

TEXT: Romans 8:28      THEME: GOD + "EVIL" = GOOD

**And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)**

Dear Fellow Citizens of God's Kingdom and the United States of America:

Flashing red lights and numerous security people—that's what we saw when we finally landed in Chicago. Because Air Force One was coming in, our flight had to circle for an extra half hour. Then, with the president safely on the ground, we could land. Besides that, all those security people were there to guard and protect and keep him safe on the ground.

As God's children, we have even better security than the president of our country. We have a loving heavenly Father who keeps us safe by defending us against all danger and guarding and protecting us from all evil.

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT? What can we expect from our heavenly Father? Daniel, prophet of God, can you tell us? "There I was hurtling down toward those hungry lions. I could almost feel the swipe of their claws and the bite of their teeth, but nothing happened. I moved among those hungry lions in their den all night long and they never touched me. You know why? Because the true God of Israel, whom I served, sent an angel to stand beside me. My God defended me against this danger and guarded and protected me from this evil."

What can we expect from our heavenly Father? Peter, can you tell us? "There I was, attacked by villainous King Herod, locked in chains in a maximum-security cell, sandwiched between two guards, expecting the worst. Herod had already killed my fellow apostle and close friend, James. Imagine my surprise when an angel tapped me on the shoulder, struck off my chains, and told me to follow him out the prison door. I could hardly believe it. The Christian friends at whose house door I knocked could hardly believe it either. But I told them who had done it. It was the Lord, whose saving name I preached, who defended me against this danger and guarded and protected me from this evil."

What can we expect from our heavenly Father? Now it's our turn to speak. Perhaps some of us can point to dramatic ways the Lord has rescued us. Was it safety under a surgeon's scalpel? Some of us have had multiple surgeries—even open heart surgery—and are here to tell about it. Was it safety in an automobile accident? Some of us have walked away with only bumps and bruises from a car that was totaled. Was it safety in missing an airplane flight? That happened to my brother in the Army. He was scheduled to be the mechanic on a flight but was sick that day and couldn't go. That plane crashed with no survivors. Eventually, my brother came home safe and sound. I am sure that each one of us can write in his

or her own example, either for ourselves or for our loved ones. In such events, the protecting hand of our heavenly Father is very visible.

What about those numerous times when our heavenly Father's protection goes unnoticed? What about the morning after morning we rise refreshed from sleep without a clue about the danger our heavenly Father kept away from us that night? What about our coming and going day after day without a thought about the hurt he prevented and the evil he diverted? In the last two months, my family and I have traveled by car almost 4,000 miles—through Chicago four times—for a graduation, assignment services, and a wedding. God kept us all safe, without even a scratch on the vehicle. I have no idea how much danger our heavenly Father protected us from! What would I see if, just for one day, the Lord would open my eyes and let me see the many times he defended me or my loved ones against danger and guarded and protected us from evil?

HOW CAN WE SURE? But doesn't experience teach us painfully that sometimes danger strikes and evil succeeds? Tell us, Joseph, about how it's no fun to lose your family and freedom as a teenager because of your brothers' envy. No fun to languish in a prison cell because of a spurned woman's lies. No fun to face a situation for which there seems to be no solution. But tell us also, Joseph, how years later—raised to the vice presidency of Egypt and reunited with your family—you saw how God used the evil your brothers thought against you to keep alive his people, his people from whom the Savior—our Savior from sin, death, and hell—would come.

Again, it is our turn to speak. Each one of us can write in his or her own experiences. In confirmation class we learned **“that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”** Yet it is from experience, more than memorization, that we learn the truth of that promise. Sometimes, the good becomes apparent rather soon. Sometimes, it takes years as with Joseph in Egypt. Sometimes we'll have to wait until eternity's shores. But always, the divine equation holds true: GOD + “EVIL” = GOOD.

What greater evil could there be than the holy, perfect Son of God being nailed to a tree to suffer and die? Yet even that darkest evil and grossest injustice God took and turned to good—to our good: the forgiveness of our sins, our reconciliation with him, and our eternity in heaven.

I look around me and see no flashing red lights or security guards. I look up and see a loving, almighty Father. We who dwell under the shadow of his wings are always safe. Amen.