

# But God

by J. Frank Norris

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting in God's sovereignty and the power of God to overcome all obstacles.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 50:20, Exodus 14:14, Psalm 27:1, Psalm 116:15, 1 Corinthians 15:38, Ephesians 2:4, Ephesians 6:2, Philippians 2:9

**Topics:** "Divine Sovereignty", "Faith And Victory"

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## Description

J. Frank Norris preaches on the story of Joseph from the Book of Genesis, emphasizing how despite the evil intentions of others, God's ultimate plan prevails for good. He urges the congregation to meditate on the powerful phrase 'But God' which signifies divine intervention and sovereignty throughout the Bible. Norris highlights the three enemies of the soul: Sin, Defeat, and Death, and stresses the need for faith in overcoming life's challenges. Through Joseph's life journey of betrayal, slavery, and imprisonment, the preacher illustrates how God's hand was always at work, turning defeat into victory and fulfilling His greater purpose.

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## Transcript

May I invite your attention to a selection which we studied in the lesson this morning, the last chapter of the Book of Genesis:

"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."

As our minds go back over these years since we have journeyed together, there are a thousand texts that revolve in our minds. Texts of gratitude and praise to Almighty God for His mercies that endure forever.

But in this hour may we meditate together and not recount any achievements for fear that we will grieve the Spirit of God, and that we might ascribe praise to mortal man. To God belongs all the glory for our creation, for our new creation, and for our preservation.

And in this hour of so much distress and sorrow I could not think of any better thing than for us to sit together for a little while in heavenly places and meditate on those two words that every one of you studied in the preceding hour, Genesis 50:20. Just two words.

Those two words occur more than 250 times throughout the whole Bible, and in every case there is a tremendous lesson, and may heaven grant that we will see, in part, the vision of that message.

Here Joseph's brethren come to him with fear. There is nothing that fills the soul of man with fear like conscious evil and that he has done somebody a great injustice and an open sin against and innocent person.

Joseph's brethren through all these years, while he forgave them and revealed himself in tenderness, yet, like Lady McBeth that walked the floor at the midnight hour with the spot of blood on her white hands and said "there is not enough water in the seas and all the perfumes of Arabia cannot erase this spot." And like Herod Antipas, who beheaded John the Baptist, when he heard of the fame of Jesus, how he healed the multitudes, that wicked dissolute king said, "This is John the Baptist risen from the dead!"

So they come and they pray him to forgive them and Joseph is grieved that they should thus come and would doubt his word that he had given years before when he had them in his hands.

That expression that I want you to notice briefly, "But God." In contrast with all the things that man knows, "But God."

May we today, like Isaiah in the 40th Chapter 9th verse, when He said, "Behold, your God!"

The world needs a new version of God, the God of this universe, the God that created the heavens and the earth, the God that upholds every star by the word of His power, the God who is from everlasting to everlasting, the Eternal One, the God who is present everywhere, the Omnipresent One, the God who is full of wisdom, the Omniscient One, the God who executes judgment and righteousness, who is the Just One, the God who is full of tender mercies, the God who forgives, who knows our frame and remembers that we are dust. May we get a new vision of him, as Isaiah said, "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord," - the year that I saw an earthly throne vacated I saw an eternal throne that shall last forever; in the year that I saw on earth the king come to his grave, I see One who will never die!

### THREE ENEMIES TO THE SOUL

There are three enemies to the soul of man that he must meet, and we find them here on this occasion.

First, the one great enemy is that of Sin.

The second enemy is that of Defeat.

And the third enemy is that of Death.

Now, you think it over and you'll find that all your life you are battling against sin, defeat, and death.

In the second chapter of Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus, he says:

"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins:

"Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

"Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

What a dark picture, and it's a true one, in those first three verses of man's sin, of his sinful nature, of his sinful acts until he is under the wrath of Almighty God.

But here comes an entirely different view, as the sun of the morning after a stormy night, as the rainbow in the cloud in the day, hear these wonderful words:

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:" "For by grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves;..."

And then he tells us how not only in this world but, "That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

A world in poverty, but God who is rich: a soul in death, but God who has abundant life; a soul in bondage, but God who has abundant life; a soul in bondage, but God who can set that soul free; so, therefore, man's first enemy is sin, sin that entered the world, sin that wrecks the homes, sin that wrecks the life, sin that wrecks the nerves, sin that robs your peace, sin that destroys your happiness, sin that brings death in the world, and the only remedy for sin is found in Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

In that immortal chapter on the resurrection of Christ, and our resurrection, Paul is arguing how the dead come forth.

"But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?"

Paul says that man is a fool, and he answered it in the 38th verse of that immortal chapter with these words:

"But God giveth is a body as it hath pleased him..."

I can look over the city of the dead, I can see them by the thousands on the battle fields where a little cross marks their last resting place - the only answer to the tomb is not found in laboratories, nor in science, nor in the wisdom of man, but the only answer is found in these words:

"But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him."

But my message this morning is on Defeat. All your life, if you don't watch out, you'll spend it in fear. You are afraid of old age, old age is fearful of what may happen. Men of wealth fear they will lose it, the man of poverty gropes in fear. The man of health is in fear that he may lose his health. We go through life in fear.

Oh, God grant today that we may have that victorious faith, for this is our victory, even that faith that overcomes the world.

Now, I doubt if there was ever a young man that went down to defeat as did Joseph.

Loved by his father, therefore, hated by his brethren. The way to earn the envy and hate of your kinfolds, and sometimes the neighbors, even some preachers, is to first have more; second, know more; and third, do more, and Joseph was guilty of all three. The old father loved him and so his brothers hated him, ten of them did, and so therefore they said, "We will dispose of him, we'll murder him."

Oh, don't let hate rankle in you breast, don't let envy grow one second, for that is the taproot of murder. Sin, when conceived, it will bring forth, it means death.

So, therefore, yonder at Dothan as they see this lad of seventeen coming, they said, "Behold this dreamer, he said we would bow down to him, we'll end it now." So, therefore, they take him and cast him into the pit, defeated in the darkness of that pit. The Midianites come and there, while Reuben is gone, they sell him into the hands of the Midianites, who are on their way to Egypt to buy and to sell. Among the things they sold were slaves. This seventeen year old lad would bring a high price in the salve markets of Egypt, and so when he was sold and bound he was defeated, "But God" was with him every step of that way, and when he came down into Egypt and was sold one of the principal officers of Pharaoh's kingdom bought him, Potiphar, and took him into his household and God was with him though a slave, and gave him charge of all that household, and soon a lustful woman looked upon him with covetous eyes and she determined upon her scheme and seemed certain that she would accomplish if not his ruin, at least his downfall, and so when she screamed and the servants that she had in the household saw that he left his coat with her, she said, "Behold, what this Hebrew has done." And it was the natural thing that when her husband came home she said, now you see what this stranger, this Hebrew you brought here, see what he undertook to do and I have here the evidence of it, his coat that he ran off and left. The evidence was conclusive and that meant a death penalty, "But God" was with him and put him in jail, permitted him to go behind prison bars, and for two years there alone in that capital prison with other capital offenders God gave him compete confidence not only of the prisoners but of the keeper of the prison.

"But God" was behind the jail bars, and in the providence of God there came a time when two men dreamed a dream, the butler and the baker, who were waiting for either execution or pardon, and God gave this young man the interpretation of these two dreams. By and by, after the baker had been beheaded and the butler had been restored to the favor of the king, the king himself dreamed two dreams which were one and the same.

He called all the wise men, the magicians and astrologers, and they could not tell him the meaning of the seven fat cattle eaten up by the seven lean cattle, or the seven full ears devoured by the seven lean ears. Then the butler said, "I remember this day my faults; there is a young Hebrew, he can tell dreams and interpret them," and God opened the prison doors and that young Jew stood before Pharaoh and God gave him the interpretation, and then Joseph went a little further and said, "Now, my advice is that you better appoint a man that is discreet and wise to take care of all that you raise in your crops of seven years to have enough in store for the seven years of famine."

And God was with him and put it into the heart of Pharaoh to give him the supreme commandership of the whole of the empire, the world's greatest empire at that time.

And thus everything that Joseph did prospered, and in the fullness of time his brothers came. Twice they came and at last he revealed himself and when he revealed himself and they wept before him, Joseph said, "You sold me into Egypt, 'But God' brought me here to preserve two nations through seven years of famine."

And now he comes to the last word on this occasion when the old father died. Here is one of the most beautiful examples of filial love. Oh, tell me how you regard the old father and mother that's left behind, and I'll tell you what your destiny will be. Tell me how much you write the old father and mother and I'll tell you what kind of stuff you are made out of.

The day came when Jacob said to all his sons, "I'm going to die," - he was 147 years of age. He gathered himself in his bed and he died, and there before the servants and his brothers Joseph fell on his face and wept aloud and the people heard it. Though the head of the world's greatest empire, he loved his father. Magnificent in life, but more magnificent in death; as the old patriarch lay there with his long silver beard on his pulseless breast, Joseph kissed his father; he loved him.

For seventeen years Jacob cared for Joseph, and now for the last seventeen years of Jacob's life Joseph cared for his father. He honored him, -- no wonder one of the Ten Commandments is, "Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long in the land that the Lord thy God giveth thee." It's the only one of the Ten Commandments that has a special promise to it - think it over. Oh, in these days of "perilous times of disobedience to parents," God help us! We need to have a revival on the authority of the home, on the glory of motherhood, on the dignity of fatherhood, and children gather around and love them that gave them life, whose hands nursed them when they were innocent babes, that bathed their little bodies, that clothed and fed them, that educated them. There is no sin in the world like the sin of ingratitude toward parents, and the man or woman that is guilty of it, mark it, the curse of God will come upon that life!

And so Joseph fell on his father's face and kissed him.

Now, he said, this concluding word, you meant evil to me, you meant to destroy me, you conspired against me, you slandered me, you did everything in the world to defeat me, "But God" overruled it all and brought me to this hour, and I'm an instrument in God's hands!

And then he gave them a command that when he died to take his bones back to the land of promise-he lived to be 110 years of age.

Oh, then, this morning, this holy and happy hour, may we come and say, "But God." You've got an empty cradle, bend over it with your tears, "But God." You've got a drinking husband, as a little wife came last week; hold on, for God can save him.

I read the other day in the life of Caesar Augustus that when he died the Roman Senate passed a decree that Caesar Augustus should be worshipped as god, but at the same time that Caesar Augustus lived a Child was born, and that Child died and rose from the grave!

"Therefore, I'll look and see the place where He lay, -- "But God" wrought in Him when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand far above all principalities, power and might and dominion, and hath given him a name above every name that is named in this world and of that which is to come, and hath put all things under His feet, and has given Him to be head over all things to His church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.

Oh, as we look back over these years when a young preacher and his wife, then with two babies, came to this city, I say today, God has watered this church with His own blessings, He has led it, like He led the children of Israel out of bondage through the open sea. He has been the pillar of fire by night, and sometimes the night was dark. He has been the pillar of cloud by day to keep off the scorching heat of the sun. He has been rock and rivers of water and water has come forth in abundance. He has turned the desert into a Garden of Eden; He has divided the swollen Jordan and you have walked through dry shod and possessed the land, dwelling in Beulah land, drinking from deep wells of water that you did not dig, is the heritage of the saints of God. "But God."

My heart overflows with deepest gratitude as I look upon this great audience and with one backward glance think of His marvelous deliverances. There comes to my mind the words of Cowper:

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.  
Ye fearful saints fresh courage take!  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy, and will break  
In blessings on your head.  
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning Providence  
He hides a smiling face.  
His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste  
But sweet will be the flower.  
Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
And scan His work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.

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