

Sovereign Over Suffering?

Sermon File Type	Sermon
Passages	Genesis 50:20
Sermon Series	Stand Alone
Topics	Suffering; Sovereignty
Tags	
Date	April 26, 2020

Introduction (Connection):

[Invite to Genesis 50]

Dale scheduled // unable to preach // modified for and explained better next Sunday.

Tension:

Many turning to Christianity for answers and hope

Time's article by N.T. Wright (N.T. Scholar) titled: "Christianity Offers No Answers About the Coronavirus. It's Not Supposed To."¹

¹ N.T. Wright, "Christianity Offers No Answers About the Coronavirus. It's Not Supposed To" (article, Time.com, March 29, 2020) available online at <https://time.com/5808495/coronavirus-christianity/> [accessed March 31, 2020].

Wright argues to should sit in hopeless lament like...

T. S. Eliot Poem — "I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope // For hope would be hope for the wrong thing;..."²

Christianity doesn't offer answers for this worldwide pandemic?

Contradicts doctrines and Catechisms of Christianity

"The bible and ultimate authority over all matters and is relevant to every situation in life."

The bible has answers for the coronavirus

Answers that are sweet-tasting, hope-instilling, and joy-inspiring.

Chief answer: God's sovereignty

Question: Is God sovereign over suffering?

Ironic: Two days to prepare on the hardest, most controversial topic.

² T.S. Eliot, "Waiting Without Hope" (poem, [DailyPoetry.me](https://dailypoetry.me), no date provided), available online at <https://dailypoetry.me/t-s-eliot/wait-without-hope/> [accessed April 24, 2020].

Exposition:

The story of Joseph, Jacob's son:

- Favorite son
- Colorful coat
- Dreams
- Hated by brothers
- Plot to kill Joseph
- Changed; sold into slavery
- Faked his death to their father
- Didn't see Joseph again for 22 years
- Joseph sold to Potiphar, officer of Pharaoh
- Potiphar's wife's advances on Joseph
- Lies about Joseph
- Imprisoned
- Interprets pharaoh's servants dreams
- Cupbearer restored, forgets about Joseph
- Pharaoh has dreams
- Cupbearer remembers
- Joseph interprets dreams
- Exalted to the highest authority in Egypt second to Pharaoh
- Famine hits
- Joseph's brothers come to Egypt to purchase food from Joseph; don't recognize him
- Joseph eventually reveals who he is
- All family comes back

- Jacob, their father dies

Genesis 50:15-21 — ***“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.”³***

Main text = v. 20

This virus has a rather wicked nature as well

- Preys on the weak and vulnerable
- Does the most damage in the most impoverished countries with poor healthcare

Cause? What initiated?

Some bat soup?

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 50:15–21.

Some men in a lab?

Satan himself?

The latest Barna Group research suggests that more people are confident of the literal, spiritual existence of Satan than they are of the existence of God.⁴

May never know the actual cause, but it was definitely intended for evil.

Joining a long line of vile and evil things throughout history.

Slavery

Abortion

Plagues

Shootings

Empire Conquests

Genocide

World Wars

Bombings

Terrorism

Massacres

10s of billions of people have suffered at the hands of wicked men and the prince of darkness himself for millennia.

Joseph suffered under the evil intentions of his brothers

⁴ Jessica Mouser, “Barna: More Americans Now Believe in Satan Than in God” (article, Churchleaders.com, April 21, 2020), available online at <https://churchleaders.com/news/374625-barna-americans-satan-god.html> [accessed online April 24, 2020].

How evil // messed up it is what his brothers did.

Wicked = ignored Joseph's being made in the image of God and treated him as property.

Joseph not the only one in scripture who has suffered greatly.

JOB

Job lost his children and possessions and wealth in Satan's onslaught against him.

Yet Job's response: "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21)

Later on: "But he said to her, 'You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?'" (Job 2:10)

Didn't he know it was Satan who had such evil plans and carried them out?

Why attribute this to God?

Naomi

Naomi lost her husband and her two sons in the middle of a famine in a foreign land, abandoned by one daughter-in-law.

And Naomi's response: "The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty... the Almighty has brought calamity upon me." (Ruth 1:20-21)

Attributes the suffering to God's bitter dealings... bitter providence.

Is she wrong?

If you say, "Yes, Job is missing half the picture and Naomi's got bad theology" then I'd be inclined to question your view of **[God's sovereignty]**.

Typical understanding: God *can control* everything.

Different then: God *is in control of* everything.

God *can* control everything but at times chooses not to pictures God as a paramedic.

Saves God from taking on a bad rep in your suffering.

"God didn't have anything to do with that"

Aligns more with Deism (spinning top)

Dangerous because...

- 1) Unbiblical — Characters often considered their suffering as something God was in control of
- 2) Disarms God

“If we try to rescue God from his sovereignty over suffering, we sacrifice his sovereignty to turn all things for good.” — John Piper⁵

(More on that soon)

Posit a more robust definition of God’s Sovereignty

Sovereignty of God = God can do, and in fact does do, all that he decisively wills to do.

“Decisively” because God can will things he does not carry through.
He can express desires that he himself chooses not to act on.⁶

To be true, God must be all-knowing, all-powerful, and absolutely free.⁷

What all sits under this sovereignty?

- Seemingly random things (Proverbs 16:33)
- The heart of the most powerful person in the land (Proverbs 21:1)
- Our daily lives and plans (James 4:13-15 — “Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit” — ¹⁴yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little

⁵ John Piper, *Coronavirus and Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

⁶ John Piper, *Coronavirus and Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

⁷ A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York, NY: Harper One, 1961), 108.

time and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”)

- Salvation (Romans 9:15-16)
- Life and death (1 Samuel 12:6)
- Disabilities (Exodus 4:11)
- The Death of God’s Son (Acts 4:27-28 — “for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”⁸)
- Evil things (Amos 3:6 — “Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?”)
- All things (Daniel 4:35 — “all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’”)

Sovereignty of God is all-encompassing and all-pervasive.

Eph. 1:11 — “[God] works all things according to the counsel of his will”

No force outside of God can thwart or frustrate his ultimate will.

In other words: Everything happens because God wills it to happen.

⁸ Context: Saints praying for boldness in the face of persecution.

Possible to believe this and not contradict the equally biblical teaching that Satan is “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4) and that human choices are genuine and significant.

Such a belief is called compatibilism.

Satan can wreak havoc in our lives // increase suffering, but he is not ultimate.

He is on a divine leash as Job shows.

Evil men can develop a contagion that wipes out mass populations; but their evil intentions are still under the sovereignty of God.

Hard to accept.

Ask: which world would you rather live in?

One where humans or Satan or chance govern what happens to you?

Or one where an infinitely good, infinitely wise, infinitely powerful God works everything together for the good of those who trust him and for his glory?

Every Godly biblical character believed in the second world.

Job ultimately believed God is the one who brought the disaster into his life, not as a the cause, but by permission.

Naomi believed God allowed her to suffer so bitterly.

Because they believed in an all-governing, sovereign God.

This is my Father's world, oh let me ne'er forget, that though the wrong seem oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet.

Joseph didn't forget this, now that we're finally back to the text.

Look closely (v. 20): ***"You (brothers) meant evil against me"***

Brothers intended evil against Joseph selling him into slavery.

Their intentions were not ultimate... they had to pass through the sovereignty of God.

Look: ***"but God meant it for good"***

Don't water this down.

Doesn't say: "God used it for good" // "God turned it for good."

God meant it, intended it, lit. "weaved it"... it being what?

Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers.

Brothers were primary actors and had an evil purpose.

God had a good purpose.

God didn't start cleaning up halfway through this sinful affair.

He had a purpose, a meaning, from the beginning.

Genesis 45:7-8 — “And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God.”

Psalm 105:16-17 — “When he summoned a famine on the land and broke all supply of bread, he had sent a man ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave.”

Conclusion: Joseph was sold by the wicked intentions of his brothers and the secret sovereignty of God.

Not a work common to both; God did not sanction anything connected with or relating to their wickedness.

They are morally responsible.

While they were contriving the destruction of their brother, God is effecting the deliverance of their whole family.⁹

⁹ John Calvin and John King, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 487.

This is the good God meant it for.

If we strip God of his sovereignty over our suffering, then we disarm him of his ability to work things together for good.

Guaranteed promise: [Romans 8:28](#) — “We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”

This truth is completely dependent upon God’s complete governance and control over all things.

How do we know this to be true?

[Romans 8:32](#) — “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with [Jesus] graciously give us all things?”

This means that God’s willingness to send his Son to be crucified in our place is his declaration and validation that he will use all his sovereignty to “give us all things.”

“How will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”

Meaning: he most certainly will!

It is guaranteed by the blood of his Son.

Application/Challenge:

This is the key to comfort when the evil of men and the evil of Satan compound our suffering.

In Christ, we have every right to say to Satan or evil men, "You meant it for evil. But God meant it for good."

God's sovereignty is the secret to solace in suffering

God's sovereignty is the secret to experiencing the sweetness of God in his bitter providences.

This is how Joseph could be so patient in all of his suffering; he trusted God's sovereignty and found it proven true.

Do you believe that God is working for us in these most strange and painful times?

If a Christian: God is working every millisecond of your pain and suffering from the fallen nature or fallen man.

Your cancer is under God's control.

Your weak heart still beats to the drum of God's pounding will.

Your greatest losses are being turned to your greatest gains.

Your greatest pains are being intended for your greatest growth.

God is working in all things, right now because he is sovereign and He is good.

Conclusion (Cast Vision):

Name of coronavirus: shape of molecule has "crown-like spikes"¹⁰

Corona from latin meaning crown¹¹

Coronavirus may think it has authority over humanity right now... but it will cast it's crown at the feet of our sovereign God.

God could stop this coronavirus.

A single word could dissipate every molecule of the virus; yet, He isn't doing that.

Though it is meant for harm, God is meaning it for good for us.

So let's trust his sovereignty, and taste the sweetness of it.

[Pray]

¹⁰ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/types.html>

¹¹ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/corona>

Sing new song: He Will Hold Me Fast