

Whose Side Are We On?

“Many are the plans in a man’s heart,
but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails.” Proverbs 19:21 (NIV)

In a dark time during the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln was in a meeting with his war cabinet. One general was especially discouraged and asked President Lincoln, “Mr. President, do you think God is on our side?” President Lincoln wisely answered, “That is not the question. The question is, ‘Are we on God’s side?’”

The idea that was in Abraham Lincoln’s mind is the very thought expressed in our verse today. We may make any plans we wish, yet ultimately it is God’s plan that shall succeed. This is sometimes a difficult idea to understand and accept for us as mortals. We love to think we are the masters of our destiny.

From Genesis 50:20 to Revelation 19:6, the consistent theme is “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.” (NIV) This flag needs to be run up the pole every time tragedy strikes the believer in Jesus.

William Shakespeare (1564-1616), in his great play Macbeth, created the saying, “Appearances are deceiving”. For example, I recently heard the story of a guest preacher at a church who came to the service dressed in the worn out clothes of a street person. He wanted to make the point that you cannot judge a person by the clothes they wear. He made his point but was never invited back to speak.

Too often we seek to understand who God is from what happens in the world He created. Again and again in the Bible we are cautioned to wait and see the outcome of tragedy before making judgements on what God is doing.

The reference above, Genesis 50:20, was a truth that Joseph could only say after God intervened in his tragic life and brought him to great prosperity. His brothers hated him and sold him into slavery to get rid of him. For some years Joseph suffered because of the cruelty of his older brothers. Years after, when Joseph’s situation as a slave was reversed and he ruled Egypt on behalf of Pharaoh, Joseph was able to say to his brothers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good...” (NIV).

We often meet with this idea in Scripture that, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise you” Psalm 76:10. Evil people may rage against God and His commandments yet the Lord will prevail in the end. Also, circumstances such as disease, financial ruin, or other catastrophes shall never upset the plans of the Lord for His people. William Cowper (1731-1800) wrote the following lines in a hymn he composed. May these words speak peace to your heart today.

God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea, And rides upon the storm.
Deep in unfathomable mines, Of never failing skill,
He treasures up his bright designs, And works his sovereign will.
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.