

The Traveling Pulpit

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God's Sovereignty

“And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan. 4:35)

The story of Nebuchadnezzar shows how the realization of God's sovereignty can change a man's perspective on life. King Nebuchadnezzar was not only a great warrior, but also a great builder. Chapter four in the Book of Daniel tells about a dream that Nebuchadnezzar had of a great tree which symbolized his selfish pride. After no one else was able to interpret the king's dream, Daniel was called in and immediately explained the meaning of it. The message of the dream was that the king would be disposed from his throne due to a mental disorder which would cause him to act like an animal for seven years. Following this period of time, he would be humbled and confess that it is God Who rules the world and sets up kings as He pleases.

It appears that Daniel pleaded with the king to repent so that this judgment might be averted, but Nebuchadnezzar's pride was too great. Twelve months later while walking in his palace, the judgment of God fell upon him just as God had predicted. Just because God's judgment is not always immediate doesn't mean it won't come. God's warnings of a future judgment are as inevitable as if they have already occurred (Rev. 20:10-15). In Nebuchadnezzar's case, he was driven out into a field to eat grass and act like an animal. The great Nebuchadnezzar who once ate the finest of foods eventually found himself eating grass like oxen. The great Nebuchadnezzar who had been manicured like a king grew hair like eagle's feathers and nails like bird's claws. What a pathetic sight that must have been!

There is a debate among theologians as to whether or not Nebuchadnezzar truly professed faith in Almighty God. Some believe that he did while others question or deny it. Personally, from the inspired

hand of Daniel the prophet as he penned the words found in this chapter, it sounds to me like he became a believer in the One True and Living Sovereign God. When Nebuchadnezzar learned the lesson of his littleness and God's greatness, he blessed and praised the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth. From this passage in Daniel, we learn that God is able to humble the heart of the proud. But, also from Nebuchadnezzar's personal testimony, we learn of God's sovereign dealing among the affairs of men. This king ended up declaring that God doeth according to His will. Scripture makes it clear that God has a will to do what He knows best and His will determines His actions (Eph. 1:9,11). There can be only ONE will in God because there is only ONE God. God foreknows what will be, simply because He declares "the end from the beginning" (Isa. 49:9-10). He foreknows because He ordains. Knowing and doing the will of God is the supreme duty of man. We have no right to dictate to God in what manner He shall do His work. However, we are obligated to seek His will and obey it.

God's Will is Sovereign in Heaven v.35a

Whatever God does is according to His purpose that is eternal, unchanging, and perfect. Since God is unchangeable, so is His will (Mal. 3:6). God would not be Omnipotent if He failed to accomplish His will. Being Omniscient means that God knows all things and is perfect in knowledge. Being Omnipotent means that God is all powerful and knows no limitations. Nothing happens by chance or coincidence with God. In other words, there are no accidents with God. From the human perspective we often refer to something as an accident, but not so with our Sovereign God. God has an end in view in whatever He does and He acts according to His divine plan. We can rest assured that God makes no mistakes because His acts are determined by His perfection. Also, let's remember when thinking about God's sovereignty that our God is too kind to do anything cruel, too wise to make a mistake, and too deep to explain Himself.

God had a purpose when He created the world which was a part of His "eternal purpose" (Eph. 3:11). Prior to the creation of man was the creation of the angels (Isa. 14, Ezek. 28). When given an opportunity, the anointed cherub (Lucifer) sought to dethrone God and became known as the Devil with one-third of the angels becoming his evil agents (demons) following his rebellion. In accordance with His sovereign plan, God permitted evil to exist in order for man to be created as a free moral being. God is not the author of evil, but He does permit it. We also discover from the creation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden that when man exercises his free will that he will always choose sin. Unless God in His sovereignty overpowers man's free will and gives him a desire for Christ, then depraved people will never turn to the Lord Jesus. Satan is powerful, but he is not all powerful. We could say that Satan is the second most powerful force stationed in the heavenly sphere. Scripture refers to him as the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2). God remains sovereign with absolute control over Satan's final destiny.

God's Will is Sovereign on Earth v.35b

Man is the ultimate object of God's love. God saw each day of His creation as "good," but on the sixth day it was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Upon earth, God placed man and fellowshiped with him until sin separated their relationship. As a result of sin, God's seventh day of rest was interrupted and God had to perform a work of redemption through Christ that was only complete when Jesus said upon the cross, "it is finished" (Jh. 19:30). Although, God doesn't approve of sin, it can only occur by His permission. This doesn't mean that God works contrary to His nature. I repeat, God is not the author of evil. He does permit it, but He is the author of the good that He has created.

The modern tendency is to reject divine sovereignty for the rights of human will. Even though God's sovereignty includes our failures, God still holds us accountable for our sins. While not approving of our sin, God works His will in spite of our sin. God doesn't endorse sin; therefore, His purposes can never make Him the author of it. Sin entered the world not because God created it, but because He made man a free moral agent and permitted him a choice between good and evil. Like Adam, all of

his descendants are accountable to God and are given a will to choose. When left to ourselves, we'll always choose evil just like Adam. God didn't make man a robot or a machine, but an intelligent person who keeps his liberty under God's sovereignty. Man's natural will is enslaved to do evil; therefore, the only way a person can come to God is for the Holy Spirit to overpower man's depraved will. This is done by a supernatural work of God's grace thus giving the sinner the gift of faith and repentance. Scripture clearly teaches that divine sovereignty and human freedom cooperate in perfect harmony. Unless God gives you a desire for Him, then you'll never have it, want it, and know it in transforming redeeming grace.

The subject of God's sovereign election cannot be understood by the mortal mind. It can only be accepted by faith as a part of God's eternal "purpose" (Eph. 1:4-7). Had it been God's purpose to save all the human race, then there would be no "elect" (I Pet. 1:2). Redemption is not universal! According to God's will, redemption is secured by the death of Christ only for those who will believe and a sinner will not believe until God regenerates the soul. God's purpose in saving sinners includes only the "whosoever believeth in Him" (Jh. 3:16). The angel announced prior to the birth of Christ that He would "save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Only those who trust Christ with God given faith to save them from their penalty of sin will receive the "kingdom prepared" for them "from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). Those who never experience the new birth will remain lost and die in their sin to suffer in the eternal torments of Hell. In judgment, God sends some to Hell. In mercy, He takes others to Heaven. Since God is JUST, He allows evil to exist. Since God is GRACIOUS, He is willing to forgive and save some.

The sovereign election of God's people is based upon His grace and not on the superiority of the people. All three persons of the Godhead are active in the salvation of sinners (I Pet. 1:2). Election is ascribed to God the Father. Redemption is ascribed to God the Son. Sanctification is ascribed to God the Holy Spirit. Sinners can only be saved by grace and not by merit (Eph. 2:8-9). Therefore, even salvation is a matter of God's sovereignty. Jonah declared that "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 2:9). God requires a saving faith in Christ for a sinner to be "born again" (Jh. 3:3). To all who trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, God promises the forgiveness of sin. It is the will of God that the Gospel be preached to every person and that every individual who believes shall receive everlasting life. Just as God is sovereign in creation and redemption, He is sovereign in the distribution of His gifts (I Cor. 12:11). Some have been chosen by God to particular offices. According to God's sovereign pleasure, He divides His gifts unto His children to be used for His purpose. The same Holy Spirit that saves sinners, equips us for spiritual service. As we witness for Christ, we'll talk to many people who hear the external call of our testimony. However, only the Holy Spirit can issue the internal call that brings forth life and light. That's why Scripture says, "if any man have ears to hear, let him hear" (Mk. 7:16).

God's Will is Sovereign Without Question v.35c

God is accountable to no man; therefore, nobody has the right to question His sovereignty. God is sovereign in doing what He pleases, uncontrolled by any other being. No superior being exists who can dictate to the Almighty Creator. Jehovah God is not accountable to anyone or anything for what He says, thinks, or does. Just because there are mysteries in the divine nature of God which are too deep for us to fathom doesn't mean that we are to question His sovereignty. Our obligation as creatures made by the Creator is to bow before His sovereignty. When we are the least able to understand His doings, it pleases Him for us to exercise faith and stand in total confidence upon His Word (Isa. 55:8-9). Most people find it easy to talk about trusting God, but very difficult to actually trust Him when adversity strikes. The term, "trust God," has become a Christian cliché with little meaning behind it. Trusting God involves more than an emotional feeling, but the surrender of our minds and hearts.

There is no biblical doctrine more questioned and fought against than that of God's sovereignty. Perhaps that is why the discipline of trusting God is so little practiced today. If God is sovereign, which He is, then why can't we trust Him? God's sovereignty declares that He is in control of ALL

things. Even though we don't know God's reasoning He has a reason for what He does. Therefore, we need to learn how to trust Him regardless of the circumstances and situations of life. In the midst of personal tragedy, it's possible that we may acknowledge God's sovereignty, but at the same time question His love. If He is to receive the glory due His name, then we must learn that His sovereignty and love cannot be separated. The job of the church is not to question His authority, but to demonstrate to the world that there is a living loving sovereign God Who is in charge of ALL things. As the Creator and Ruler of the universe, God is sovereign and nothing can come to pass apart from His divine approval regardless of calling it His permissive or perfect will. If we understand that God has all things under His control, then there is no need to panic over the threat of nuclear holocaust or any other such catastrophe. Being convinced of God's sovereignty should take the fear out of facing personal tragedy (Rom. 8:28).

Closing

You may be saying, "Well preacher, it sounds like you believe that whatever will be will be." Let me respond by saying that, "Whatever God wills ... will be." King Nebuchadnezzar had to find that out the hard way. The sooner we embrace this mighty spiritual truth, the sooner we'll find the burden of living being lifted off our shoulders and the beauty of trusting our sovereign God. Nebuchadnezzar was a high headed self-righteous ruler who didn't think he needed God. In grace, the Lord taught him who was really in charge. When we acknowledge that God is the One calling the shots, then there will be no room in our hearts for pride, boasting, nor worry. That is because, like Nebuchadnezzar, a recognition of God's sovereignty will bring peace and tranquility to the soul.

Only when the flesh is humbled and God is exalted will the cross of Christ be elevated to its proper perspective in our lives. Every sinner must come to Christ on the same level. Aren't you glad that there is level ground at the foot of the cross? The rich, poor, educated, uneducated, nobles, and peasants must all come to Christ without any distinction of rank. We're all sinners in need of a Savior and the only Savior is Christ Jesus Who stepped out of Heaven, came to earth, took our place on the cross, and died for the penalty of our sin. Everyone must meet Christ on His terms or else not meet Him at all. Since God is sovereign, He can get our attention in any way that He chooses. If there's a want to in your heart, a genuine desire for Christ to be your Lord and Savior, it's because God has placed that longing within you and you'll not find peace no more than did Nebuchadnezzar until you acknowledge God's sovereign saving authority over you. Acknowledging the sovereignty of God means, submitting to His authority, surrendering to His will, and serving Him in gladness. We cannot call Him, Lord, in sincerity without recognizing His sovereignty. We must yield everything precious in our lives to His control. We need to realize that He is the reason for our very existence. All that matters in our lives is that our Sovereign Lord is glorified.

Ministry Update

Since our previous quarterly edition, the big news is that all of my books have been added to our website along with updates to the publications page. Also, our gospel tract has been added and much to my surprise, it has become the number #1 "hit" on the website. It's entitled, ***"Where Will You Be One Minute After Death?"*** Since the new material has been added, we've seen an explosion of "hits" to the website in general. For a small ministry like ours, we are delighted to see how God is using it around the world. In both April and May, we had over 4,000 "hits" each month. If this trend continues, it will be our best year ever on the internet as we get the Word out to the World. Currently, I'm writing my seventh book, ***"The Sovereignty of God, In A Pastor's Sufferings And Sorrows."*** Hopefully, it will be published and ready for circulation within the next few months. As always, thank you for your prayers and financial support for this little ministry. May the Lord richly bless you.

Because of His Sovereign GraceBWM