canaan for burial, the brothers became frightened at the thought of their

sin against Joseph and possible revenge at his hands and sent a messenger to him to plead for pardon. They feared that he might try to get even with them for their sin against him in other years. This was an entirely unwarranted feeling. He had forgiven them long ago; had provided for them many years; and now they tried to open up the old grievance. You see, their request was a reflection of their unforgiving hearts. They assumed Joseph was like themselves. How this hurt him! We are told that he wept. Those tears were caused by the fact that they did not fully believe him and trust him. Joseph assured them that while they meant what they did against him for evil, God meant it for good. He might have taken the wrong attitude toward the trying experiences through which he had passed and charged it to the meanness of his brothers but he would have missed the best part of the truth. Such an attitude would have hurt him and would not have done his brothers any good. He might have emphasized the malice of his brothers and the wrong they had done to him, but he had a better and the right attitude to his trial. He saw in it not the meanness of men but the providence of God.

III. God's Meanings Will Ultimately Be Made Clear.

It may take time to grasp the divine purpose. It does not always appear on the surface or at once. Joseph had to wait many years. As he trudged the many weary miles down to Egypt it certainly was not clear; as the temptress falsely accused him, it was difficult to understand; as the officers of the law took him to prison, things seemed to be going from bad to worse. Many weary months passed by, affording plenty of opportunity to wonder and doubt, but at length the meaning became clear -- "God meant it for good."

Joseph was a great soul. The best test of a really great soul is the test of prosperity. As someone has said, "It takes a steady hand to carry a full cup." Prosperity shows up the man -- it does not make him. Joseph was a great soul. Affliction and disappointments taken from the hand of God contributed to that greatness. The real thing about life is not where you live, but how you live. Joseph could have lived a low life in a high place had he desired. He looked upon his position as a privilege. The great thing was, he had a real sense of God. Privilege brings responsibility. He saw God in every part of life, and he believed that God was at the back of things. and that this universe was ruled by Him, an all-wise, all-holy, all-powerful, all-gracious personality.

Out of this scripture comes this lesson, when you cannot grasp God's meaning, trust Him. We can trust when we cannot understand. This brings to mind the word of Christ to His own on the night of the betrayal. Knowing that on the morrow His crucifixion would plunge His followers into darkness, confusion and dilemma, He said, "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me." In just a few hours, events would usher them into a seemingly topsy-turvy world. They simply could not understand how the Lord of glory could ever hang upon a tree, but they could trust even when they could not comprehend. If God is good, and He is, and He means good, then you and I can trust Him even when the way is dark.

Undoubtedly there will be moments in our experience when we shall be called upon to walk in darkness. We may not be able to understand the peculiar situations which arise in our lives. In those hours let us trust in God and rely upon Him. Be assured of one thing -- God is good. God means good for you. However tangled the way may seem, at length He will make it plain. Whatever happens, hold fast to the words of our text -- "God meant it for good."

"Until I learned to trust
I never learned to pray;
And I did not learn to fully trust
'Til sorrows came my way.

Until I felt my weakness
His strength I never knew;
Nor dreamed 'til I was stricken
That He could see me through.

Who deepest drinks of sorrow
Drinks deepest, too, of grace;
He sends the storm so He Himself
Can be our hiding place.

His heart, that seeks our highest GOOD
Knows well when things annoy;
We would not long for heaven
If earth held only joy."