

# God Over Evil

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Sunday we started a study on the doctrine of divine providence. What we said about the definition of divine providence was this, is that God continually upholds his entire creation and sovereignly works in absolutely everything that happens and thus directs all creatures and events to accomplish his purposes. The definition is deliberately absolute, there are no exceptions to this, that his entire creation visible and invisible, is under the rule of his providence, everything that has happened in time past, present and future, is under his providence, all of his creatures, animals and men alike are under his providence, and everything that they do is under his providence and God is directing everything that happens under the realm of his creation to accomplish exactly what he wants to have happen.

Now we looked at that Sunday. We saw that the providence is broad, we saw that it's detailed, we saw that it's personal. You can pick up the message on the way out if you somehow missed it. But having said that in those absolute terms, to say that God sovereignly works in everything that happens quickly brings a thinking man or a thinking woman to perhaps the most difficult question in all of theology, at least in my opinion, and the question is: what is the relationship between providence and the existence of evil in the world? What is the existence or what is the relationship between God's sovereignty and the sin and rebellion of man? Where did sin come from if God is holy and God is sovereign? Why is there evil in a world that is ruled by a holy and sovereign God? That is a difficult difficult question and one that we would not be wise to dismiss too lightly or too easily, and eventually we will get to a direct answer to that question. That will probably be next Tuesday when we directly answer that in a technical theological way, but tonight I wanted to do something a little more simple and something that's a little bit less direct to approach this matter in a way that I think will be most helpful to you at the start, especially for some of you young people who, you know, are perhaps hearing teaching on divine providence for the first time in your more fully formed, soon to be adult mind, you're hearing these things for the first time, we're swimming in the deep end of the pool here and I want to make sure that everybody is, you know, is staying above water here and so I want to approach it in a slightly different way than I've ever done in the past when I've taught often on the doctrine of divine providence, so we're going to approach it in a different way tonight.

It is quite easy, actually, to illustrate something pretty profound from Scripture that's right on the surface, and what's easy to illustrate is this that is basically just a restatement of the

doctrine of divine providence, just this specific application of it, and I want you to get this down in your mind and that there is no wiggle room for it ever to become dislodged: God accomplishes his purposes in the world even through the sinful actions of men. I'll say that again: God accomplishes his purposes even through the sinful actions of men. To state it differently, God's sovereignty, God's providence is not dependent upon man's obedience to him, God's providence, the outworking of God's purposes is not dependent on man cooperating with God. God is able to work through even the sinful disobedience and rebellion of man to accomplish his purposes and it's really fundamental to grasp this. You see, it's not just that God is sovereign when things are going well, when there aren't any hurricanes in the ocean and people are obeying and not ruffling our feathers with the way that they make life difficult for us. No, no, then providence wouldn't be an important and difficult doctrine to grasp. What we want to understand and what we want to grasp is the reality that God works even through the disobedience of man to accomplish his purposes and that's what we're going to look at this evening. I intend this to be as difficult as that concept is, I intend for this to be a rather simple, direct, possibly even a fairly brief message that we're going to look at it from three distinct perspectives here tonight.

First of all, I want to show you from Scripture, number 1, the goodness of God over evil. The goodness of God over evil, and that's a grammatically suspect way of articulating a point. I don't even know if that's even good grammar or not but it says what I want it to say and grammar is designed to serve the expression of thought, not to restrain somebody in the exact way that they are supposed to say something. So we've stated it this way, the goodness of God over evil. What I want you to see is that God even when men are behaving in wicked ways, God is still accomplishing good purposes and God is ruling over it to accomplish good no matter what.

Now that is a bold way to state the point that God's goodness rules over evil, but it is critical for us to understand and as I said at the start, rather than defend that point theoretically just now, what I want to do is simply look at three or four examples that show it so clearly from Scripture in the lives of individual men that will be familiar to you so that we can see this by way of personal example, by way of human example rather than stating it theoretically at the start. Let's just see how this is described in Scripture in things that actually happened, and that's the way that we're going to approach it for better or for worse. I'm trusting the providence of God to accomplish good no matter what I exactly phrase things here tonight.

So we're going to start here, you will remember the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis 37 through 50. Let me just give you a little brief overview. I'm not going to go to all of the passages to make these points, most likely, but you remember that Joseph had a bunch of brothers and they hated him. They hated him because they felt like their father showed favoritism to Joseph; they hated him because he had told them of dreams that he had had that pictured his parents and his brothers bowing down before him one day and they said, "Who is this dreamer?" and they hated him because of the things that he stood for. So in the course of life, it came to a point where they threw, Joseph's brothers threw him into a pit and then they sold him into slavery to men who took him to Egypt. That was in Genesis 37:18 through 28 if you want to read about that later, and I'm skipping

over a lot of details. In Egypt, Joseph had a measure of success but Potiphar's wife falsely accused him of sexual assault. The me-too movement was nothing new back then, and so Joseph was thrown into prison. So here's Joseph being on the receiving end of sinful actions from his brothers selling him into slavery just because they hated him, and their wickedness was working themselves out in ways that were adverse to Joseph circumstantially, an adulterous woman throws herself at Joseph and then blames him for it and Joseph is again wrongly put into prison, subject to restraint and put into a place against his will, everybody is sinning against him and he is on the receiving end of the evil actions of men directed against him. People sinned against Joseph repeatedly but you know how the story comes out in the end. As the years go by, Joseph interprets dreams for pharaoh. Pharaoh is impressed. He elevates Joseph to second over all of the kingdom of Egypt, and through the wisdom of Joseph the sons of Israel are saved during seven years of famine as well as the rest of the people of Egypt, and through the slavery that took him to Egypt, through the imprisonment of the false accusations of sexual assault, Joseph is brought face-to-face with pharaoh and he's elevated to this position of prominence from which he exercises a saving purpose, physically speaking, for his people and the people of Egypt. Now that is not something that you could have predicted, that is not any way that any preacher of prosperity would say to go about finding your dreams fulfilled and finding influence, it's not the way Tony Robbins or any other motivational speaker would suggest that you find your way to usefulness by being sinned against, but that is the way that God worked. In the end, Joseph's brothers stood before him in fear that Joseph now that their father was dead, would exercise revenge and take revenge against them.

With all of that background in mind, we're only going to look at one simple verse here. Look at Genesis 50:20 as Joseph speaks to his brothers and interprets for them, Joseph had been interpreting dreams rightly throughout his life, now he interprets the whole series of events for them at the conclusion of it all, and in Genesis 50:20, he says this to his brothers who had sinned so greatly against him, he says,

20 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.

In their hearts, in their intentions, uncoerced by any outside influences, Joseph's brothers wronged him, they sinned against him and they intended evil against him, and that was the only thing that they had in mind. They had no other purpose than to bring harm to their brother and Joseph says that, "While you were doing that, operating in an unseen way, operating in a way beyond the perception of men as the events were happening, God was intending good and God was working out good even as you were doing evil." God's goodness overrode and directed the sinful actions of men so that they actually accomplish God's purposes even while they were trying, and they actually were sinning against God in the process. It's amazing. God was sovereignly working good even in the midst of their sin.

Now there's a second example of this that we'll look at. We could look at many, I've chosen three. God was sovereignly working good even in the midst of their sin. Now you

see this exact same principle playing out in the supreme act of the evil of men when Jesus Christ was betrayed and crucified. Judas, one of the 12, betrayed him to the Roman soldiers for 30 pieces of silver. In a despicable act of human sinfulness, the one with the closest of access to the Lord himself used that position of access in order to bring harm to the eternal Son of God, and that son of perdition took his money and betrayed Christ over so that the Roman soldiers knew where they could find him and carried him away for trial and for crucifixion. Judas betrayed him out of the evil of his own heart, intending nothing but wickedness against Christ. As the story unfolds, as you read it in the Gospel, by mob action others join in on the evil. Unbelieving Jews pressured Pilate to condemn Jesus to death. Pilate did so even though by his own confession he found no wrong and no guilt in Christ. He exercised his position of human authority in a wicked way to save his own neck and his own skin, and he knowingly declared an innocent man guilty and condemned him to death. Judas and the Jews and Pilate were morally culpable for their actions. What they did was sinful, evil, wicked against one who had not sinned against them in any way, one that they knew was rightly claiming to be the Son of God. That is the highest act of human evil and depravity that anyone could imagine, for God himself to be present in front of them in human flesh and they sin against him in order to put him to death. There is no redeeming virtue to be found in the human motivations or the human actions of any of those characters that put Christ to death. They were morally culpable, acting from the evil in their own hearts, intending nothing good, intending to do everything they could, in fact, to frustrate the purposes of God and the ministry of Christ by what they did.

This is despicable. It is deplorable and yet, turn to the book of Acts 2 as Peter preaches on the day of Pentecost. He says in Acts 2:22, he says,

22 Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know-- 23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

These men, these human actors, were godless, sinful men, and they wickedly put Christ to death by the motivations and desires of their own heart which were godless, sinful, wicked, evil to the highest degree. And yet Peter can look at that in light of the resurrection and say that these men who were acting in this way, acting according to the evil desires of their own heart, not coerced by God to do it in any way whatsoever, God worked through their sinful actions to accomplish what he had determined to happen before the beginning of time, and to accomplish the salvation of his elect through the crucifixion of Christ. And in verse 24 it says,

24 But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

Beloved, God in his goodness, in his wisdom and in his power, worked through the independently evil wicked actions of sinful men in order to accomplish his purposes. The

best, the highest, the most loving, the most godly, the most good purpose imaginable, God redeeming sinners through the crucifixion of Christ where Christ became a curse for us, God accomplished that end as wicked men worked their wicked desires against our Lord. So in the human realm evil is taking place, God is working out good even through that to achieve redemption, God working independently of the motives and actions of men to accomplish what he desired to have happen and what he determined would happen before the beginning of time. God untainted by their evil, God not forcing them, God not tempting them to do that in any way, shape or form because Scripture says God does not tempt anyone to evil, these men were acting out of the wickedness of their own heart and yet God was accomplishing his purposes as they did so.

Let's consider one more as we remember the Apostle Paul in his pre-Christian days. You remember it, you're in the book of Acts, let's just go to Acts 7 and without rehearsing the sermon or the stoning of Stephen, the men to whom Stephen was preaching it says in chapter 7, verse 54,

54 ... when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him. 55 But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; 56 and he said,

Pause it there for just a moment and let's just remember Stephen's verdict on these men at the end of his sermon in verse 51. Yeah, I should have started in verse 51 but I didn't. That's okay. It was all in providence, right? Do you see how this works? You can't get away from it. In verse 51 it says, Stephen says to these men,

51 "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. 52 Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; 53 you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it."

Wow. I love the boldness of Stephen in front of these wicked men. The reason that I mention it here to you right now is as Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit and preaching to them, he was declaring the nature of the men in front of him. They were stiffnecked. They were uncircumcised. They were resisting the Holy Spirit. They were sons of their fathers who persecuted the prophets and now they were betrayers and murderers of Christ. They had received the law and yet they rejected and violated it in the most profound way. These men had nothing good in them at all. They were sinners against Christ and they were about to sin against Stephen in their undiluted wickedness. And you know what happens, verse 56, we left it off there. Stephen said,

56 ... "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

What a great way to finish a sermon. Man, that would be a way to go out. But these men to whom he was preaching,

57 ... they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. 58 When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" 60 Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep.

They were sinning in the very moment of his death. As the stones were raining down upon his body, hurled by men who were blinded by fury and envy and rage, Stephen says, "Lord, they're sinning but don't hold it against them." And there was Saul right in the middle of it, verse 58, watching the robes of the ones who were doing it, and Saul in his own mind, chapter 8, verse 1, he loved it as it was happening. He looked upon that with approval. It says in chapter 8, verse 1, Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death, and you can see how Saul's wicked heart at that time carried him along with the hatred toward God's people as well. Verse 2,

2 Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him.  
3 But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

So Paul present as a witness, an affirming witness at the stoning of Stephen, goes out from that carried away by the wickedness of his own heart, and starts persecuting the true church, starts persecuting the people of Christ, and Scripture goes on to say in chapter 9, verse 1, after an interlude that talks about some other historical events, picks up the story of Saul in chapter 9, verse 1 and says that,

1 ... Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, 2 and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

So Saul is completely consumed with his hatred of the people of God. He had persecuted them, he had exercised his authority and his ability against them, and they suffered as a result at the hands of his in his pre-converted days, in the hands of his murderous evil heart as Saul exercised all of that against them and there's no redeeming feature in the motives or the actions of Saul during that time. It was utter murder that was driving him at the time.

Now many years later, a few decades later, Paul himself looked back at this time. It still hurt his heart to remember that that's what he once was like. Perhaps you can relate to that as you look back at some of your own pre-Christian behavior and attitudes and words that you said. I know I can. I look back and I say, "Oh, God, be gracious to me the

sinner." But in 1 Timothy 1:12, I'm guessing that I didn't mention that because you're starting to turn there now. That's good. 1 Timothy 1:12, Paul now writing at toward the end of his apostolic ministry, writing probably around the year 65 A.D., something like that, some 30 years after the events that we were reading from the book of Acts give or take a little bit, you get the point, whatever the precise chronology might be, Paul is now writing as an apostle of Christ. Look at 1 Timothy 1:1,

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope,

Now he's been converted. The Lord met him on the road to Damascus and changed him and saved him, and Paul yielded to him as Lord as the Lord called him not only to salvation but to apostolic ministry and Paul's life was changed and he went out and began preaching this Way that he formerly persecuted. And after years and years of missionary journeys and successful apostolic service, Paul writing to Timothy says this in verse 12. He says,

12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, 13 even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. [He said] Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; 14 and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. [He goes on and says in verse 15] 15 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.

Now stay with me here. Remember what we're talking about here is that God rules over the evil actions of men, God rules over evil man, he rules and turns to good even the evil which men do and you see this in Paul's testimony. He had just said, "I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor," and yet what was the purpose of God in that? Was there a purpose of God in that? Verse 16, he says, "Yet for this reason I found mercy." He says, "There was a purpose in it even as I was doing that that I was unaware of at the time, but there was a purpose in it."

16 ...for this reason I found mercy, so that [the "so that" telling you what the purpose is] so that in me as the foremost [the foremost sinner], Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

He says, "My evil and my wickedness was extreme and yet God had a purpose in that, that I was not conscious of as I was acting in that manner. God's purpose was that He would ultimately save me, me the one who had sinned in the most great way. I had sinned in the greatest way against the very people of God and yet God saved me, and His purpose in saving me was to show and establish for all time that there is no sinner that is beyond the grace of God." God was accomplishing a purpose even in Saul's wicked actions to achieve a purpose that had eternal ramifications for good, eternal ramifications

for the Gospel; that any sinner could come under the sound of the Gospel, perhaps tempted to say, "But you don't know how bad I am. You don't know what I've done. You don't know the blood on my hands and I must be beyond the grace of God." And Paul says, "To a sinner like that comes my story, my conversion shows that no one has sinned themselves outside the grace of God. You can look in me, the foremost sinner, and see that Christ has a patience that would bring even a sinner like me to salvation. For those who believe in Him, you can look to me and see that you're not beyond the offered grace of Christ." And you see the good purposes of God being worked out; even as Saul was doing that, there was a purpose to be accomplished so that there would be a permanent example, the highest example that would forever silence any concern that someone was beyond the grace of God if they would believe in Christ, God accomplished that purpose through Saul's blasphemy and persecution and violent aggression, there was a purpose being established that God would exercise his patience and save even such a one is that, and God's purpose there is indisputably good even though Paul was unaware of it at the time.

So what's the conclusion? How do we turn to that? Verse 17 Paul says, having recited his testimony and the patience of Christ to save him, he says in verse 17,

17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

So through Paul's/Saul's aggression, God showed the extent of his mercy. Now along these lines, you could multiply other biblical examples or passages about God's sovereign supervision and reversal of evil to accomplish his purposes, but I think this is enough for now. Through Joseph, through Jesus, through Paul, Scripture has shown us that God accomplished good purposes even through the evil actions of men. He used what men intended for evil in order to accomplish his good purposes.

Now we have not explained that yet theologically, we're not going to tonight, my point is simply to heighten your awareness of this reality that Scripture testifies to. At a human level, utter wickedness, from the perspective of the purposes of God, God doing good through that. It's enough to pause and recognize that something however we define this, whatever terms we use and however we try to account for this, something important is going on here as we see these things. It's almost like God sovereignly works in absolutely everything that happens and thus directs all creatures and events to accomplish his purposes. In fact, it is just exactly like that.

We look at Scripture and we ask the question, how far can we press this understanding of divine providence when we say he always does it in everything that happens as we saw on Sunday a half-dozen passages or more saying all things, all things, all things, all things, all things, all things. You see the principles enunciated in those New Testament epistles saying all things, but our slow to understand and slow minds want to say, "But what about this and what about that? And you know, the evil things that people do, what about that?" And Scripture teaches us and shows us that in the most extreme examples of Old Testament examples of family members betraying a brother into slavery, in the New

Testament of the eternal Son of God being betrayed by one of his own disciples, of an entire dual justice system working injustice against him through a man persecuting the very people of God, wicked, wicked, wicked, and in every instance we see clearly beyond any doubt the good purposes of God being accomplished. Israel and Egypt is saved. Christ accomplishes the work of redemption on behalf of his people. Paul becomes a Gospel example that will stand the test of time to anyone who would hear and believe, and Paul's example breathing words of hope to those who have sinned egregiously so that even those in our day condemned to die for the most heinous of crimes even against children, can look to Christ even as Stephen did and see that there is an advocate for them in heaven who will receive them if they'll repent and believe. If he saved Paul, he'll save anyone else that comes to him.

Beloved, I would say, wouldn't you, that's really good, and at this point we remember the passage that we read on Sunday from Ephesians 1:11, that we, the people of God, have been predestined, Ephesians 1:11, we have "been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will." The only point that we're making tonight is this, is that when Scripture says all things, it means all things and it obviously includes even the sinful evil acts of men against God and against his people.

Now let's just stop there for a moment and just realize, we'll talk about this more on Sunday, to just realize, beloved, that in that magnificent incomprehensible purpose of providence and sovereignty of our great God and King, that there is a place where your heart can go and rest no matter what's happening to you in life. We will be on the receiving end of the sinful actions of men in our day, in our lifetime, and they have the ability, as you know, they have the ability to make us really miserable in the way that they pursue and hound us with their unkindness, with their lies, with their wickedness, with their betrayals. Some of you have experienced that even in your marriages, haven't you? God bless you. What I want you to see is this, is that when you grasp this aspect of the doctrine of divine providence, you now have a settled position of strength through which to view everything else that happens in life. You have something which can help you reinterpret the things that have made you bitter in the past. You have something that gives you strength and confidence as you look to the future with those who have power over you and maybe exercise it against you. This is magnificent when we've seen so many times in the Psalms God described as the rock, as the refuge, as the fortress of his people. It says it over and over again. Well, one of the things that undergirds our understanding of that now, especially in light of the completed canon, is that God is the sovereign God who providentially works all things and causes all creatures to achieve ultimately his will, and if you belong to him, if you are resting in the finished work of Christ as your access to God, as your righteousness, Christ is your righteousness and God has set his love upon you, beloved, don't you see that it's not simply that God providentially does that but he takes you by name and lovingly brings you into the realm of that providence so that everything that occurs in your life is filtered through the providence of God and through the love of God so that the outcome could only be good in the end, right?

You believe that, right? You should. It's true. In fact, we're not at liberty to disagree with it. This is the teaching of God's word and so what I want you to see in passing, I guess, look, this kind of truth changes lives. This changes people. This changes Christians who believe and embrace it. This changes everything. It changes the way that you understand everything that has ever happened to you. It is the plug that drains bitterness out of your life. You've got a tub full of bitterness in your heart over what people have done, this pulls the plug and it drains and it goes out and you can replace it with fresh water. This is the plug that drains the tub of fear of the future. God is like this and if he has saved you, he has shown that it is his intention to cover you with this well-directed providence for the protection of your well-being and the goodness of your soul. The goodness of your soul, what I mean by that is to bless you and to show goodness to your soul in the end. This changes everything, beloved.

Now let's just call a quick time out here and I want to encourage you to do something that normally I don't feel the liberty to say because it sounds self-serving but I don't have anything to get out of it except for your well-being. Beloved, what you need to do, you don't hear these things one time and then move on to other things and have them make a lasting impact on your life. What you need to do, what I encourage you to do is to take this message, to take the messages in this providence series and listen to them repeatedly. Play them over and over and over again so that you are hearing them repeatedly so that they become embedded in the fabric of your heart. It is not enough to hear something like this one time and then move on to a different topic of consideration. The power of this and where this starts to really anchor your heart is when you hear these things and you rehearse them again and again and again. We need this truth to transform us but we can't be someone who just looks at the mirror one time, glances in and then walks away and never comes back and looks at it again. If you would have the full benefit of this, you need to hear these things and to take the time to repeat them over and over again. That's just the reality of it and I invite you and encourage you to do that for your own spiritual good. What happens is as you're listening to them, you start processing them from a different perspective, you remember something that happened in the past and you hear something that connects and you say, "Oh, that means that for this." You have a new situation in life, there's a new trouble, "Oh, that means this for then."

You see, beloved, and I'm just pleading with you as a pastor and trying to help you, you see, we're weak and we're frail vessels, you are, I am, we're weak and frail vessels and Scripture repeatedly tells us that repetition is the key to learning. Paul says in Philippians 3, "I'll remind you of these things." Look at Romans 15 for another example of this. Paul says to the Roman believers in Romans 15:14, he says,

14 ... concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another. 15 But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God,

He says, I'm reminding you, I'm doing it again. You need these reminders, beloved, and on these things that are so fundamental to an entire Christian worldview and an understanding of the work of God in his creation, you need to take the opportunity to remind yourself again and again. So I just commend that to you in ways that I normally won't do but this time, it feels important to make that point to you.

So time out's over, back to the game. God over evil. We've seen the goodness of God over evil. We've seen it through Joseph, through the life of Christ. We've seen it through the life of Paul. We've expanded on that. Now I'm not going to take the time to develop these last two points but they need to be stated here all the same. Let's look at point 2: the cross of Christ over evil. The cross of Christ over evil and I'll just ask a basic question here. Like I said, I'm just going to throw this out and not even try to develop it but to get you to think and to help you think in broad terms, in broad, fundamental, transcendent ways and transcendent principles, I want to help you this way. We're talking about how God rules over evil, right? Now I'll ask a question here: what is biblical salvation if not a manifestation of God overruling the sins of his elect to save them and bring them to glory? When God saved you, what did he do except he has overruled, he has conquered the prior evil in your life in order to bring you into his kingdom. That's a sovereign act of God. Whereas before you deserved judgment, now you are on the receiving end of mercy. Whereas before you had taken the posture as an enemy of God, now he has made you his friend. You had no power to change your status before God, God did that. God ruled over your evil and accomplished good for you in the end.

Isaiah 53:6 says this, it says,

6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

There you were, vile and full of sin and full of iniquity under the domination of Satan and by nature a child of wrath, into that steps our lovely Lord Jesus Christ, steps into the lostness of mankind after the fall of Adam and for his people he does this, he voluntarily, Christ does, he voluntarily and sovereignly takes our sins upon himself, in a sovereign act of imputation, in a sovereign act of God, Christ at the cross somehow God imputes our sin to him and pours out the punishment upon him, and in the infinite majesty of his person takes on the infinite punishment that each of us deserved and absorbs it and satisfies the wrath of God on our behalf. He sovereignly took our sins upon himself, he sovereignly paid the price of forgiveness in his own blood. That means that though you were dead in trespasses and sins, in the words of Romans, though you were helpless and though we look at others outside of Christ now and we're tempted to think there is no hope for them because they are so hardened and so far gone into sin, and we look at them as though they were somehow a hopeless case, understand that you're not talking and thinking like a Christian when you think that way because you were equally lost and helpless in your pre-Christian state. Did your inability prevent God from saving you? No. No, the Spirit of God as we saw a couple of weeks ago, the Spirit of God took the word of God and somehow mysteriously worked in your heart, revealed Christ to you and gave you the power and the life so that you repented and believed in Christ and you were

saved. That was a sovereign act of God based on a sovereign act of Christ at the cross, a voluntary loving act of Christ at the cross. So we look back at the cross and what flowed from that, our conversion, and we see from a different perspective the sovereignty of God over evil.

Look, I'm glad that it was an exercise of his sovereign power that guaranteed my salvation. If he had left it up to my wicked, hardened, ignorant heart in my unconverted condition, I would never have been saved. I had no power to save myself and you didn't either, speaking to you all as Christians, assuming that here as we speak while simultaneously inviting those of you who still may be outside of Christ to believe on Christ and be saved. But just to understand that this sovereignty of God over evil includes the act of Christ on the cross, his life of obedience that made redemption an accomplished fact for his people, that this was another way in which God sovereignly exercised his power over sin. He did it to you. Christ exercised it at the cross. The cross of Christ shows the power of God over evil. I said I wasn't going to develop that so I'll stop there.

Finally, point 3, we see the judgment of God over evil. You know, if I had to do it over again, I would have titled point 2 the mercy of God over evil and talked about it that way from the perspective of the cross. Point 3, we see the judgment of God over evil. You know, when we ask ourselves as we see our world spiraling out of control and where is it going to go and all of just the multiplied wickedness of man that we see right in our face day after day after day, well, beloved, what we need to do again, we need to step back, we need to turn off the TVs and the radios and stop reading the internet long enough to come to God's word and say what does God say about all of this? What is he going to do with it in the end? Well, what Scripture teaches us is that God will judge unrepentant sinners in the end.

Look at 2 Thessalonians. 2 Thessalonians after Galatians and before the letters of Timothy, before Titus. Working backwards from the back of your Bible, Titus, Timothy to Thessalonians. 2 Thessalonians 1:6 says,

6 ... after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 10 when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed

There is a coming day when God's patience will be exhausted, when the day of grace will come to a conclusion and the day of judgment will begin, and when that happens God will exercise his judgment against sinners who have defied him and who have rejected the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And not only men and women who rejected him, Revelation 20:10 says it will go to the spiritual forces as well when, just listen to me as I read Revelation 20:10,

10 ... the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Beloved, I promised that I wasn't going to develop these and I'm going to for once exercise a measure of self-discipline in the pulpit here and simply say this: whatever riddles and enigmas and injustices that we see in the world around us, whatever individual acts of evil or of hatred or just of general callousness, whatever individual acts of that that we may see and wonder how does all of that fit within the providence of God, what I want you to see is that whatever enigmas we may see in the evil world around us today here in time with our limited perspective, I want you to understand this, beloved, no one, no one will question God's sovereignty over evil at the end of the age. There won't be any question about it. It will be on full display for everyone to see and God will have displayed and he will display that he is God over evil in an ultimate final way of justice and that the way that he has worked good through the evil actions of men were simply a manifestation of this overarching supremacy that he has over all of his creation.

Now we have much more that we need to say about these things. We need to explain them and define them technically, we need to answer things theologically and we will do that, but that's enough for tonight. For now I just want to close with this statement to you to encourage you as you go out into the rest of your week. Beloved, what we are seeing from what we saw on Sunday, God's providence is broad, it's detailed, it's personal, what we've seen here this evening is that the goodness of God rules over evil, the mercy of God rules over evil, the justice of God or the holiness of God rules over evil, what you need to see as we put these things together in our minds and what needs to settle deeply into your heart is this, Christian, your heavenly Father has been, is, and always will be over all. Those who belong to Christ have his unbreakable word and promise that he will cause all things, even the evil of man, to work together for his glory and for our good. He can do that. He will do that because he is God over all.

*Father, we worship You in response to the greatness of Your sovereignty. We don't understand how You can do all of these things but, Father, we believe Your word and it's enough for us. Grant us grace that these things might settle into our hearts in an abiding way that produces trust and worship toward You, a peaceful contentedness within, and a loving Gospel-oriented outreach toward those who do not know You. We rest in You. We believe You. We trust You. We stake our eternal destiny, Father, on the truth of what You have said in Your word. And Father, while that is a singular place to be, our trust has a singular focus in Christ, we have no fear of being lost or being disappointed because You have said in Your word the one who believes in You will never be disappointed, and so develop our trust, teach us our faith that we might walk as worthy citizens of Your blessed kingdom, the King who reigns over all. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

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