

The Gospel of John

Lesson #92
The Journey
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The Gospel of John

The sovereignty of God is tied to his right and his power to do anything he wants to any one he wants, without anyone or anything impeding his intentions.

The providence of God is his acting in whatever means necessary to see to it that God's intentions are carried out, overcoming all obstacles to his will.

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- John 10:39 Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands.
- This is the verse that sent me down the path of God's sovereignty – the part where we read, "but he escaped from their hands".
- Jesus is on the temple grounds where the "Jews" had lots of power at their disposal – probably 150 or more Temple Guards that could be called upon to restrain Jesus.

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The Gospel of John

- The text even tells us “they sought to arrest him”, yet John’s words indicate no struggle, no opposition, just words that seem routine and uneventful.
- Jesus is on their turf, they have their own police force, they gave the order to arrest him, but no arrest happens and, as far as we are told, there was not even a small skirmish.
- All John tells us is that he escaped – I would love to know how that was done. Did he make himself invisible, did he blind the Temple Guard, just how was this done?

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Luke 4:28 When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. 29 And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. 30 But passing through their midst, he went away.

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- Jesus is sovereign over even the eyesight of others and over their ability to move their hands and legs to arrest him.
- I suspect he did something supernatural to escape because if he and his disciples chose to fight, and win they would, that would have been notable and recorded for us.
- Or is this the explanation? - John 21:25 Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

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- We see the sovereignty of God throughout the scriptures – it’s just that the word rarely appears – sovereign appears just 4 times in the Bible and sovereignty not at all.
- But just because the word does not appear don’t think for a minute that the idea is absent, anything but!
- Exodus 15:11 “Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?”

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- Job 42:2 I know that you can do anything, and no one can stop you.
- One of God’s attributes that can cause us to quake in our boots is his power – he is all-powerful and as Job aptly points out above, no one can stop what he wants to do.
- But a fear of God that is not rooted in truth is a fear that could lead you to despair for if he can do whatever he wants then I will never enjoy him if I do not know him.

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- Proverbs 16:4 The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.
- Try to take this in – God made the wicked for his own purposes.
- Exodus 14:17 And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen.

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- Philippians 1:6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (because no one can stop him)
- God is sovereign over your life – he has determined that what he began in you when you believed, will continue until he brings it to completion.
- The One who promised to never leave us nor forsake us is as good as his word – his work in you will continue and he will bring you home because he is the Lord, and no one can stop him.

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Isaiah 46:8 “Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, 9 remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, 10 declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ 11 calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.”

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Revelation 11:3 And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.” 6 They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire.

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Revelation 11:7 And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them.... 10 and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. 11 But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them.

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- When we say that God is sovereign - it means that He is the sole ruler, He is the sole authority, and He answers to no one.
- It is impossible to overstate the complete and total independence and rule of God.
- He tells us in no uncertain terms that He alone is God and that He has no equal.

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God is the sole ruler of the universe, something that should give us comfort and confidence. At this point it is normal to ask, "if God's will is always best, and he does whatever he pleases, then why pray?". Because he has given us that privilege and invites us to come and ask for what we want. Hezekiah is an example of someone who was told by God through Isaiah to set his affairs in order – he was going to die. Hezekiah prayed and God changed his mind and lengthened his life. So why Hezekiah and not the millions of others who have prayed in like manner? Perhaps because God wanted to show us our prayers can make a life and death difference – in Hezekiah's case God's will was set, but seemed to change due to his petition to have his life extended.

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Prayer causes things to happen that otherwise would not happen if we didn't pray.

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- I want to expand our discussion of God's sovereignty a bit more today using some of the same scriptures I used a week ago.
- I will try to explain the relationship between the will of God and our prayers as there is a natural tendency to throw up our hands and say, "if God's will is always supreme, and no one can stop him, then why pray at all?"
- To not pray is not an option for the believer – God has fashioned us in such a way that we must pray.

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- Matthew 7:7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened."
- The above is at least part of the reason why we pray – we are invited, commanded, to pray.
- In fact, sometimes our prayers are the answers to our prayers for in expressing our needs before our Lord a sense of relief can come over us just because we prayed.

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- I am not a psychologist, but I do know that when I am hurting, just expressing my hurt to someone who cares is incredibly therapeutic.
- God commands us to pray multiple times in scripture – to pray for our enemies, for the souls of the lost, for things we need, and sometimes to not ask is to not have.
- But if God is sovereignly in control of the universe what good are my prayers – doesn't he know better than I do? 19

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- God did not just wind up the world and then release it to do all that he pleases – he knows all that will happen, and he is superintending everything that happens.
- God has given us the power of moral choice – he is watching, he is making course corrections, and at times he is causing things to happen while forbidding other events.
- When we pray, we appeal to the supreme Authority over all that happens, he knows all that will happen and even our prayers are part of the plan because he knew in advance. 20

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- As I said a minute ago, we are invited to pray and God knew from the very beginning that you would be concerned, that you would pray, and that he would intervene, or not.
- **James 4:2 You do not have, because you do not ask.** – These words of James do not mean the opposite of what they say.
- And then verse #3 sets a limit for us – “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” 21

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- But verse #3 (you ask and do not receive because ask wrongly) does not negate verse #2 (You do not have, because you do not ask).
- In some sense this is “Prayer 101” – we ask, God decides, but knowing that we are invited to ask and that sometimes the answer is “yes” keeps us asking. (as we should)
- Now back to the matter at hand – if God is in control of everything and managing things perfectly, then why would we want to disrupt what he is doing?

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- Because we live in a sin filled world where there are lots of bad things happening – things that are not just beyond our control, but way beyond our control.
- Things we have trouble processing, let alone understanding some of the things we see, hear, and experience.
- Prayer is that gift from God that gives us at least a measure of control, or perhaps better stated would be “a measure of influence” – an opportunity to influence life’s events.

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- A thought here – when we pray maybe we should begin with “thy will be done” as opposed to ending up with that sentiment.
- It becomes a matter of trust wherein we believe God has a **perfect plan** for us born out of his **perfect wisdom** and out of his **absolute love** for us.
- Perish the thought that God would ever have a flawed plan, so flawed that he would need to consult with us as to what he should do.

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- When we enter into prayer, we are not just spouting words into the air, but we are before the Almighty God of history and what happens when we pray is often transforming.
- Remember how Jesus taught his disciples to pray – Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name, your kingdom come, your will be done
- Just those words alone set the table for what is about to happen – we are about to be comforted just because God is our all-powerful Father who makes no mistakes.

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- We bring God information that he does not need, but we need to express – we ask for his help which is what he has already promised.
- Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

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- We pray expecting God to answer our prayers in the affirmative and we think in terms of God changing his plans for us in a given situation.
- When he does, it appears as though God changed his mind and instead of not healing someone, he heals them and from our perspective God moved and changed things.
- But that raises this question – was something out of control in the universe that God had overlooked and now that you raised the issue, he noticed and corrected it?

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- Well, what makes you so sure that your prayer was not part of his plan all along?
- The One who sees the end from the beginning does not overlook things, he makes no mistakes, and does not need reminder notes from us.
- When we pray and God moves according to our prayer and changes things our confidence and faith in him grows and we see God in a better light – so much so that he becomes even bigger and more precious to us.

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- And what if we pray for one to be healed and God does not heal – what then?
- Well, the “what then” is up to us – God is doing something in the believer all the time and some of what he does in us is to stretch us beyond the natural realm where we think things should always go according to our plan.
- What then? It is at that point that we grow to trust in the goodness of his will being done, and we are brought to a place in our pain that we could get to no other way.

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The mere fact that God commands and invites us to pray ought to tell us something. It is one of the ways he comforts us. If he never intends to answer our prayers in the affirmative, then he would be cruel to invite us to pray. So, we pray about the things that might otherwise consume and control us. Prayer is to be communication and if we listen as well as speak, we might just find our perspective changes. What we often find is that the mere expression of our needs before the Father can become the answer to our prayer. For in prayer, we are looking for a good outcome to our problems and spending time in the Lord's presence resets our perspective to the point that we end up like Jesus saying, “thy will be done”.

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