



God or Genie

Do we treat God as a genie rather than as a Sovereign Lord?

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- Good evening and thank you for inviting me...
 - My name is Stephen Armstrong, and I am currently teaching the Sunday night study here on Revelation
 - My class is now in its 23rd week, and I can sense the excitement in the class is really starting to build –
 - However, I suspect the students are merely anxious to find out what will come first: the end of my class or Christ's Second Coming itself
 - Truly, I am honored to answer your call to teach on Wednesday nights for this time, and I am humbled by your trust you placed in me to bring you God's Word. It's an awesome responsibility and it's one I do not take lightly
- Tonight we begin a 7-lesson series I've titled "Thy Will Be Done," the Sovereignty of God.
 - Before I begin today's lesson, I want to give you an appreciation of why I believe this topic is so important for our times
- As I have had occasion to watch Christian churches broadcasting their services on television or the radio or when I browse the popular Christian titles in a book store, frankly I'm astonished by what I see
 - I know you've seen these same things, because they're immensely popular
 - From every channel and from every book cover, I see teaching after teaching transforming (if it were possible) the God of the universe and of all creation and of all time – into a genie in a bottle
 - So many ministries and books teach about a god I've never known – a god who wants to make me rich
 - A god who can't wait to cure me of every ailment I suffer from
 - A god to who never wants me to suffer any trials
 - A god who is prepared to clear every last obstacle standing in the way of my personal success and happiness in this world
 - And yet this god is powerless to provide all these things until I enable it, or as they often say, until I release his power
 - Release his power? Huh? What kind of god needs my help in order to do what he supposedly wishes to do anyway?
- Some of the messages I've read or heard are probably familiar to you
 - One popular book tells us to repeatedly pray an obscure Old Testament passage – a virtual chant guaranteed to release god's blessing

Dear Reader, I want to teach you how to pray a daring prayer that God always answers. It is brief--only one sentence with four parts--and tucked away in the Bible, but I believe it contains the key to a life of extraordinary favor with God....

- ◦ Do these words concern you? They should. Regardless of the good things to be found in books like this, it can't excuse the serious errors in teaching that turns God into a genie obligated to respond to our selfish desires

- Other popular teachings of the day tell us to lay claim to the blessings - blessings that God is waiting anxiously to shower upon us
 - – as if they might expire – like some limited time offer – “and if you act right now He’ll throw in a bonus spiritual gifting absolutely free – pray now, St Peter is standing by...”
- I recently watched a well-known television preacher declare that if we tithed regularly, God would be obligated to repay us seven times over or He would be breaking His word – but of course, God won’t give until we do
 - As if our faith were nothing more than some cosmic multi-level marketing scheme
- Another popular perspective says that I must have the right frame of mind – I need a better self-view – so that I might achieve the victorious life in Christ
 - A recent best selling book claims to have the secret for how Christians are...

“...achieving a successful, prosperous life...The key to doing so are seven steps: Enlarge Your Vision, Develop a Healthy Self-Image, Discover the Power of Your Thoughts and Words, Let go of the Past, Find Strength Through Adversity, Live to Give, and Choose to Be Happy.”

- These misguided teachers would have us believe that our God is a God who is capable - and even obligated - to provide all we could possibly want or imagine, and yet He’s powerless to do anything unless we enable him
 - What a strange God this is...and is this the God of the Bible?
 - What has happened to the sovereignty of God?
- My brothers and sisters in Christ, the church is under attack by false teaching – and in the worst cases, the teaching seeks to distort the words of the Bible for dishonest gain
 - The teachings are often saturated by catch-phrases that sound appealing and seem sensible enough – until you compare them against the light of scripture
 - For example, is one poor self-image truly a cause of our problems in life? Would our problems vanish if we just cultivated better self-esteem? Do we believe we need more self-esteem in this culture?
 - I wonder what the Apostle Paul would think.

Phil. 2:3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;
Phil. 2:4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Phil. 2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,
Phil. 2:6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,
Phil. 2:7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

Phil. 2:8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming

obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

- The Apostle Paul commended the Philippians church to imitate Christ in His humility and willingness to sacrifice His position of honor out of obedience to the Father
- If Christ were alive on earth today, no doubt these teachers would blame his miserable circumstances on his obvious poor self-esteem and the fact that he didn't choose to be happy
 - Self-esteem is a \$20 word for a very ancient idea: pride
 - But the last thing this lost and dying world needs is more pride
 - Scripture teaches we need far less self-esteem and we need far more Christ-esteem – we need to deny ourselves and take up His cross, the cross of obedience to the Father
- At the root of all such false teaching is a distorted view of who God is and what He desires and what he has promised to those who love Him
 - A distorted view of what it means for God to be God and what it means that we're NOT
- But if we're willing to be honest with ourselves, there's something even more troubling than simply the false teaching by itself
 - What should bothers us even more is the fact that these teachings attract such huge audiences of adoring followers
 - These men and women often find themselves preaching to tens of thousands of people who love everything they're told
 - But friends, may I suggest the shame rests with us
 - Because to attract such a devoted following, these teachers require an audience that is largely ignorant of the truths of scripture
- And we the teachers and pastor together with lay leadership have the collective responsibility to provide the instruction our fellowships so desperately need
 - to exhort all our brothers and sisters to seek after the meat of the Word
 - To not be satisfied with feel-good pabulum, porridge for the mind – milk
 - And to know and teach the sovereignty and power of God
- As the Apostle Paul was approaching the end of his life and he recognized that his time and ministry on this earth were drawing to a close...
 - He used one of his final letters to issue a solemn charge to his young protégé, a minister named Timothy

2Tim. 4:1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom:

2Tim. 4:2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

2Tim. 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires,

2Tim. 4:4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

- Brothers and Sisters, I fear the time that Paul warned of is sadly upon us.
 - And though we are not in control of the times nor the seasons, we can still stand against the tide that has swept so many of our brothers and sisters out into a sea of confusion and despair
 - And our weapon in this battle for the hearts and minds of Christendom is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God
 - The series seeks to bring the Word of God to bear on this issue by presenting a Biblical view of the sovereignty of God
 - Each week we will take a look at a particular aspect of God's work in His creation through the lives of His people
 - the work of prayer, healing, provision, evangelism, world events and even the Word itself
 - And examine passages of scripture to understand what God's Word tells us about His sovereignty in these areas
- Meanwhile, I know that we can all take great comfort in knowing that we aren't the kind of Christians to take God's sovereignty lightly – to treat God as our genie, right?
 - After all, anyone who truly knows the Lord, who truly knows his love and lordship and who knows his awesome power and perfect nature, the incomparable depths of the wisdom of God – would certainly never see God as merely a personal attendant who answers to our every whim.
 - Surely, we couldn't do that, could we?
- Turn with me to the Gospel of John, Chapter 2

John 2:1 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there;

John 2:2 and both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding.

John 2:3 When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus *said to Him, "They have no wine."

John 2:4 And Jesus *said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come."

John 2:5 His mother *said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."

John 2:6 Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each.

John 2:7 Jesus *said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." So they filled them up to the brim.

John 2:8 And He *said to them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it to him.

John 2:9 When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter *called the bridegroom,

John 2:10 and *said to him, “Every man serves the good wine first, and when the people have drunk freely, then he serves the poorer wine; but you have kept the good wine until now.”

- No doubt you've heard this story before and perhaps have studied it for yourself - but perhaps if God permits, we might see the story a little differently today
 - Jesus has recently begun to collect disciples to himself
 - And while in the region of Galilee, He attends a wedding as a guest of his mother, Mary
 - Jesus and his small group of disciples come along for the celebration
 - Weddings were a big deal in Jewish culture, and they typically included a party that could last for days
 - NIOSA only with less pushing and shoving
 - The host of this affair had a lot riding on the contentment of his guests
 - A bad party would be a disgrace and dishonor to the parents of the bride and groom
 - So at some point in the festivities, Mary takes note that the wine is running out
 - This was no small matter
 - A Jewish wedding without wine would be like German Octoberfest without beer
 - Or a church potluck without a casserole
 - At this point Mary does a very interesting thing
 - She calls Jesus over and tells him...
 - Why did she do this?
 - Why did she think Jesus should know this?
 - What did she expect Jesus to say?
 - This moment is like one of those test moments for every man
 - Like when your wife asks you, "Honey does this dress make me look fat?"
 - There's only one right answer
 - Just like there's only one right answer to Mary
 - Jesus gives her a mild rebuke
 - Now the first thing that might catch your mind is the phrase "woman"
 - In that culture it wasn't a disrespectful term
 - His next statement is where we should concern ourselves
 - He says, plainly, what does this have to do with us? My hour has not yet come.
 - Well, we know how the story ends: we know that Christ honors his mother's request and turns the water into wine.

- And not just any water, those pots were for ceremonial cleansing
- But what is Mary's motivation for going to Jesus and saying they're running out of wine
 - Except that she thought he could do something about it
 - Which tells us she must have known Jesus was capable of doing the very thing He did.
- So Jesus replies, My time has not come.
 - In other words His time to reveal himself through His public ministry, has not yet arrived.
 - Through the Gospels, Christ spent many times in the early part of His ministry trying to conceal His identity until the proper time so that His ministry could go to fruition, according to God's plan.
 - And here's Mary, essentially trying to expose her son for who He is
- As we see next, Christ honored his mother and turned her misplaced motives to good, for the sake of God's glory.
 - We know from scripture that we are to bring our needs before the Lord.
 - But James 4 says, you do not have because you do not ask. You ask but do not receive because you ask with wrong motives.
 - So while we are to bring things before the Lord, and we should, if we bring them with wrong motives, we will not receive
 - The motives that we should bring into prayer as we seek God, and His blessings is that His will be done
 - And that our will would understand His
 - And we would receive it gladly
- What this series is designed to do is to return us to the biblical view of who God is and who we are in relationship to God
 - And if we truly understand His word, and all it has to say about how God works in this world, we will understand better our responsibility in this world.
 - But when our understanding of God's sovereignty loses the biblical centered focus that it's supposed to have, then we're tempted to think:
 - “I can manipulate God”
 - “I can do certain things, say certain things, pray certain ways, approach life in a certain way”.
 - “If I please Him, then I release all this favor.”
 - That's a genie, not a god
 - That's not the God of the Bible
 - It encourages our flesh to be in control – not God

- And He will not receive glory if He were to answer those prayers
- So we should look to give him glory in our petitions too



Purpose in Prayer

God's sovereignty over
our prayers.

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- We continue our series on God's sovereignty, THY WILL BE DONE
 - A series examining scripture to learn what it teaches us about God's work in this world and our partnership in His work
- Our topic for Week 2 is God's Sovereignty in Prayer – a lesson I am calling "Shall I Hide ..."
 - Let me begin by stating that I would have to be incredibly arrogant to think I could teach you all the Bible has to say on the topic of prayer in under 45 minutes
 - But since I was born in Texas...naturally I thought no problem
 - As I mentioned the first night, I have no intention of teaching everything on the subject of prayer
 - Nor am I trying to teach everything about God's sovereignty
- My purpose during this series is much more specific
 - Throughout this series, we are going to consider some aspect of our relationship with God and His work through us to learn what we can about God's sovereignty
 - And as I taught last week, we are especially interested in learning what the Bible says about God's sovereignty – not necessarily what Steve says, not what others have said, but simply what the Bible teaches
 - More specifically, we want to go to key passages that cut to the heart of the issue -
 - Places where we can see God's sovereignty in action
- As you may recall from last week, I said that my principle purpose in teaching this series was to stand against a tide of unbiblical teaching that has risen recently
 - I described teaching that undermines and diminishes God's sovereignty
 - Teaching that leaves the impression that God is merely a genie waiting to respond to our command
- Many Christians or potential Christians are growing up with a perspective that God can be manipulated, cajoled, bargained, even compelled to act according to our will
 - They believe that God's will can be bent to conform to our will
 - Oh, they would never say that, at least not in so many words
 - But many people – perhaps some of you in this room tonight – believe we can influence God's purposes
 - That we can influence His thinking and alter His eternal plans – at least as they may pertain to our own circumstances
 - That we can change His mind
 - And of course, the primary mechanism we turn to in trying to accomplish this task is prayer
 - But is that the purpose of prayer? Is that how prayer works?
 - How does a sovereign God in control of all things, having planned all things from the beginning make use of our prayers?
- The simplest place to start is to acknowledge that God has instructed us to pray

Phil. 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

1Th. 5:17 pray without ceasing;

James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

- Christ Himself is frequently seen praying in the Gospels
 - We know that we should seek God for those intentions on our heart
- But does the fact God tells us to pray mean that God will change his mind in response to our petitions?
 - Many Christians would answer that question yes, God must certainly change His mind – why else would we pray?

Num. 23:19 God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

1Sam. 15:29 “Also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind.”

- In the verse from Numbers, God is speaking through Balaam to Balak stating that God's direction to bless Israel and prevent a curse was unchangeable, since God would never change His mind like a man
 - In the second verse, Samuel tells Saul that he has lost the throne to a better man – David – and God cannot change His mind like a man does
- These verses not only state the fact that God never changes His mind, they also give the reason why – God is not a man
 - Specifically, God does not exist as a man exists, inside creation and bound by time
- Consider your own experience and you'll understand why God can't change His mind
 - What would you think if I were to come to you and promise to paint your house for you for free
 - You are thrilled and thankful at first – and if you know me, you're also shocked
 - A week passes and you are still expectant but perhaps a little concerned it might not happen
 - Since I never mentioned when I would do it, you have no way of knowing when it will occur – but the fact that a week has passed introduces some doubt
 - After a month passes, you have serious doubts I will ever follow through on my promise

- And if you had known how much I hate to paint, you never would have trusted me to begin with
- Why did we begin to doubt the promise? After all nothing happened to change my original words – I never retracted my promise, I never gave any reason to doubt
 - We begin to doubt because we know human nature and we understand instinctively that time is an enemy of any promise made by men
 - Time brings change, it give opportunity for men to think differently;
 - To consider new information;
 - To have circumstances intervene;
 - To make fulfilling the promise difficult, or impossible or inconvenient
 - But God does not live within time – He already exists in the future as much as He does in the present
 - There is no new information available to God – nothing He doesn't already know
 - There is nothing acting upon God to give Him a new perspective or new motivation to act
 - There is simply no basis for God to act or think differently, because God has already considered everything that is possible
 - In fact, He already knew the words we would speak in our prayer and He already considered those words before they were even spoken
 - Remember the words of Christ in Matthew 6

Matt. 6:7 “And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.

Matt. 6:8 “So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

- So why pray to a sovereign God? A God who will not be changed by our prayer.
 - If you've been praying to God because you think your prayers will change God's mind, you may now be wondering if there is still any purpose in prayer
- This brings us to tonight's passage:
- In Genesis 18 Abraham and Sarah are entertaining guests, three men who brought them great news about a son to be born within the year, Isaac
 - Abraham didn't know at first that these visitors – three men – were actually two angels and the Lord Himself – a preincarnate Christ – appearing as men
 - They had just finished eating where we join them in verse 16:

Gen. 18:16 Then the men rose up from there, and looked down toward Sodom; and Abraham was walking with them to send them off.

Gen. 18:17 The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do,

Gen. 18:18 since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in

him all the nations of the earth will be blessed?

Gen. 18:19 “For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.”

Gen. 18:20 And the LORD said, “The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave.

Gen. 18:21 “I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know.”

Gen. 18:22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the LORD.

- As the three supposed men prepare to leave Abraham, the scripture records God’s words to Himself – words Abraham could not hear
 - God asks an interesting question – shall I hide...
 - As the rest of the story demonstrates, this is a rhetorical question – one that God never answers directly
 - In fact, the question is really no question at all – it’s a statement
 - God has determined that He shall not hide from Abraham what He is about to do
 - Before we can examine what it is God is about to do, we’ll need to consider some background from earlier chapters
- Abraham lives outside of any city, living the life of a nomad, a wanderer Hebrews calls him – because he was determined to remain set apart from the local godless culture
 - When he first left his ancestral home in Ur, he was answering God’s call on his life
 - That call included the instruction to leave his family behind, meaning only he and his wife should travel
 - Abraham leaves – but he decides to take family despite God’s instructions
 - In particular he brings his nephew Lot, since Lot’s father had already died
 - The wisdom of God’s direction to leave family quickly becomes evident soon after Lot and Abraham settle in Canaan
 - Lot and his animals compete with Abraham for the grazing pastures
 - Eventually, Abraham and Lot part ways, with Lot traveling to settle outside the city of Sodom
 - Abraham prefers to remain separated from the local culture, but Lot eventually moves into the city of Sodom
 - Abraham’s troubles with Lot continue in Chapter 14
 - In Chapter 14 we hear about kings from the north led by King Chedarlamor who invade Canaan and plunder the towns
 - They ride away with the people of Sodom, including Lot and his family
 - Abraham is forced to ride after the army with 318 men and defeat Chedarlamor at Damascus, bringing home Lot’s family and the rest of the

captives

- Still, a disobedient Lot decides to return to the live in the evil and depraved city of Sodom
 - So, in Chapter 18 God is ready to act in justice against Sodom, but before He acts, He asks rhetorically shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?
- Remember, God's plan is fixed, His resolve is firm – Sodom will be judged – it must be
 - His character requires justice and His holy purpose intends to make Sodom an example for all time

2Pet. 2:6 and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter;

- I think Christians often overlook that just as in Abraham's day, God is constantly at work in our world
 - And He is persistent in making known His work to His children, inviting them to join Him in that work – we have only ourselves to blame for missing those opportunities
 - But with each opportunity we seize, we give the Father the opportunity to train us up in His ways – just as God has said will happen for Abraham here
- Did you take note in those verses...of God's reason for including Abraham in His work?
 - God has chosen Abraham as the man through whom God will bring many nations
 - And through whom God will bless many nations
 - And God demands that Abraham be a man who will stand as an example to all those generations as a man who will walk in His ways and observe all He commands, and a man who will raise His children in the same way
 - So God is determined to teach Abraham both the mercy and the judgment of God – and He sees in these circumstances the opportunity to train Abraham in the process
- Our father in Heaven is truly doing no different with us than our earthly fathers will do from time to time

There is a story of a father with a young child, a son. The father is about to go into the garage to work on his car. As he is walking out, the father turns to the son and asks “Son, would you like to help fix the car?” Now sometimes the son will say “No I’m too busy watching tv,” or “I’m distracted right now, it’s not something I feel like doing right now.” But when the son says “Yes Dad, I want to be a part of it” they head out to the garage together. When the father asks for a wrench the son hands him a screwdriver. The father helps correct him. The son wants a turn to help, but the father needs to start him off. Before long, the father and son have fixed the car.

- Do you think the presence of the son made the father's job shorter or longer?

- Was it more complicated for the father than it would have been otherwise?
- Did they make a few more mistakes than if the son hadn't been involved?
 - So why did the Dad do it?
 - What good is there in bringing along someone who makes the job harder?
 - It makes no sense if your goal is fixing the car.
 - It makes perfect sense if your goal is fixing the son.
- Our heavenly father is doing no differently than with Abraham and with us – He is fixing the son
 - But His plan doesn't depend of Abraham, and He doesn't need Abraham's help
- “Shall I hide from Abraham” is equivalent to the father in our story saying “Son you can't know what I'm about to do in the garage. Stay here and watch tv.”
 - But that's not love
- So, in Abraham's hearing, God announces his plan to visit Sodom and determine whether it is as sinful as He has heard
 - Of course, God already knew the truth about Sodom – though He spoke honestly about visiting Sodom, His words were spoken for Abraham's benefit
 - My wife and I used to do something similar with our children when they were younger
 - When we knew their rooms were a mess, we would say something like, “I have a treat for anyone with a room that's clean. I think I will go check and see who has a clean room.”
 - Then the children go scurrying down the hall to their rooms...
 - Now we knew the room was messy, and we weren't going to look because we were unsure of what we would find
 - We had a different purpose in mind, and the statement – though it was true – was more designed to influence behavior
 - I think my wife has taken this technique a bit too far – I recently heard “I have a treat for anyone who has mowed the lawn
 - Similarly, God knew what he would find in Sodom, but He wanted Abraham to share in his plans so that he might join in the work God had planned
 - Now, imagine Abraham's reaction to God's words
 - He knows Sodom is desperately wicked – after all, if the city's reputation is so bad that it reached all the way to heaven, certainly it reached Abraham only a few miles away
 - And even today, we use the term “Sodom and Gomorrah” to describe an incredibly sinful place
 - Abraham also knows that his nephew Lot is still living there
 - So, as Abraham considers the situation, two things are immediately obvious to Abraham – this city is sunk and Lot is going down with the ship
 - And he responds with one of the most dramatic examples of prayer given in the Bible –

- And make no mistake this is prayer; a petition placed before the Lord by a man desiring God's favor
- And it offers one of the clearest pictures of how prayer works that we can find anywhere – one that demonstrates the purpose of praying to a sovereign loving God

Gen. 18:23 Abraham came near and said, “Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?

Gen. 18:24 “Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it?

Gen. 18:25 “Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?”

Gen. 18:26 So the LORD said, “If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account.”

Gen. 18:27 And Abraham replied, “Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes.

Gen. 18:28 “Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the whole city because of five?” And He said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.”

Gen. 18:29 He spoke to Him yet again and said, “Suppose forty are found there?” And He said, “I will not do it on account of the forty.”

Gen. 18:30 Then he said, “Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?” And He said, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”

Gen. 18:31 And he said, “Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?” And He said, “I will not destroy it on account of the twenty.”

Gen. 18:32 Then he said, “Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?” And He said, “I will not destroy it on account of the ten.”

Gen. 18:33 As soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham the LORD departed, and Abraham returned to his place.

- Abraham is quite the negotiator, isn't he?
- He looks for a way to engage God and he begins the proper way – appealing to God's character and nature
 - God will never act against His holy and perfect nature
 - If we ask Him to, we are guaranteed to see our prayer fall on deaf ears
 - So Abraham seeks God's will by appealing to His nature in a proper way – he appeals to God's perfect mercy and justice by asking if God would indeed destroy the wicked and the righteous?
 - And the obvious answer is no

- God will preserve the righteous and judge the unrighteous – the righteous being those who have faith, of course
 - 2 Peter also declares that this story is proof that God does exactly that – saves the righteous while keeping the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment
- Next, Abraham begins to do his best Monty Hall imitation by bargaining with God over the fate of Sodom
 - He begins with 50, then 40, then 30, then 20 and finally 10.
 - What's he doing here?
 - Does he really care for the city of Sodom? Does he want it saved?
 - Certainly not, and if truth be told, he probably would prefer it be destroyed
 - What does he care about? Lot and his family!
 - But yet what does he pray for? – The city of Sodom – so he bargains for God's pardon
 - Abraham fears that the only righteous in the city might be Lot and his family and perhaps a few more – after all if Lot only had a little impact in the culture of Sodom there ought to be a few more righteous in the city, right?
 - In fact, when the angels arrive, they find Lot city in the gate, a position of prominence
 - Abraham must have known how powerful and important Lot had become in the city – surely he had witnessed about the true living God to a few people? So 10 should be enough to ensure the city would be saved
 - God agrees to Abraham's proposal...so did Abraham change God's mind?
 - Well, we need to jump to the end of the story to see that answer, but before we do, we should ask why did Abraham stop at 10? Abraham stopped asking before God stopped agreeing...
 - Well, the angels proceed to visit the city and sure enough, they find exactly what they expected to find – great depravity, so great that the city's destruction is assured
 - So the angels warn Lot to leave and avoid destruction
 - They give Lot one night to convince his wife, his daughters and future sons-in-laws to leave with him
 - We pick up the story in Chapter 19, verse 15

Gen. 19:15 When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city.”

Gen. 19:16 But he hesitated. So the men seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hands of his two daughters, for the compassion of the LORD was upon him; and they brought him out, and put him outside the city.

Gen. 19:17 When they had brought them outside, one said, “Escape for your life! Do not look behind you, and do not stay anywhere in the valley; escape to the mountains, or you will be swept away.”

- How sad that a righteous man like Lot would be so attracted to the world that he would hesitate to leave even though his death was certain if he remained
- Why are the angels helping Lot? God never mentioned that He would help Lot nor did Abraham ever mention Lot or his family
 - Because just as Peter explained, God knows how to rescue the righteous from temptation
 - Lot couldn't compel himself to leave because he was tempted to stay – tempted by the world in Sodom – its pleasures and riches and comforts
 - But the angels removed him from that temptation – they placed him outside the city away from the temptation – yet he was still in harm's way
 - He and his family were not yet safe – if they didn't run they would still perish – as his wife later does
 - God will remove your temptations, but then He still directs us to take steps to leave our sin – to escape its danger and follow Him to safety
- But back to the issue of prayer...did Abraham's prayer work?
 - Well, consider what Abraham prayed for...that the city would be saved if 10 righteous were found
 - Only 4 were found and the city was destroyed...God gave Abraham exactly what he asked for
 - And yet God's plan to destroy the city came about exactly as planned
 - Good job Abraham
 - But wait...what did Abraham want?
 - He wanted Lot and his family saved – but he never asked for that – and yet that's what God gave him
 - Remember that God knows what we want even before we ask – and even if we don't ask for the right thing!
 - And God's character required that Lot and his family be saved, as Peter taught us in his letter, regardless of whether Abraham asked or not
 - So what did Abraham's prayer accomplish
- Through prayer, God bent Abraham's will, rather than Abraham bending God's will
 - God did everything He planned to do, everything He promised to do and everything that His perfect nature required that He do
 - And He also gave Abraham exactly what he wanted because what he wanted was consistent with God's will
 - And how did Abraham know God's will? Because God purposed to reveal it to him and set about circumstances so that Abraham would respond in His Will
 - And God does all of this to train us up in His ways while ensuring that He receives all the glory as He rightly deserves
- When Jesus gave us the model for prayer in Matthew 6, He began this way:
 - Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed by Your name, Your kingdom come , your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

- Those are declarative statements. They are not requests. They are wishful thinking. They are facts. Jesus says pray this way because those things are true
- The first request doesn't come until "Give us this day" ... give us only what we need
- Our first request in pray should be to see God's will be done, and therefore we seek to know it so we may request it
 - And God is so gracious and so loving that he will reveal His will to those who love Him and desire to know it, so that we may seek it and in seeking it and having seen it realized, we will give Him glory for it
 - For only those things in His will can He grant us
- Had Abraham prayed for God to spare the city forever, He would not have seen his prayer answered successfully, because to grant that prayer God would have to deny his very character by not judging unrighteousness
- When you take time to examine the many verses related to prayer, you'll find this common quality to each of them – our prayers must be offered in the faith that knows we are already operating within God's will

John 14:13 "Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

John 14:14 "If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.

- To ask something in the name of another person was a very specific concept in the Far East, especially in ancient times
 - It meant you were standing in for the person you represented, speaking on their behalf, with their full authority and permission
 - And you were able to do this thing – to speak in their name – because you knew them so well that you knew their thoughts and intentions and you had received their specific direction on how to speak
 - It was as if they were you, so naturally anything you said would be honored by the one you represented
- If you are ask in the name of Jesus, it isn't just that you add his name to a sentence – it means you added him to your life
- So often we forget that our life on this earth – including our prayer life – should exist for His glory and to do His will
 - And especially when God answers our prayers – the very prayers He gave us through His Holy Spirit and through circumstances – it is often in these circumstances that we are so quick to steal some of his glory
 - Like the child who helps his father fix the car...



The Love of Money Part 1

The Biblical perspective on wealth.

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- Welcome to our third installment in our series on God's Sovereignty, entitled Thy Will Be Done.
 - If you were able to attend the first lessons, you know we covered some challenging material
 - We opened with an introduction on how so much current day preaching and teaching reduces God to little more than a genie
 - Last week we studied God's purpose in prayer – how it is that God cannot be changed by our prayers and yet He desires that we pray
 - If you missed either of those weeks, I encourage you to listen to the sermons for free from our website: www.versebyversemministry.org
 - Since those two weeks were probably a little challenging, I thought I would go easy on you all this week
 - I decided to cover a light topic, one with no controversy
 - We'll talk about God's sovereignty over our wealth and finances
 - And no, I'm not going to talk about tithing – it's certainly an unpopular topic

One Sunday, a preacher was speaking on what it would take for the church to become better. He said "If this church is to become better, it must take up its bed, and walk." The congregation said "Let it walk, Preacher, let it walk."

Encouraged by their response, he went further. "If this church is going to become better, it will throw aside its hindrances and run!" The congregation replied, "Let it run, preacher, let it run!"

Now really into his message, he spoke stronger. "If this church really wants to become great, it will have to take up its wings and fly!" "Let it fly, Preacher, let it fly!" the congregation shouts.

The Preacher gets louder. "If this church is going to fly, it will cost money!" The congregation replied. "Let it walk, Preacher, let it walk."

- So I know how unpopular this topic can be
 - But I'm not here to talk about what you give to the church – but what you expect to receive
 - Our topic this week is called simply "The Love of Money"
- Is it just me, or has the church – the church universal – become completely obsessed and distracted with money and wealth?
 - How many messages from the pulpit these days deal in part or even exclusively with wealth and prosperity?
 - How many church billboards advertise Sunday messages or entire series on wealth or finances? I'm grateful that didn't happen here.
 - Not surprisingly, the bigger and more prominent the ministry, the more it

seems to focus on money topics

- Consequently, how many Christians today see their faith exclusively within the context of a discussion of wealth – or to the use the Christianese – in terms of blessings?
 - The answer is most of them – especially in the larger churches
 - And what do Christians sitting under this teaching learn? For starters, ask them to describe what a blessing from God looks like? Give examples.
 - Sadly, most of these Christians would define blessings in terms of wealth or health
- And while wealth and health can be blessings, did Christ come to earth merely to reassure us that we can expect wealth and health?
 - Should our primary concern in this life be on our prosperity? That's what many churches – even some here in San Antonio – are now teaching
 - Does God desire to make us financially prosperous – is that what He means when He promises to bless us?
 - In fact, is wealth truly a blessing? Is prosperity even something to be desired? Spiritually speaking, are we in a better place if we have riches or a worse place?
 - And can we do things or say things that will guarantee God will give us everything we desire financially?
- As I've said throughout this series, my intention is not to cover every aspect of what the Bible says about wealth and financial prosperity – that would take a month of Wednesdays
 - Instead, my focus is on God's sovereignty and how a sovereign God works through His creation and through his children in the various aspects of life including finances
 - And keeping with that focus I intend to address over the next two weeks the key issues I just mentioned
 - God's sovereignty over finances, His purposes in giving wealth, the role of our desires and the impact of finances on our walk as Christians
 - Next week will continue this discussion with a focus on health
 - And as always, we're going to examine these topics through God's word – relying on scripture to be our guide by examining passages of scripture
 - Scripture understood in context and properly interpreted without false motives, as so often can be the case in this area
 - Before we examine tonight's passage, we need to take stock of where the church stands today on this issue
 - In short, it's obsessed with wealth and health – largely because of false teaching that is going unchecked in pulpits around the country
 - It's become so bad, I'm convinced that Christ could come to earth today and walk around preaching the good news and doing miracles, but unless he drove a Hummer limo, wore Rolex watches and pastored a 20,000 seat church, we would question his credentials as the Son of God.

- And it's not just in the US

On a trip to teach Kenyan pastors, I was stunned to find this country giving every indication it was the most Christian place on Earth: Billboards everywhere saying “Praise the Lord”. Bumper stickers on the back of government vehicles said “Jesus Lives”. Every checkout counter had little scriptures on them.

But when you looked closer you saw the nation had been taken over by men with dishonest purposes, preaching a false prosperity gospel. And all these bumper stickers and placards were merely the efforts of the people trying to gain favor with some God who would respond if only you said the magic words.

- But the church's fascination with money and its obsession with material blessing is not hard to understand – and of course it's not even new
 - Even when Christ walked the earth, wealth was a central concern for His listeners
 - Christ spent more time addressing money when He taught than He did virtually any other subject
 - I'm sure you're familiar with many of the things Christ taught on the subject as recorded in the gospels

Matt. 6:31 “Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’

Matt. 6:32 “For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

Matt. 6:33 “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

- Funny, but you don't hear the prosperity Gospel folks quoting that one very often...
- Christ says don't worry about wealth and prosperity, for that's what the unbelievers do – Gentiles, He calls them
 - You see, both issues of wealth and health come back to a matter of trust – do you place your trust in yourself or in God?
 - Unbelievers have no one else to trust except themselves

Job 31:24 “If I have put my confidence in gold, And called fine gold my trust,

Job 31:25 If I have gloated because my wealth was great, And because my hand had secured so much;

Job 31:26 If I have looked at the sun when it shone Or the moon going in splendor,

Job 31:27 And my heart became secretly enticed, And my hand threw a kiss from my mouth,

Job 31:28 That too would have been an iniquity calling for judgment, For I would have denied God above.

- So, Christian, where is your trust: God or yourself?
 - If they were honest, most Christians today probably would have to say both
 - They trust God and they trust themselves – a kind of partnership
 - After all, doesn't the Bible say that God helps those who help themselves?
 - No, the opposite is true
 - You can't say you trust in God but live your life relying on yourself
 - That's like being a little pregnant – this is an all or nothing thing
- God is a jealous God – jealous for your allegiance to Him and dependence on Him
 - Listen to what He told the Israelites as they prepared to enter the promise land

Deut. 8:11 “Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today;

Deut. 8:12 otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them,

Deut. 8:13 and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies,

Deut. 8:14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Deut. 8:15 “He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint.

Deut. 8:16 “In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end.

Deut. 8:17 “Otherwise, you may say in your heart, ‘My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.’

- This could be the anthem of the modern church – especially in America
 - The power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth
 - Our culture exalts the self-made man – we preach self-reliance
 - Reliance on anyone or anything else is wrong
 - Self-reliance is a part of having good self-esteem
 - Remember we said self-esteem is a fancy word for pride
 - We need less self-esteem – we need more Christ esteem

Jer. 9:23 Thus says the LORD, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the

mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; Jer. 9:24 but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the LORD.

- If you pride yourself on having no dependence on anyone – you’re a self-made man – be careful because whether you realize it or not, you are 100% dependent on God
 - Just as dependent when you have a job as when you don’t

Prov. 18:10 The name of the LORD is a strong tower; The righteous runs into it and is safe.

Prov. 18:11 A rich man’s wealth is his strong city, And like a high wall in his own imagination.

- One of the clearest indications we have that we have entered the last days, the time before Tribulation and before the return Christ for His church, comes from the letter addressed to the seventh church in Chapter 3 of the Book of Revelation
 - That letter was addressed to a church that existed in the day of the Apostle John, a church in the city of Laodicea
 - But the nature of that church – the last of seven churches addressed by Christ in the book – is also a prophetic picture of how the universal church overall would appear in the last days

Rev. 3:15 ‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot.

Rev. 3:16 ‘So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.

Rev. 3:17 ‘Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,

- This is a dead church – a church that looks successful and seems to have everything going for it, but is truly comprised largely of unbelievers
 - A church too preoccupied with its own wealth and self-reliance to know how desperately needy it truly was – the church is blinded by its wealth
 - It’s the church today

I read recently a story of an African man who had not lived outside his village. Missionaries had visited and begun to teach in his area. This man had been particularly involved and showed a lot of promise in the area of ministry.

So the minister in charge of the group brought this man back to the States for a short trip – like a reward, or opportunity to expand his horizons. At the end of his trip they had a dinner for him and asked the man his impressions of

America. Would he like to stay here?

His response was insightful. He said he felt blessed to live here, but he needed to get home. If he stayed in the US any longer, he'd lose his dependance on God.

- Understanding the biblical perspective of prosperity is truly a matter of understanding God's sovereignty
 - Remember, God owns everything in the world

Psa. 24:1 The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains, The world, and those who dwell in it.

- When we tithe, we're not helping God – we're not paying Him back
 - It's already His
 - Tithing is like prayer – it's not for God's benefit (He can go without your tithe)
 - It's for our benefit
- Secondly, since God owns everything, He will determine how much of His wealth He allots to each person on earth

1Sam. 2:7 “The LORD makes poor and rich; He brings low, He also exalts.

Prov. 22:2 The rich and the poor have a common bond, The LORD is the maker of them all.

- So He is in control over all wealth and He awards it according to His own pleasure – not according to our desire
 - And as Christ taught that the Father knows what you need
 - And since the Father promises to take care of our earthly needs, we are free to focus ourselves on the work of His kingdom and on righteousness
 - Seeking His kingdom means seeking to support other believers by using our spiritual gifts – and to bring along those who would become believers
 - Seeking righteousness means concentrating on your own development as a Christian – your walk of sanctification
- And if you do these things, all the things you need will be added to you – in other words, deny self while serving God and the church
- So if we were to heed the words of Christ, what should we as Christians expect in terms of prosperity? What should we seek from God?
 - The simple answer – and the overwhelming Biblical answer is – contentment
 - We are to find contentment in whatever God has chosen to grant us – since we know it is in His control and according to His will

- We know that His will is best and His will is what we should desire

Prov. 30:7 Two things I asked of You, Do not refuse me before I die:

Prov. 30:8 Keep deception and lies far from me, Give me neither poverty nor riches;

Feed me with the food that is my portion,

Prov. 30:9 That I not be full and deny You and say, “Who is the LORD?”

Or that I not be in want and steal,

And profane the name of my God.

- Contentment is a sign of our trust in the Father, the writer of Hebrews says:

Heb. 13:5 Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,”

- Our trust in God gives us the opportunity to be content and trust His provision, no matter what he decides to give us
 - Paul said it best in 1 Timothy:

1Tim. 6:3 If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness,

1Tim. 6:4 he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions,

1Tim. 6:5 and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.

1Tim. 6:6 But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment.

1Tim. 6:7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either.

1Tim. 6:8 If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.

1Tim. 6:9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.

1Tim. 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

1Tim. 6:11 But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.

- Paul mentions the ones who teach a different gospel, and regarding the men and women today who are peddling these unbiblical doctrines of wealth and prosperity,

there much more I would like to say...

- But I will wait until part two of this lesson next week to address them
- Meanwhile, I'd like to use the rest of our evening to explain one of the least appreciated yet most important Biblical truths concerning God's promised blessings to his children
 - Call it the true prosperity teaching from Scripture, if you like
 - It's the proper view of wealth – one that trusts in God and glorifies Him rather than our selfish desires
- Now most of us will agree that there are, in fact, promises given in scripture of blessing for obedient believers – and it's true there are many such promises
 - And although on occasion the scriptures talk about earthly blessings...
 - Like the blessing of children, or a good wife, or a good harvest etc.
 - More attention is given in scripture to a different kind of blessing – one that's very different than the one taught by the false teachers
 - Christ Himself alludes to this blessing in Matthew 6 when He says:

Matt. 6:19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

Matt. 6:20 “But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;

Matt. 6:21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

- What is this treasure in heaven and how do we store it up? Christ gave us an idea when he told a parable in Luke 16
- This parable has often been described as the most difficult parable to interpret in the Gospels
 - If that's true, I think I understand why that's so
 - It describes a concept so foreign to our culture and our nature – so different from what we're told everywhere we turn today

Luke 16:1 Now He was also saying to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and this manager was reported to him as squandering his possessions.

Luke 16:2 “And he called him and said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager.’

Luke 16:3 “The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg.

Luke 16:4 ‘I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the management people will welcome me into their homes.’

Luke 16:5 “And he summoned each one of his master’s debtors, and he began saying to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’

Luke 16:6 “And he said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ And he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’

Luke 16:7 “Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ And he said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ He *said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’

Luke 16:8 “And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light.

Luke 16:9 “And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings.

Luke 16:10 “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.

Luke 16:11 “Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you?

Luke 16:12 “And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own?

- Well at first reading, we’re immediately struck by the parable’s paradoxical message – by what appear to be several internal contradictions
 - The master is ready to fire his manager for mismanagement
 - But then the master praises the manager for being shrewd after he appears to cheat the master out of even more money
 - This manager looks like a genuinely detestable character who embezzles from his boss at every opportunity
 - Yet in the end, Jesus seems to praise his behavior
 - And what exactly is unrighteous wealth anyway?
 - Well, let’s sort this out
- As is usually the case, a little background is necessary
 - In Jewish culture (as in our culture today) wealthy businessmen often employed managers to handle their business affairs
 - These managers would attend to every detail of the master’s business, including purchasing and selling goods and extending credit to customers
 - But under Jewish law, specifically Deuteronomy 23:19, it was unlawful to charge a usury interest
 - So it became a custom in Jewish society for a manager such as this one to overcharge a customer by adding his own fee directly to the bill for the goods or services
 - So when the bill was repaid, the manager took his share off the top and gave the rest that was due to his master
 - It was not uncommon for a manager to charge a 100% fee on top of the bill owed the master
 - Now the second thing to understand as we study this parable is the comparison

Christ is making

- In verse 16:8, Jesus makes the comparison between the sons of this age (in other words, unbelievers) and the sons of light (believers) by using the term “in relation to their own kind”
 - In other words, he’s making a comparison between how unbelievers deal with other unbelievers vs. how believers deal with other believers
- So looking at the deals, we find a manager who has not been reliable in his position of authority, and the master tells him he is ready to fire him
 - But notably he doesn’t fire him yet – technically the manager is still on the payroll
 - Before releasing him, the master tells the manager to give an accounting of his management – the master wants to look over the books and see how bad things are
- Now the manager sees his chance to help himself
 - He knows that his firing is imminent – he’s about to leave this comfortable world he has grown accustomed to
 - And he doesn’t know what he will find on the outside or how he will be received
 - But he devises a shrewd scheme
 - He realizes that all the debts that are currently owed to his master include a portion that belongs to him – his fee added to each debt
 - Since he knows he’s going to be fired before those customers repay their debt, he stands to lose all that money
 - So why not at least gain some advantage out of his loss
 - He runs to each of his master’s debtors and while he still has the master’s authority, he reduces their debts by the amount of his fee
 - Since only the manager’s fee was deducted from each bill, the master’s original debt is still going to be paid – the master has not lost a cent
 - Meanwhile, the manager builds goodwill among these clients in the hope they will look favorably upon him when he is unemployed and looking for help
- The Master praises the manager because this is such a smart move
 - It’s a win-win-win
 - The manager gains the favor of the clients, the clients save money, and the master’s business benefits from the positive reaction of the clients to the discounts
 - Though Jesus doesn’t say, perhaps this move is enough to save the manager’s career
- So Jesus isn’t praising his previously poor management style, but rather He simply praises the manager’s shrewdness in knowing how to use money for the greatest gain in his world
- But here’s where it can get even more confusing...Jesus says that the sons of light don’t know how to do this as well
 - That we should use the wealth of unrighteousness to make friends for the sake of

eternity

- The problem we have with this parable is that we don't understand the difference between the wealth of unrighteousness and the wealth of righteousness
- You might have assumed that the wealth of unrighteousness meant wealth gained through dishonest means – but you'd be wrong
 - The wealth of unrighteousness is all money – it's the money of this world – the treasure of earth
 - The money that the sons of this age seek after
 - The money that perishes along with everything else in this world when it burns up
 - The money that people store up here rather than in storing a treasure in heaven
 - It's called unrighteous because it is the money the unrighteous world values, the money that the unbelieving world puts its trust in
- Now you can put all this together and understand why Jesus compliments the sons of this age and criticizes the believers
- Jesus says we should learn from how the unrighteous use their wealth
 - Like the manager, unbelievers are willing to influence people and win friends and gain all the benefits that their money can give them in this world
 - For unbelievers, the money of this world is all they have to depend upon and trust in – it is their treasure
 - And they make the most of what their money will buy them in this world, until their time is up
- But the sons of light are criticized for not dealing with one another as shrewdly as unbelievers deal with each other
 - And here's the secret: because we live as if we were sons of this world – as if we had no future in eternity either – as if the money we have right now is our treasure in heaven
 - But it's not – the money God has given you right now is the wealth of unrighteousness – it will burn up when this world ends
 - But what if I told you there was a way to turn it into treasure in heaven
 - That you could deposit it in your bank in heaven so that when you leave this world and enter eternity, you would have it there waiting for you
 - And it will never perish there
 - It can't be stolen
 - It can't wear out
 - It's actually very easy – spend it on the work of the kingdom now
 - And I'm not talking about tithing – at least not exclusively
 - Look at what Jesus says in the parable
 - Verse 9 – make friends with your earthly money, but which friends is He

talking about?

- What kind of friend can be there to welcome you into an eternal dwelling? Only another believer
- Use the money of unrighteousness now, but spend it on believers, the sons of light
 - Unlike the favors that the unrighteous earned with their money – favors that perish when this world ends – the rewards you earn, the eternal friends you win for Christ, bring eternal benefits
 - Whether you're helping fund outreach ministries that establish new believers
 - Or supporting the Body of Christ by funding Christian organizations
 - Or providing financial aid to the widow or poor or sick living down the street
 - Or just placing an extra check in the offering plate, or whatever God lays on your heart
 - When you use unrighteous wealth to gain eternal benefits, you are that shrewd manager – but one working for an eternal master – one who will remember your good management
- Look at what Jesus says at the end of the parable
 - Of the unrighteous wealth that God has given you here...
 - Wealth that has no true value
 - Wealth that will all burn up anyway
 - Wealth that you can't take with you
 - Wealth that will be completely forgotten in eternity
 - If you aren't willing to spend that wealth now for His glory and for the benefit of His kingdom – if you would trust in it and store it up even though you know it won't be with you in eternity
 - Then Jesus asks what kind of true riches do you expect to have in eternity?
Why should God trust you with eternal riches?
- You want a prosperity message from scripture? Brother and sisters – that's the true prosperity gospel
 - God gives you what He determines, and then He watches what you do with it
 - If you horde it, focus on it, worry over it and spend your whole life trying to get more, save more, earn more and glorify yourself with it – then you better enjoy it while you can
 - Because in eternity you'll have very little to bother over
 - But if you live contentedly with whatever God has given you, determined to put every penny you can to work for the glory of God and for his kingdom, winning friends who will greet you in eternity – then you will certainly see eternal treasure

Psa. 49:0 For the choir director. A Psalm of the sons of Korah.

Psa. 49:1 Hear this, all peoples;

Give ear, all inhabitants of the world,

Psa. 49:2 Both low and high,

Rich and poor together.

Psa. 49:3 My mouth will speak wisdom,
And the meditation of my heart will be understanding.

Psa. 49:4 I will incline my ear to a proverb;
I will express my riddle on the harp.

Psa. 49:5 Why should I fear in days of adversity,

When the iniquity of my foes surrounds me,

Psa. 49:6 Even those who trust in their wealth And boast in the abundance of
their riches?

Psa. 49:7 No man can by any means redeem his brother Or give to God a ransom
for him—

Psa. 49:8 For the redemption of his soul is costly, And he should cease trying
forever—

Psa. 49:9 That he should live on eternally, That he should not undergo decay.

Psa. 49:10 For he sees that even wise men die; The stupid and the senseless
alike perish And leave their wealth to others.

Psa. 49:11 Their inner thought is that their houses are forever And their dwelling
places to all generations;

They have called their lands after their own names.

Psa. 49:12 But man in his pomp will not endure; He is like the beasts that perish.

Psa. 49:13 This is the way of those who are foolish,

And of those after them who approve their words. Selah.

Psa. 49:14 As sheep they are appointed for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd;
And the upright shall rule over them in the morning, And their form shall be
for Sheol to consume

So that they have no habitation.

Psa. 49:15 But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, For He will
receive me. Selah.

Psa. 49:16 Do not be afraid when a man becomes rich, When the glory of his
house is increased;

Psa. 49:17 For when he dies he will carry nothing away; His glory will not
descend after him.

Psa. 49:18 Though while he lives he congratulates himself— And though men
praise you when you do well for yourself—

Psa. 49:19 He shall go to the generation of his fathers; They will never see the
light.

Psa. 49:20 Man in his pomp, yet without understanding,
Is like the beasts that perish.



The Love of Money Part II

The Biblical view of wealth & health.

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versebyversemministry.org/lessons/the_love_of_money_part_ii

- Note from audio: teaching from the old website under the name Stephen Armstrong has all been migrated to versebyversemministry.org
- Last week I presented a teaching on the sovereignty of God over our finances
 - I promised you that it would be merely the first of two parts on this subject
 - And that this week I would move more in the direction of health, which I will
 - I also said I would address more specifically the issue of the teachers who are peddling so many false and unbiblical perspectives on both these topics
 - And as always, I will try to capture some aspect of what the Bible has to say on God's sovereignty in this area by relying on a passage of scripture that illustrates these truths
 - And as usual, I want to repeat my disclaimer concerning my treatment of this topic – I don't intend to teach everything the Bible has to say concerning the sovereignty of God and money or health
- Since this is a Part 2 of sorts, I need to briefly revisit where we left off in last week's teaching. In fact, I want to pick up at the end of the parable we read last week, in Luke 16
 - Jesus had just given a short parable about a poor manager soon to be fired, who shrewdly finds a way to make good use of money he was about to lose anyway
 - He turned this money into favor among the men who did business with him so that some might be willing to help him once he lost his job
 - Christ compliments the man not on his poor management, but for knowing how to make the most of the passing wealth of this world
 - Then Christ makes the stunning comparison to believers, teaching us to use the fleeting wealth of this world to make eternal friends
 - In other words, just like the manager who turned his worthless unpaid bills into true gain, Christians should use the worthless wealth of this world to build up treasure in heaven
 - And if we truly recognized the perishable nature of this world's wealth, we would never hesitate to use it for the gain of eternal riches
 - Consider Christ's words at the end of that parable

Luke 16:10 “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.

Luke 16:11 “Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you?

Luke 16:12 “And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?

- Remember the words of Christ in Matthew....

Matt. 13:44 “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

- As I ended last week, I challenged you to consider what it would take for you to live a life that truly reflected Jesus' teaching in this parable
 - What would it take for all of us to give no regard for our earthly wealth, instead focusing our attention on eternal riches
 - In a word, trust – trust in God to provide for your needs here while you spend your time and resources seeking His kingdom and His righteousness
 - What would our church and our world look like if all Christians were taught this and followed it – we would look as radical as Christ Himself looked
 - And maybe we would have as great an impact as He had
- Now, at various times through this lesson both last week and this week, I referred to our giving of our resources (wealth) and our effort (service)
- So I think it's time I transitioned to the second part of this topic – God's sovereignty over issues of health and the body
 - Spiritually speaking, how should we view our bodies and our health then?
 - How does our health and our desire that our body function properly relate to God's sovereignty? And how is it connected to the issue of wealth?
- Well, as always, we need to begin by establishing the basic principles established in God's Word
- God gives life, to every man and woman
 - Moreover, He establishes the length of that life

Job 14:1 “Man, who is born of woman, Is short-lived and full of turmoil.

Job 14:2 “Like a flower he comes forth and withers. He also flees like a shadow and does not remain.

Job 14:3 “You also open Your eyes on him And bring him into judgment with Yourself.

Job 14:4 “Who can make the clean out of the unclean? No one!

Job 14:5 “Since his days are determined,

The number of his months is with You;
And his limits You have set so that he cannot pass.

- Since our days are determined, the number of our months is with God
 - God has determined the number of our days in this world
 - Some might read this and unknowingly confuse two related Biblical principles by assuming that this is speaking merely of God's foreknowledge
 - In fact, it's referring to God's Sovereignty, specifically His providence
 - Job makes clear we're not just talking about God's knowing the future and thereby knowing the length of a man's days
 - God says He has set or appointed man's limits – in other words, He has determined, decided the limit of our days
 - Moreover, He says He will not allow us to pass that limit
 - I believe the more you consider this statement, the more radical it will become in

your life

- How much time do you spend concerning yourself about how long you will live?

Matt. 6:27 “And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?

- ○ How much effort and money do you invest in trying to lengthen your days
 - Given what we just read, how successful do you think you will be?
- If the world and lately even the church are obsessed by concerns over wealth, then I think it's fair to say they are paranoid over the prospect of declining health and death
 - Consider the vast amounts of money and effort spent by the world to avoid death? To forestall it?
 - But even the unbelieving world knows they can't truly avoid death, so they do the next best thing:
 - They pretend they're avoiding it
 - They work to look as if they were avoiding it – plastic surgery, cosmetics, etc.
 - All of it done to give the impressions of eternal youth if not eternal life – all the while in a decaying body
 - There's a reason why cheats and con artists are commonly called snake oil salesman
 - Because the most common and most successful way to cheat people out of their money has typically come from those selling miracle cures – snake oil it was called – to a world desperate to cheat death
 - And what really drives the world to behave this way? To focus so much on preserving health and lengthening life?
 - In a word: fear
 - Fear of pain, fear of dependency, fear of rejection, fear of death and ultimately, fear of judgment
 - For though most unbelievers couldn't articulate it or perhaps even recognize it, they are living a life driven by fear – a fear that comes from sin and the separation it creates from God
 - And of course, they should fear – for

Heb. 10:31 It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

- Though the fear should drive them to repent and confess Christ, for so many it merely manifests itself as a pitiful exercise of sticking their fingers in the dike, even as it springs more leaks and the rising waters slowly choke off the life in their mortal bodies
- Now the truly sad part to all this is how much the church has become to look like the world – just as it has in the area of wealth
 - As believers, we have no business sharing in the world's fear

Heb. 2:14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,
Heb. 2:15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

- Christ took on flesh and blood and suffered through the death process, and when He was raised up, the Father demonstrated His power over death – a power He grants to those who trust in His Son's sacrifice
 - And by doing so, He rendered Satan powerless over Christians
 - How is Satan powerless over us? Because we no longer have reason to fear death. Because we know death brings better things, not worse things
 - As long as someone has reason to fear death, they will be consumed by the fear of death and through that fear, Satan has control over them, a slavery Hebrews calls it
 - This is the fear that drives the unbelieving world and causes them to participate unknowingly in the schemes of the evil one
 - Their fear of death and all the insecurities it produces – insecurities over money, health, love and power – drive the unbelieving world to commit all manner of sin
 - But the writer of Hebrews says Christians have no business sharing in that fear
 - We are freed from that kind of slavery
 - Simply put, we have no business fearing death nor even the natural decay of this body – for we should look forward to its replacing
 - So when we act as the world does, fearing death and following the same schemes as if to avoid death, we are assuming the position of a slave again – not in reality but in appearance
- It's also on the basis of fear that so many false teachers have succeeded in gaining an audience
- I want to take a brief moment to address the issue of these teachers before moving to tonight's passage
 - These teachers know that their audiences fear not having enough money and they fear the approach of death
 - So these teachers tailor their messages to appeal to the ears of the world

2Tim. 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires,
2Tim. 4:4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

- These teachers are tickling ears – which means they are saying things we like to hear – things that appeal to our sinful fearful nature – and they avoid messages that offend

or disturb us

- They tell us that God wants to make us rich and take away all illness
- That God must grant us our wishes if we ask Him using the right words or while we hold the right thoughts
- Interestingly, they often avoid preaching the hard message of the gospel because it may offend...just as Christ said it would
- Perhaps this insight will help explain their motives:
 - After he was released from prison, a very repentant Jim Bakker told this account of how his ministry came to focus on false teaching concerning prosperity:

I'd always quoted 3 John 2, saying, "Above all things God wants you to prosper." I loved that Scripture. It looks great on a TV screen when you're raising funds, and I interpreted it as God wants you to be rich. But when I got to the words of John, I said, "Now this don't make sense." So I took the word prosper apart in the Greek and found out it's made up of two words—the first word means good or well and the second road. It's a progressive word, so it's like a journey. So, here's John saying, basically, "Beloved, I want you to have a good journey through life as your soul has a good journey to heaven." It was a greeting! Building theology on that is like building the church on "Have a nice day."

I began to look up all the Scriptures used in prosperity teaching, such as "Give and it shall be given unto you." When I put that Scripture back into its context, I found Christ was teaching on forgiveness, not on money. He was teaching us that by the same measure that we forgive, we will be forgiven.

I had gotten my sermons from other people. The Bible warns about the shepherds who get their messages from each other. I think today the reason we have another gospel and another Jesus being preached is because men have gotten their sermons from each other and from motivational teaching. A lot of what's being taught today is simply motivational teaching with a few Scriptures put to it.

- That last line sent chills up my spine...consider how many churches now are willing to jump on board the latest teaching fad sweeping the country – effectively relinquishing their pulpits over to pre-fabricated sermon series designed to sell books more than glorify God and edify believers – it's truly frightening
- While some of these teachers are truly evil men, unbelievers preying on the Body of Christ
 - But what's worse, many honest and well-meaning pastors and teachers have been impressed by the success of these false teachers and are beginning to imitate them and mimic many of their teachings
 - This is a dangerous trend, because it means not only do God's sheep have the wolves to be concerned about, but now even their shepherds themselves have

begun to go astray and lead their flocks to dead ground rather than good pasture

- Shame on all the church if we allow this decent into apostasy to go unchecked – I pray we will have the courage to be like Hezekiah, who removed the high places and broke down the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah.
- Now I know some of you are probably exercising great patience with me right now
 - Because you know there is another side to this story of God's sovereignty in health to be found in scripture, and you would be right
 - And this discussion will lead us into our passage tonight
 - Scripture does give clear instructions concerning the need to respect our bodies and to do so with reverence
 - There are many well-known verses:

1Cor. 6:18 Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.

1Cor. 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

1Cor. 6:20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

- Similar things are said in 1 Corinthians 3 and 2 Corinthians 6

Rom. 6:11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Rom. 6:12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,

Rom. 6:13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

- So, obviously the condition of our bodies is not meaningless to God
 - He wants our bodies to be respected and honoring to God
 - At times we know He desires to heal us so that He may receive glory for his compassion and mercy
- But so often our theology in this area glosses over the details and simply runs to the conclusion that keeping our bodies healthy is one of the spiritual precepts from God, and we often cite passages like the ones I quoted to prove the point
 - But did you pay close attention to those passages?
 - Did they talk about seeking physical health, preserving physical strength or protecting the beauty of the body?
 - Did they persuade us to strive for a long life ?
 - Did they talk about what we should eat?
 - Did they talk about health at all really?

- If you listened carefully, you noticed they all spoke about refraining from sinning with our bodies
- Paul instructs us to flee immorality, especially immorality committed with the body – sins that involve physical acts of immorality
 - God's Holy Spirit indwells us and therefore, He owns our body
 - By using our body for immoral purposes, we essentially bring the Holy Spirit with us into our sin, making Him an unwilling witness to our depravity
 - So our instruction from Paul is to honor the Holy Spirit's presence in our bodies by fleeing immorality and using our bodies to glorify God
- Paul taught essentially the same thing in Romans, emphasizing the importance to not allow sin to reign in the body
 - But here's the truth about what you'll find in the Bible regarding how we treat our bodies
 - Apart from sin issues like gluttony, immorality or eating food sacrificed to idols, the scriptures say almost nothing about how we treat our bodies strictly for the purpose of health
 - Some may be tempted to raise the issue of the dietary laws given in the Mosaic Covenant
 - But of course we know as Christians, we are not bound by that law – nor does anyone I know try to keep it
 - In truth, the dietary law was like the rest of the law – a schoolmaster to drive us to Christ by demonstrating our unrighteousness
- So, we're left chiefly with one view in scripture: we should not focus on the earthly body, but set our mind on eternal things knowing God is sovereign.
 - He has set the length of our life
 - He expects us to use our body to glorify Him
 - In many of his teachings, Paul compares our bodies to the temple of God...so what was the purpose of the temple?
 - To worship and glorify God
 - Are you using your body to bring glory to God?
- We know we are to devote all we can in our finances to the kingdom, not storing treasure in heaven...
 - So if I were to take the Biblical perspective of bodily health, and do the same – devote my body to serving God with as just much commitment and energy as I commit my finances, what would that look like?
- And that brings us to our passage tonight, which we'll cover in two parts beginning in 2 Corinthians 4:5-12

2Cor. 4:5 For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.

2Cor. 4:6 For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God

in the face of Christ.

2Cor. 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;

2Cor. 4:8 we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; 2Cor. 4:9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;

2Cor. 4:10 always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

2Cor. 4:11 For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

2Cor. 4:12 So death works in us, but life in you.

- Paul had a vitally important ministry in the early church
 - In fact, there probably isn't a man after Christ who could be considered as important to the church as Paul
- ◦ I read one article on Paul written by an unbelieving Jewish scholar who asserted that it was more accurate to say that Paul founded the Christian church
- And Paul knew how important his ministry would be – Jesus gave him that insight and understanding
- So if ever there were a man who could claim that preserving the health of his body was the most important thing he could do to advance the kingdom of God, it would have been Paul
 - Can't you hear Paul's words now...
 - "Therefore, it is with sorrow that I must remain here in Ephesus rather than embark on such a long and difficult journey to greet the brothers in Macedonia, for I must preserve my strength so that I might minister to the saints for as many years as I am able."
 - Wouldn't that make sense to our modern view of preserving the health of the body?
 - Or the other popular view on health would have Paul saying:
 - "I have this thorn in my side, but I have cast it out in the name of Jesus and because I had enough faith, God will heal me of this affliction, because He desires that all His children are free of distress."

2Cor. 12:7 Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!

2Cor. 12:8 Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.

2Cor. 12:9 And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

2Cor. 12:10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with

distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

- The truth is Paul lived a miserable life
 - In fact, 4 out of 5 doctors say if you do the things Paul did, you're probably suicidal
 - If there was a way to put his body in harm's way, to subject it to misery, to wear it down, to undermine its health, Paul did it
 - He was stoned, he was beaten, he was jailed under the worst of circumstances
- Our passage today begins with a sobering reminder of what true devotion to a calling requires of us
 - Paul says that though he was filled with the Light of the Holy Spirit as are all Christians, it was placed inside earthen vessels
 - Lamps were often made of crude clay pots that were translucent...
 - He compares the human body to such vessels
 - The only reason those vessels have any value at all is because of what's inside them – the light and life of Christ
 - If you were to find one of these vessels lying around without oil, with no way to light it, you would cast it aside – it would be worthless
- And in fact, it's God's purpose that the container for His light be weak and unimpressive, so that the light can be seen all the more clearly for what it is – the power of God
 - Look at what Paul says in 8-11
 - Our earthly body is constantly suffering for the sake of our ministry: afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, struck down
 - But these afflictions cannot defeat us totally – because that's not their purpose
 - Instead, their purpose is something altogether different and surprising
 - We who live in Christ, Paul says, are being delivered over to these afflictions so that Christ's strength in us may be shown – so that God will receive glory
 - Who exactly is delivering us? Is the enemy delivering us to these circumstances? Does he have such control and does he want to glorify Christ?
 - No, the grammar of the Greek makes clear that the one who delivers us is the same one who is working to glorify Christ
 - It is the Holy Spirit Himself – God in other words
 - God subjects us to these afflictions, but not for the purpose of destroying us – merely to ensure our weakness is always evident – and Christ's strength is always visible
- The most convicting part of Paul's message comes in verse 12
 - He says death works in us, so life works in you

- It's a paradox, and in the Greek it was a commonly understood rhetorical technique – a comparison drawn by contrast
 - Paul says that the more faithful he and others like him are to obey God's will and minister to the Corinthian church, the more they suffered physically
 - Yet the more they did that, the more the Corinthian church prospered spiritually in witnessing the apostles' faithfulness
 - Do you understand what Paul is saying to us here?
- If it's not clear, hold on as we read the second part of this passage together

2Cor. 4:15 For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.

2Cor. 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

2Cor. 4:17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

2Cor. 4:18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

2Cor. 5:1 For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

2Cor. 5:2 For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven,

2Cor. 5:3 inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked.

2Cor. 5:4 For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life.

2Cor. 5:5 Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.

2Cor. 5:6 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—

2Cor. 5:7 for we walk by faith, not by sight—

2Cor. 5:8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

2Cor. 5:9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

2Cor. 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

- Paul doesn't regret the abuse his body is taking for the sake of the Corinthian church, even as much trouble as he's caused them

- He says all that he's done was for their sake and for the glory of God
- And the fact that his body is falling apart doesn't matter one bit to Paul – because he knows who's in charge
 - And he knows that it's part of God's plan that he suffer in the work of the ministry
 - He knows that experiencing trauma to his body was necessary and part of God's plan because of how it diminished Paul's apparent strength and glorified God
 - And why is that necessary? Because he doesn't want to convert people into believers in Paul, he wants to convert people into believers in Jesus Christ
- If Paul were to have lived his life emphasizing his physical health, he would have been doing exactly the same thing as the man who stored up his material wealth on earth
 - Both would be storing their treasure on earth instead of heaven
 - Think about that when you avoid opportunities to minister because of the discomfort it might cause or the physical stress it might produce
 - Or when you can't find time for ministry or serving in the Body because your calendar is too full with activities that grow your pocketbook or shrink your waistline – you're storing up treasure in heaven
- Consider the rest of Paul's words in v 17...
 - The affliction is light and momentary but the rewards are eternal and weighty
 - And we are willing to do such a thing because we see our circumstances with eyes for eternity – not fixated on things of this world, the temporal things of life
 - Then he says that just like our earthly money, the body we have here – this tent he calls it – is temporary and not worth holding onto
 - It will be torn down and God will replace it with something eternal – something every believer should be yearning for and focused on
 - And God even gave us a down payment – a pledge of that future new body in the form of the Holy Spirit
 - But before we get that new body, there will be a test
 - And at the test, called the Judgment Seat of Christ, we will be shown for what we did in this world with what He gave us
 - With the resources He gave us and with the opportunities to serve with our bodies in glory to Him
 - And what will Christ say to you? Why not answer that question right now for yourself?
- Which prosperity gospel are you living by right now?
 - The one that believes that we must seek wealth, pray for wealth, strive for wealth and store up our wealth so that in this world we can feel rich and satisfied?
 - The prosperity gospel that says we have to protect our health, worry over our health, demand God's healing and preservation of our life to the last possible moment so that our strength may be made known in the eyes of the world
 - The prosperity gospel taught in so many deceived churches around the world that

places all the emphasis on our selfish desires and on our fleeting life in this world

- Or are you prepared to believe and to live out the true, biblical view of prosperity and health?
 - The one that trusts God to keep His word in providing for your needs
 - The one that teaches contentment regardless of what God chooses to provide
 - The one that understands that the willingness to spend the wealth of unrighteousness on the kingdom is our test of our trustworthiness with eternal riches
 - The one that does not seek to protect our health and strength to our own glory, but is willing to sacrifice it for the sake of the kingdom and the glory of God
 - The one that sees this world with eyes for eternity, the one that understands the sovereignty of God
- What are you prepared to believe?
 - And what are you prepared to do with what you believe?

Psa. 90:1 Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.

Psa. 90:2 Before the mountains were born

**Or You gave birth to the earth and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.**

Psa. 90:3 You turn man back into dust

And say, “Return, O children of men.”

Psa. 90:4 For a thousand years in Your sight

Are like yesterday when it passes by,

Or as a watch in the night.

Psa. 90:5 You have swept them away like a flood, they fall asleep;

In the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew.

Psa. 90:6 In the morning it flourishes and sprouts anew;

Toward evening it fades and withers away.

Psa. 90:7 For we have been consumed by Your anger And by Your wrath we have been dismayed.

Psa. 90:8 You have placed our iniquities before You, Our secret sins in the light of Your presence.

Psa. 90:9 For all our days have declined in Your fury; We have finished our years like a sigh.

Psa. 90:10 As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, Or if due to strength, eighty years,

Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow;

For soon it is gone and we fly away.

Psa. 90:11 Who understands the power of Your anger And Your fury, according to the fear that is due You?

Psa. 90:12 So teach us to number our days,

That we may present to You a heart of wisdom.

Psa. 90:13 Do return, O LORD; how long will it be? And be sorry for Your

servants.

Psa. 90:14 O satisfy us in the morning with Your lovingkindness, That we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

Psa. 90:15 Make us glad according to the days You have afflicted us, And the years we have seen evil.

Psa. 90:16 Let Your work appear to Your servants And Your majesty to their children.

Psa. 90:17 Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; And confirm for us the work of our hands;

Yes, confirm the work of our hands.



The Fields are White

God's sovereignty in
salvation.

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- You all received the gift of a 2 week break from my teaching, with a business meeting thrown in as a bonus, so I trust you're ready to pick up where we left off in our series on the Sovereignty of God
 - I know at least a few friends of mine who don't normally attend this church happened by last week expecting to see me teaching
 - I think they got about half way through the business meeting before they realized I wasn't on the program for that evening
 - In the end, though, it was a good visit – they were added to the membership rolls, placed on a committee and signed up to bring a casserole at the next fellowship event
- Tonight is the fifth installment in our series called Thy Will Be Done
 - In our first week we addressed how easily we can make the mistake of reducing Jesus into just a Genie, even as his mother Mary seemed to do at one point early in Jesus' ministry – which is why I called that introductory lesson, God or Genie?
 - In the second week we spent time in Genesis learning the purpose of prayer – of why we pray to a God who never changes His mind as scripture tells us
 - In weeks three and four we studied wealth and health issues in scripture
- In all four teachings, I endeavored to select key passages of scripture that embody the fundamentals of each issue – that best capture what the Bible has to say on the topic
 - Tonight I'm going to continue that pattern
- Which leads me to make one small correction to the schedule
 - Next week is world events
 - So the topic for tonight is God's Sovereignty in evangelism, the making of the saints and growing of the church
 - And tonight's lesson is called The Fields Are White
- As Christians we often speak about Jesus' final instructions to the apostles given in the final verses of Gospel of Matthew
 - We commonly call those verses the Great Commission
 - And if you asked a Christian what the great commission actually is, I suspect you would get a variety of answers
 - For example, some might say it means to preach the gospel to all the nations – good answer
 - Some might say it's Jesus' command to Christians to share their faith with their friends and neighbors – another good answer
 - Some might say the Great Commission is to baptize people in the name of Father, Son and the Holy Spirit – also true
 - You might even get some who say the Great Commission is what you earn from making a big sale
- Well for the record, here's what Jesus said:

Matt. 28:18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

Matt. 28:19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, **Matt. 28:20** teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

- Let's consider those words carefully for just a moment
 - All authority has been given to Christ on heaven and earth
 - Now we know that the Father gave Jesus that authority, for there is no other name given in heaven or on earth by which men may be saved
 - Then Jesus says “Go therefore...”
 - Because He has all authority, we can be confident in going as He commands
 - We can be assured that we will not go in vain
 - We can know that our obedience to his command to go will be followed by some measure of success – to include success that doesn't bear fruit until years after we have come and gone
- Paul instructed the Corinthian church on this principle when he said

1Cor. 3:4 For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not mere men?

1Cor. 3:5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one.

1Cor. 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.

1Cor. 3:7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.

1Cor. 3:8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

1Cor. 3:9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

- The focus and credit for building the church – the Body of Christ – believers – is not on the one who plants the seed (an evangelist sowing the Word of God in other words)
 - Nor does it go to the one who may come along later and water what was planted (the one who through love and encouragement nurtures the growth of new life in a believer)
 - Both these people are merely workers in God's field – hired help
 - But God made the growth possible
 - God produced the new life in the believer
 - God receives all the credit for the creation of the building
- Jesus echoes that sentiment in the heart of the great commission
 - In verse 19 He says “make disciples of all the nations”
 - Disciples (*math-e-te-uo*) – a pupil, a student, someone who grows through instruction

- And then Jesus says how we do that
 - First we baptize new believers – baptism serves several purposes, but in this context it simply serves as an essential early test of sincerity
 - When someone claims acceptance of the gospel, they declare their sinfulness and that they believe Jesus is their Messiah
 - But yet they cannot bring themselves to participate in even the simplest public display of commitment – a baptism
 - It draws into question the sincerity of their confession
 - Secondly, we are told to teach them to obey all Jesus commanded His disciples
 - Which is where we get our notion of discipleship – of bringing up new believers in the fundamental teachings of the faith according to Christ
- So, let's review
 - In the Great Commission Jesus told us to make disciples of the nations, and making disciples is:
 - baptizing new believers
 - and teaching them to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ
 - Does something seem to be missing to you?
 - Where did the new believers come from?
 - Doesn't the great commission include converting unbelievers to believers – isn't that part of our responsibility?
 - Well, not exactly. First, it's true that God has purposed to work through men to bring the Good News to others
 - In fact, the word evangelist in Greek means "one who brings good tidings"
 - And we know that through His appointed evangelists – His workers in the field, men like Paul and Apollos – God will bring new life, new growth to a lost and dying world
 - So in that sense, yes, the great commission includes faithful men and women bringing the Gospel to unbelievers, so that they may be converted
- But it's still notable that in His words to the apostles, Jesus made no reference to our responsibility for producing new faith
 - Rather Jesus placed our emphasis squarely on receiving that new spiritual life, confirming it and then maturing it
- You could compare our commission to the role of a doctor assisting with the birth of a new child
 - The doctor wasn't responsible for forming the child in the mother's womb
 - The doctor didn't make the cells divide, form the structures of the body, start the heart beating
 - No, God did those things
 - The doctor simply stood at the end of the assembly line and received the new life as it was born

- Then he washed it
- And then he handed the new life over to caretakers who begin to instruct it and bring it up in the ways of the Lord
 - This is essence of the Great Commission
- Remember the words of Christ in Matthew when he spoke to Peter

Matt. 16:15 He *said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

Matt. 16:16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Matt. 16:17 And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

- Flesh and blood didn't teach Peter that Jesus was the Messiah – only God can reveal that truth through His Holy Spirit
- We would do well to remember that the birth of new life – whether the birth of a physical life or the birth of new spiritual life – is the work of God through His Holy Spirit
- So what does an evangelist bring to the process then?
 - Well Paul answered that question in one short verse:

Rom. 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

- At the hearing of God's word, the Holy Spirit opens the heart to faith
 - The Word pierces the heart (Hebrews 4:12)
 - it is the Sword of the Spirit we're told in (Ephesians 6:17)
 - Now...God's word may reach an unbeliever from the pages of the Bible or it may come from the mouth of an evangelist, but in either case the Word of Christ itself is the tool of the Holy Spirit for faith
 - When an unbeliever says they came to faith reading their Bible, who do we credit? God and His Word of course
 - But have you noticed that those same words, the Gospel from scripture come through the spoken words of an evangelist, we sometimes are prone to credit the evangelist?
 - But the Word of God is just as much responsible for that new faith brought by the Holy Spirit through the words of the evangelist as through the words on the pages of the Bible itself

1Cor. 12:3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is accursed”; and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

- So, the simple way to explain the point of tonight's lesson: God is sovereign in

evangelism – over the birth of new life

- Remember the example I used a few weeks back of the father working on his car with his son
 - The father does all the real work and he invites the son to join him so that the son may benefit from working along side the father
 - Because the son is involved, the work is harder, slower and more error prone as a result, but the Father is willing to put up with lower efficiency because the work benefits the son
 - And the Father loves the son so much, He doesn't want to work without him by his side – even if He could do it better without him
- It's the same in God's work of spreading the good news through us
 - We've been invited to participate with the Father, but if we're not careful, we can begin to claim some measure of credit for any success we experience
 - But God did all the heavy lifting
- Sadly, many churches seem to have lost sight of the sovereignty of God in evangelism
 - Many churches have produced entire generations of Christians that believe that everything depends on them personally
 - Some have even been taught if they do not share the gospel message with someone, they have somehow participated in sealing that person's fate in eternity
 - That somehow they share responsibility for that person's condemnation
- If there is anyone who may feel that way tonight, please allow me to ease your burden
 - Just as no one deserves credit for another man's salvation, no one can be guilty of another man's sin and just condemnation
 - Secondly, God is not dependent on any one man's obedience in order to bring the Good News to another
 - Remember Saul on the road to persecute Christians in Damascus – God was able to bring Him to the knowledge of Christ without the aid of another man
 - Yet God still found a man, Ananias, who would follow through in obedience and disciple Saul into Paul
- However, if you are prone to ignoring the great commission, don't take too much comfort by what I just said
 - Because there are personal consequences for each us when we neglect our responsibility to obey that commission
 - Remember in the 1 Corinthians passage earlier, Paul made mention of rewards for the workers in God's field

1Cor. 3:8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

- If you are a lazy worker who does not do his part in the field, God will simply hire other workers to get the job done

- It's His field and He will not let his crop suffer due to the mistakes of a poor worker
- And those obedient workers will receive the wages that could have been yours
- You know, as workers in God's field, there is another kind of mistake we can make – one that isn't taught very often – one that's different than being lazy – and one that can have even more dire consequences for the church
 - This will lead us into tonight's passage – turn to Acts 8
- In Acts Chapter 7 we see Stephen being stoned
 - Chapter 8 begins with Saul agreeing to the death of the early evangelist
 - You probably remember the story of how Stephen became an evangelist – he signed up to wait on tables
 - He was one of seven men selected to resolve a dispute over feeding widows
 - One of the men was Stephen and another was a man named Philip
 - And the story of Stephen and Philip are closely connected in more than one way
 - After Stephen is stoned to death for his testimony, wide scale persecution breaks out in Jerusalem as a result of his death
 - And this persecution had the result of scattering many of the leaders within the young church to areas outside Jerusalem, as verse 4 explains
 - This is a good example of how God can turn bad circumstances to good, because this scattering had the effect of spreading the Gospel and growing the church even faster
- One of these new leaders is Philip, who travels to a city named Samaria, a place that Jews rarely traveled, since Samaritans and Jews generally despised one another
 - And that's where we begin our passage tonight, in verse 5

Acts 8:5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them.

Acts 8:6 The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.

Acts 8:7 For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.

Acts 8:8 So there was much rejoicing in that city.

Acts 8:9 Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great;

Acts 8:10 and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God."

Acts 8:11 And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts.

Acts 8:12 But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men

and women alike.

Acts 8:13 Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.

- In this city of Samaria, Philip begins his ministry in earnest
 - Before Christ departed the disciples, He is quoted by Mark at the end of his gospel as telling the apostles that they will have unique spiritual powers to aid them in spreading the gospel message in the early church
 - Among those powers are the ability to cast out demons, lay hands on the sick and heal them
 - Here we see Philip doing just that
- What makes Philip's story so interesting is a man named Simon, the magician
 - Simon has been practicing magic in Samaria for some time
 - The text says he was there formerly – *prouparcho* means existing beforehand
 - Now the story makes clear that Simon has real power – demonic power – the black arts
 - His abilities astonished the people of Samaria
 - And Simon gained great advantage from his power
 - He used it to claim that he was someone great and gain the peoples' respect
 - They even claimed he had the Great Power of God – something that sounds suspiciously like a counterfeit version of the Holy Spirit
 - Equally important, I can assure you that Simon would have found ways to turn his abilities into profit
 - He probably performed for money or offered to cast out demons for money, or whatever came to mind
- Then one day Philip walks into town, and with him comes the true Power of God – the Holy Spirit
 - Philip begins to perform the miracles Jesus said he would in Jesus' name
 - And naturally, he amazes the city – and this a city already used to amazing spectacles
 - Many believe and many are baptized
- Now how do you expect Simon to react to this display?
 - Well, the scripture says that Simon was amazed as well – and he believed and was himself baptized
 - But it also says that he continued on with Philip – the Greek word *proskartereo* literally means to never leave his side – so Simon was intently interested observing the continuing miracles Philip is doing
- And I guess if we stopped here, we would have an interesting and encouraging story – an evangelist in his natural habitat

- But of course the story doesn't end, so let's read on:

Acts 8:14 Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John,

Acts 8:15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:16 For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Acts 8:17 Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money,

Acts 8:19 saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

Acts 8:20 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!"

Acts 8:21 "You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.

Acts 8:22 "Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.

Acts 8:23 "For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity."

Acts 8:24 But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

- While the persecution had scattered many within the church like Philip, the apostles had steadfastly remained in Jerusalem
 - But as word began to reach them of how Gentiles – even Samarians – were responding to the Gospel...well, this prompted them to see events for themselves
 - And the scripture says something a bit puzzling here – the believers in Samaria had not yet received the Holy Spirit
 - Though this is not the normal experience for the church today, it did happen in many cases in the early church as recorded in Acts
 - And if you think about it, this difference makes perfect sense
 - The gift to every believer of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a unique characteristic of the church, available only since Pentecost
 - So when this sealing first came to be – both at Pentecost itself and in the years shortly following – God decided to make the indwelling of the Spirit a demonstrable experience
 - Something tangible and visible
 - Something undeniable, so that the early church would have clear evidence that the Father was keeping Jesus' promise to send His spirit to all believers to teach them all things

- Once that fact had been established, the Father ceased giving such immediate visible signs of the arrival of the Holy Spirit
 - Because He doesn't want belief in Him and allegiance to Him to be based merely on what we see, but rather on faith – the things which are unseen
- So the Apostles lay hands on men and women, and they receive the Holy Spirit
 - From the text, it's clear that this process of bestowing the Holy Spirit was visible and impressive
 - No doubt the people who received the Holy Spirit were exceedingly thankful and they certainly gave praise to God and to the apostles for the gift
 - And then there's Simon...Simon, Simon, Simon
 - Simon can't stand it any longer
 - First there was Philip
 - Philip rides into town, and steals the show, takes the crowd away
 - One day business is hopping for Simon, and the next day a competitor with a better act shows up and ruins everything
 - Simon has to take his hat off to Philip
 - You know there's really only one thing a con artist respects and that's a better con artist – at least that's what Simon assumes
 - Philip is cut from the same cloth as Simon, except that he's much, much better
 - Well if you can't beat 'em, you might as well join 'em
 - He's declared himself to be a disciple of Philip, and he's followed Philip constantly trying to learn the secrets of these impressive powers
 - Finally, after Simon watches the Apostles bestowing the Holy Spirit by laying on hands, he can't stand it any longer – he offers money for their powers
- Now maybe you're a bit uncomfortable about my characterization of Simon as someone who merely faked his confession of faith
 - After all the scripture says plainly that Simon believed and was baptized
 - Certainly that should settle the issue – Philip must be a believer, no?
 - Well, first are we saying that false confessions never happen?
 - I hope not, because the truth is they absolutely do happen
 - That's the reason why Peter and John both make strong points in their letters about the need for us to be discerning around others who claim to share our faith – to look for fruit
- Well, if Chap 8 of Acts had ended at the conclusion of our first passage – at about verse 13, then we would have no argument
 - But it didn't
 - And thankfully because it continues, we don't have to guess about Simon
 - We don't have to rely on our intuition and on guess work while looking back two

thousand years of time

- Instead, we can rely on the eye witness statements of the apostles themselves who met Simon, talked to Simon and discerned his heart
- Consider what Peter says to Simon
 - First he says may your silver perish with you – in the Greek Peter literally says “Go to Hell with your money.”
 - And when the Apostle Peter tells you to go to Hell, he means it literally
 - Then he says you have no part or portion in this matter
 - Part = *meris* = no share
 - Portion = *kleros* = inheritance
 - Matter = *logos* = word (as in John 1:1)

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

- In other words, you have no share, no inheritance in the word you've heard
- Then he says Simon's heart is not right before God – read literally in the Greek, Simon has a heart that is not been set straight before God
 - Then Peter tells him to repent before God and pray for forgiveness – but notice Peter adds that if possible, it may be forgiven him
 - For a believer, there is never doubt concerning God's forgiveness
 - Had Simon been a believer, he would have already been forgiven for that sin and every other sin he could possibly commit
 - Yet here the apostles say there is doubt as to whether God will forgive his sin
 - Finally, the nail in Simon's coffin...Peter says he sees that Simon is in the gall of bitterness and bondage of iniquity
 - Interestingly, Peter begins that statement with the word *horao*, which means perceives – Peter has perceived something about Simon, something that can't necessarily be seen
 - First, Peter notices that Simon is in the gall of bitterness
 - This is a colloquial phrase common in scripture, and it always means an intense envy of a person – bordering on hatred
 - Simon envies these powerful men so much he can't stand it
 - Secondly, Simon is still in the bondage of iniquity – he is a slave to sin, rather than a slave to Christ – he is an unbeliever Peter has discerned
 - And in response to Peter's statement, what does Simon say?
 - He says why don't you pray for me instead? The unbeliever's brush off
 - What's scripture teaching us here? Well, it's an example of that second problem I said can happen in evangelism
 - When we lose sight of the real meaning of the great commission and shift our focus to making believers rather than discipling new believers, we risk filling our

churches with Simons

- To be sure, we'll probably also gain our fair share of true believers too
- But have you noticed how few churches make true discipleship the emphasis of their evangelism effort?
 - In fact, most churches have evangelism separate from discipleship – but evangelism is all about baptizing and discipling
- As I travel from church to church, and watch the mega churches on television or read the books on the bookstore shelves, it's apparent that too many churches have become content to fill seats with people rather than filling hearts with the Word of God
 - For example, I wonder what percentage of new believers are actually baptized in most churches today
 - And how many of those are ever taken aside and personally discipled to grow in the knowledge and grace of Jesus Christ
 - For example, by participation regularly in solid Bible study programs
 - Listen to what George Barna said:

“Our studies consistently show that churches base their sense of success on indicators such as attendance, congregant satisfaction, dollars raised and built-out square footage. None of those factors relates to the kind of radical shift in thinking and behavior that Jesus Christ died on the cross to facilitate. As long as we measure success on the basis of popularity and efficiency, we will continue to see a nation filled with people who can recite Bible stories but fail to live according to Bible principles.”

- And I submit to you that one of the reasons this situation exists is because the Church has largely ignored the Biblical teaching of God's sovereignty in evangelism
 - We've replaced reliance on the Holy Spirit to produce new faith with a reliance on new methodologies and slick church growth tactics
 - We've jettisoned our solemn responsibility to confirm new faith and disciple it, and replaced it with superficial weekly experiences that merely fill a square on our calendar
 - And even though your congregation may not be part of the problem, as part of the body of Christ, I believe we all share in the blame
- Now I would like to end tonight on a positive note, and thankfully the rest of Chapter 8 gives me the opportunity to do so
 - Because after Philip leaves Samaria, he has a new experience
 - Philip hears from the Holy Spirit and here's what happens:

Acts 8:26 But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, “Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a desert road.)

Acts 8:27 So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her

treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship,

Acts 8:28 and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah.

Acts 8:29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go up and join this chariot.”

Acts 8:30 Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

Acts 8:31 And he said, “Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Acts 8:32 Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this:

“HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER;
AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT,
SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH.

Acts 8:33 “IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY;

WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION?

FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH.”

Acts 8:34 The eunuch answered Philip and said, “Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?”

Acts 8:35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

Acts 8:36 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch *said, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?”

Acts 8:37 [And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”]

Acts 8:38 And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.

Acts 8:39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.

- It's so important to note that this second account appears within the same chapter as the account of Simon
 - Because it stands in stark contrast to the events in Samaria
 - Where one experience turned on miraculous signs and wonders, the other relied on the Word of God
 - Where one experience had to wait for the Holy Spirit to appear to confirm faith, the second experience had the Holy Spirit involved even before it began
- The Spirit calls Philip to go out into the field
 - Philip responds and the worker enters his field, for the fields are white for the harvest
 - The Spirit prepares the ground, the heart of a man to receive the seed – the Word of God
 - The Spirit directs Philip to that man, where the sowing begins
 - As the man endeavors to understand the Word, he falls short and needs someone to explain its meaning

- So the Holy Spirit prompts Philip to join him, so he may explain the truth and faith begins to grow
- And new faith prompts obedience, so the man seeks baptism and Philip complies
- And once the worker has completed his assigned task, the Master moves him to new ground, leaving others to nurture the new believer who rejoices
- What a beautiful scene and what a simple picture of how God does the work and yet we are invited to join Him
 - If you are ready to obey the great commission, then model your ministry after the second half of Acts 8
 - Listen to the leading of the Holy Spirit
 - Watch for signs of a heart prepared by the Holy Spirit, of someone who has ears to hear
 - Bring the Gospel by way of the Word of God
 - Emphasize the importance of baptism as a confirmation of new faith
 - And entrust that new believer in the care of those who will disciple him or her in the meat of the Word and the Love of other believers



Having a Common Purpose

God's sovereignty in
world affairs and world

disasters.

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- On September 11, 2001, terrorists hijacked 4 airliners, flying them into the World Trade Centers, the Pentagon, and a field in Pennsylvania, resulting in the deaths of 3,076 people
- On April 20, 1999, 2 teenagers entered their high school in Littleton Colorado and systematically murdered 19 people before taking their own lives
- On December 26, 2004, an earthquake in the Indian Ocean produced a tidal wave that destroyed coastlines from East Africa to Indonesia resulting in the deaths of more than 174,000 people
- These three dramatic events – separated by time and great distances – would appear to have little in common
 - Each took their toll from different communities, under different circumstances
 - Each had different causes and consequences
 - But for all their differences, all three events shared at least one thing in common
 - All three events so shocked the conscience, so stunned the world by their horror and senselessness that all three prompted a common question:
 - How could a loving God permit such things to happen?
- Of the 7 topics I've chosen for my series on the Sovereignty of God, I imagine that none will make so obvious and yet at the same time so controversial an opening statement as the one I will make tonight:
 - God is sovereign over every event that occurs in all His creation throughout all of time
 - On the one hand, my statement is obviously true – because I'm sure we agree that there can be no higher power in all creation than the very Creator Himself
 - That the God who has the power to speak the entire universe and all that fills it into existence merely by His Word, must by necessity have all power and authority over it
 - That there is no other power that could possibly intervene to contend with – much less match – the power of God
 - That whether by His active intervention or by His willful restraint, God purposes all things to occur exactly as they do
 - In fact, when we ask the question itself – How can God allow such things – we are indirectly acknowledging that God had the capability to prevent such things, which then causes us to ask why did He not?
 - Charles Spurgeon said it far better than I ever could when he wrote:

I believe that every particle of dust that dances in the sunbeam does not move an atom more or less than God wishes – that every particle of spray that dashes against the steamboat has its orbit, as well as the sun in the heavens – that the chaff from the hand of the winnower is steered as the stars in their courses. The creeping of an aphid over the rosebud is as much fixed as the march of the devastating pestilence – the fall of... leaves from a poplar is as fully ordained as the tumbling of an avalanche.

- On the other hand, my statement, if we ponder it long enough, ultimately leads us to controversy
 - Because as soon as we begin to consider all that scripture has to say about God's control over the events of history, we find ourselves wrestling with issues of evil, sin and man's relationship to God
 - It's as though we begin our search for the answer by drawing a line in the sand, and declaring that God's sovereignty goes only this far and no more
 - Then we read scripture and come across verses or details which force us to erase our first line and redraw it a little closer to us and a little farther from God
 - While I have no hope whatsoever of addressing every aspect of this complex and literally mind boggling area of God's sovereignty, I do believe there is so much more that could be said on this topic than is typically addressed in pulpits across the country
 - And along the way, brothers and sisters, I hope I can show you why this is not an issue reserved for discussions among academics
 - This is not a topic that only pastors and theologians should tackle
 - This is not some abstract, irrelevant, unprofitable debate
 - The issue of God's authority and the extent of His control over the events of this world cuts to the core of our faith and its meaning
 - It is the foundation for our confidence in the prophecy found in the Old Testament
 - It is the basis for our hope in God's promises given in the New Testament
 - The ability to exercise control over all space, time and matter is the very definition of what it means to be the true living God – the Creator – the one we desire to worship
- So, make no mistake, this discussion truly matters
 - For if it were possible to cast doubt on the sovereignty of our God over all that He has created and all that He has declared by His word
 - Then we will have also cast doubt on His ability to carry it out and to fulfill His promises to us
 - And if there is doubt in God's ability to carry out His promises according to His will, then as Paul said in his first letter to the Corinthians, we are of all men most to be pitied
 - So tonight my goal is to help you take a few steps toward understanding and appreciating the Sovereignty of God over world events, a lesson entitled Having a Common Purpose
 - And as always, the understanding we seek is not philosophical, not worldly, not one that appeals to our pride – but rather the Biblical view
 - But in order to get where we're going, it's important to know where we're starting from
 - I believe you can group all opinion on the issue of God's Sovereignty over his creation into essentially one of three groups (at least among those who believe in a higher power):

- ONE = There are those who believe that God created the world and the universe, and then like someone spinning a top, He now stands back to watch it work itself to conclusion
 - And like the spinning top, God's hand never again touches His creation or intervenes in its course
- TWO = There is a second group who believe that God created the world and He continues to intervene in it to change the course of history from time to time
 - He intervenes in both natural and supernatural ways, and always for good purposes, ultimately to bring events to His desired outcome
 - Implicit in this second view is the principle that some things lie outside God's control – outside His sovereignty
 - Evil, for example, is an independent force, one that operates apart from God's desires and intentions and against His will
 - Many would also agree that man himself operates in freedom from the direct control of God – that God would not intervene to change the mind or will of man
- THREE = Finally, our third group are those whose view of God's Sovereignty sees no limit. All things were created by Him and are sustained by Him.
 - He doesn't just intervene to redirect history from time to time, He writes every page of history
 - He directs all things, controls all things, governs all events on Earth so that everything may happen according to a preordained plan
 - One example of this view can be seen in the 1689 Confession of faith for the historic Reformed Baptist movement in London:

God who, in infinite power and wisdom, has created all things, upholds, directs, controls, and governs them, both animate and inanimate, great and small, by a providence supremely wise and holy, and in accordance with His infallible foreknowledge and the free and immutable decisions of His will. He fulfills the purposes for which He created them, so that His wisdom, power and justice, together with His infinite goodness and mercy, might be praised and glorified. Nothing happens by chance or outside the sphere of God's providence. As God is the First Cause of all events, they happen immutable and infallibly according to His foreknowledge and decree, to which they stand related. Yet by His providence God controls them, that second causes, operating either as fixed laws, or freely, or in dependence upon other causes, play their part in bringing them about.

- Some might criticize those who hold this view as merely adhering to fatalism, to which Charles Spurgeon, himself a member of this third group, replied:

What is fate? Fate is this – Whatever is, must be. But there is a difference between that and Providence. Providence says, Whatever God ordains, must be; but the wisdom of God never ordains anything without a purpose.

Everything in this world is working for some great end. Fate does not say that. . . . There is all the difference between fate and Providence that there is between a man with good eyes and a blind man.

- I believe it is fair to say that most unbelievers today likely fall into the first of these three groups (assuming they are not atheists)
 - They are content to acknowledge the existence of some higher power, but their pride and hard hearts will never allow them to concede that this higher power actually has influence over them, much less controls their lives and their future
 - Sadly, even a few Christians fall into this group
- Most Christians, on the other hand, probably fall into Group 2
 - Aware of God's ultimate control over the larger events of the world and history. They believe in His prophecy, but they often attribute it to foreknowledge – His knowing the future – rather than to His providence – determining the future
 - But their belief in His Sovereignty turns to uncertainty when deciding where to draw the line in His control over smaller matters of everyday life, or over our personal choices and or over the effects of sin and evil
- Few Christians today, however, are willing to venture into Group 3
 - In fact, few have even heard it suggested that there is no event –
 - That not the smallest meaningless events of our everyday lives
 - That not our personal decisions whether impulsive or well-considered
 - That not even Satan's choices and actions –
 - Remain outside His direct and constant control
 - And yet, when we all consider a great tragedy and are tempted to ask How could a loving God allow such things, we have unknowingly placed ourselves – if even for just a moment – into Group 3
 - Even just by asking the question we are stating, for example, that we believe God could change the decisions and actions of two disturbed teenagers in Colorado
 - That He could have altered the paths and opportunities of 19 hijackers and thousands of other people on September 11th to prevent that destruction
 - That He could have held back the sea and calmed the earthquake that devastated hundreds of thousands
- Well, could He? What does the Bible say about God's control over His creation?
- First, God is sovereign over the substance of the creation, over all weather, over all natural forces, over all the animal kingdom
 - The Bible abounds with examples, but to remind you of a few:
 - In almost every book of the Old Testament, God is credited at times with bringing huge harvests, bringing famine, bringing rain, bringing drought, bringing lightning and thunder, bringing life and death

Psa. 147:15 He sends forth His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly.

Psa. 147:16 He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes.

Psa. 147:17 He casts forth His ice as fragments; Who can stand before His cold?

Psa. 147:18 He sends forth His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow and the waters to flow.

- The story of Moses in Egypt is a tour de force of God's sovereignty over the forces of nature with hail, insects, animals, and even the heavens themselves responding in unison to God's commands
 - In the Gospels, we hear the apostles exclaim as they watch Jesus calm the storm on the sea of Galilee that He even commands the wind and sea. Yes, He does.
 - In the book of Daniel, we can read of God holding back the jaws of a lion
 - In Numbers we see God speaking through the mouth of a donkey
 - In 1 Samuel Chapter 6, God directs two nursing cows yoked to a cart to go against their most urgent instincts and walk away from their newborn young so they may return the ark of the covenant to the Jewish nation
- Our examples could literally go on all night, but the conclusion is already obvious:
 - There is no such thing as mother nature
 - There is nature and it has a father who will not share His control over it with anyone

Psa. 135:5

And that our Lord is above all gods.

For I know that the LORD is great

Psa. 135:6 Whatever the LORD pleases, He does,

In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.

- Now you might be thinking that the fact that God can control all things doesn't mean He chooses to take that control
 - For example, was God responsible for the tsunami of last winter?
 - Did that tragedy happen because God made it happen, or did it happen by natural forces and God merely permitted it to happen?
 - This is a false dichotomy – a distinction without a difference
 - Since we know from scripture that God can make waves respond to his word (remember the flood of Noah?)
 - We also know he could stop these events if He wished
 - He could have stopped that wave with one word from His mouth – just as He created all waters with His Word in the first place
- Therefore, whether He ordained that event by His initiating it or He ordained it by refraining from stopping them, in either case He ordained it – He wanted it to happen
 - It's like the little boy who stands in a park with a baseball, and tosses it straight up above his head, and as it falls he ponders whether to catch it or let hit the ground
 - Whether he chooses to take action and reach out to catch the ball or he chooses to

withhold action and allow the ball to hit the ground, either way it was the boy's choice and his desire that determined the ball's fate – so it is with God

- The inescapable conclusion we come to is that all natural events happen because He desires them to happen
 - And this stands true even in the greatest of calamities, because God tells us He deserves the credit

Is. 45:5 “I am the LORD, and there is no other;

Besides Me there is no God.

I will gird you, though you have not known Me;

Is. 45:6 That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun

That there is no one besides Me.

I am the LORD, and there is no other,

Is. 45:7 The One forming light and creating darkness,

Causing well-being and creating calamity;

I am the LORD who does all these.

Amos 3:6 If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble? If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?

- Both Isaiah and Amos state the obvious – if we are prepared to give God credit for the good things that happen in His creation, than we must also be prepared to recognize that calamity occurs on His watch as well
- I believe part of our difficulty in accepting that God ordains such things to happen stems from our concerns over the loss of innocent life. We find it hard to accept that God would allow or even instigate the taking of innocent life
 - Here again, I believe the problem can be found not with God or His nature, but in our perspective
- Imagine with me a story of a woman living in a desert town. She leaves the gates of her city one day to walk a few miles to draw water from a nearby creek. As she turns to head back to her home and to her relatives, she is shocked to watch huge fireballs descend from the sky instantly engulfing her town, utterly destroying it and all its inhabitants in flames
 - With her city destroyed, her family killed, even her children, the woman falls to her knees crying to God in the way so many have done over the centuries. How could God have allowed such calamity to come upon her and her city...her beloved city of Sodom – a city God Himself chose to destroy
 - You see the problem is the world has a false understanding of how God defines innocence and guilt – of what makes a death justified and what makes a death unfair

Rom. 3:9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;

Rom. 3:10 as it is written,

“THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; Rom. 3:11 THERE IS NONE WHO

**UNDERSTANDS,
THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;
Rom. 3:12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;
THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”**

James 2:10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

- Rom 6:23 - For the wages of sin is death – the payment due to all who sin is death –
- And the definition of sin does not depend on a conscious knowledge that we have sinned...even the Law has a provision for sacrifices to cover unknown unintentional sin
 - No, we inherit our sin nature from Adam
 - When Adam sinned, his very spiritual nature changed
 - Though Adam was created without sin, once he sinned he became a different creature, a fallen creature with a nature opposed to God
 - And since God had decreed during creation that both man and animal would reproduce after their own kind, Adam's new fallen nature would by necessity be passed on to all who descended from him
 - So every person ever born has been born with Adam's dead nature, a corrupt nature, a sinful nature – a nature opposed to God
 - No less a man than King David recognized this fact about himself when he wrote...

Psa. 51:1 According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.

Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;

Psa. 51:2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin.

Psa. 51:3 For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me.

Psa. 51:4 Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight,

So that You are justified when You speak

And blameless when You judge.

Psa. 51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,

And in sin my mother conceived me.

- Part of our inability to understand how God could be responsible for, or even just allow, events that cause death is that we fail to grasp the true depravity of the human heart – the degree to which the world justly deserves God's wrath
 - As unbelievers, there is never a moment in the life of any human being prior to faith when we stand sinless and without blame before God
 - We were all conceived with a fallen nature – a nature that is opposed to Him and can never please Him apart from faith – and we all deserve judgment for it
- In fact, there has only ever been one innocent life who ever walked this earth, a man

not born of man's seed and therefore who did not inherit Adam's sinful nature

- But a man born of the Holy Spirit through a virgin...and even that one innocent life God saw fit to put to death – to suffer great violence for the sake of the greater good
- God has numbered our days, and it is in His control when, where and how each life comes to an end – as is the potter's right over His clay
 - But where then does Evil and the demonic realm fit into all this?
 - Some Christians and non-Christians alike are prone to elevating Satan to the point where we almost see him and God as opposite but equal
 - But the demonic forces are merely created beings, so they too fall under God's authority
 - John wrote in his first letter that He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world – meaning God is greater than the Enemy
 - And we know that Jesus Himself commanded demons to leave the bodies of men and women, and they obey
 - In Mark Chapter 5 we read...

Mark 1:27 They were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.”

Mark 5:11 Now there was a large herd of swine feeding nearby on the mountain.

Mark 5:12 The demons implored Him, saying, “Send us into the swine so that we may enter them.”

Mark 5:13 Jesus gave them permission. And coming out, the unclean spirits entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, about two thousand of them; and they were drowned in the sea.

- Remember Job...Job lost his family, his business, and his health because God permitted Satan to do it – Satan essentially was God's agent in that action
 - Satan was never outside God's control, He required God's permission for His every act, God even set the limits of how far he could go
- But when we talk about God having sovereignty over the demons, we're not simply talking about God holding back evil from time to time, restraining evil...
 - God frequently is seen commanding the demonic realm to do His bidding

Judges 9:22 Now Abimelech ruled over Israel three years.

Judges 9:23 Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, Judges 9:24 so that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood might be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers.

1Sam. 16:14 Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized him.

1Sam. 16:15 Saul's servants then said to him, "Behold now, an evil spirit from God is terrorizing you.

- Even in the death of His Son on the cross, God was in control of the Enemy
 - He again used Satan through a disciple Judas – a disciple that Jesus knowingly chose so that He would be betrayed – so that His Son would be put to death

John 6:70 Jesus answered them, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?"

John 6:71 Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him.

- Then God granted Satan the opportunity to use Judas and the Jewish and Roman leaders to do His bidding in murdering His Son as we're told in Acts

Acts 4:26 The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.'

Acts 4:27 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.

Acts 4:28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

- Perhaps the most power example of God's control over the demonic realm still lies in the future
 - In the final days in the book of Revelation, there comes a moment right before Christ returns to rule the earth, when the world has fallen under the control of a Satan-possessed man called the Antichrist, also known as the Beast
 - He rules the entire world with the help of 7 world leaders who answer to his dictatorial authority and have relinquished their authority to the Antichrist, to the Beast, allowing him to do what he wishes with their armies
 - And in Revelation 17 we hear why they do this:

Rev. 17:17 "For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled.

- Consider those words again...God directed these kings to give their allegiance – even their very kingdoms – to the control of Satan himself, so that the words of God will be fulfilled
 - The kings will believe they are acting by their own initiative – they will think it's

their idea, their purpose

- But God gave them that purpose – He made them share a common purpose, controlling their decisions without them realizing it
- Those verses confirmed not only God's sovereignty over the demonic realm, but it also gave us our introduction into the final issue for tonight: God's sovereign rule in men's lives
 - No doubt this is the hardest issue for us to come to grips with – the one with which we struggle the most
 - For example, how could God intervene in the decisions of men when our own perspective tells us constantly that we are the ones making our own decisions
 - I wonder how surprised those future kings will be to learn that God was the one who caused them to give over their kingdoms
- Even more troubling, since men act in sin yet God is not the author of sin, how can God be credited with men's actions?
 - Jonathan Edwards answered that point using an analogy of our Sun
 - By its very nature, the sun gives the earth light and heat, and when it drops below the horizon, it leaves the world dark and cold – but the sun is not the source of darkness and cold
 - If the sun were the proper cause of cold and darkness, he says, it would be the fountain of these things, as it is the fountain of light and heat:
 - But it is not a fountain of darkness and cold, and so it is with God
 - God not the fountain of sin, nor does it please Him, yet He still has sovereignty over it and can control it and may determine where it leads and what it will do, so that He may turn all things to good...
- In truth, it's rather easy to point to example after example in scripture of men being directed by God, God controlling their lives and decisions
 - God using Pharaoh and his sin to display His glory throughout the world as He freed Israel from bondage
 - God using Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army to devastate Jerusalem and take the nation of Israel captive for 70 years as punishment for their ignoring the Sabbath over their land
 - God using the hatred of men in Jerusalem to scatter the early church and ensure the spread of the Gospel message, as we studied last week
 - Or God consecrating John the Baptist for a life of ministry even before he was born, by giving him the Holy Spirit even while he was in the womb and announcing that his life would be set aside for one purpose
- Did any of these men have a chance to object to how God decided to use them? Did they even understand in the moment that God was in control and not them? Do any of us ever take time to realize that?
- Tonight we will revisit probably the most famous example of God's sovereignty over the events of men's lives by looking at the story of Joseph
 - But due to length of that story, we will cover it a little differently than as a single passage

- Instead, we are going to piece together the key details of his story from across scripture, paying close attention to how God acted through the lives of men
- The story of Joseph actually begins in Chapter 15 of Genesis, when God confirms His covenant with Abram

Gen. 15:13 God said to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.

Gen. 15:14 “But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions.

Gen. 15:15 “As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age.

Gen. 15:16 “Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.”

- God planned for the descendants of Abram to be enslaved for four generations in a foreign land
 - He gives a hint of why in these verses – because the iniquity of the Amorite was not yet complete
 - That God was not yet ready to judge the sin of the people living in the promised land, the Canaanites
 - But that doesn't explain why the Nation of Israel must be enslaved during that time
- That answer comes in Chapter 38 of Genesis
 - In Chapter 38 we see Judah, the man from whom the Messiah would come, disobeying God's direction and marrying a Canaanite wife
 - Together they produce three sons
 - The sons are so depraved, that God literally puts one of them to death because he was so evil and then kills another because he refuses to produce heirs for Judah
 - Judah is so distraught, that he will not give His only remaining son to marriage fearing his death as well – so now the corruption by the Canaanite's culture that God warned would happen is threatening to put an end to the Jewish line that would bring the Messiah
- So that brings us to Joseph
- We're told in Genesis 37 that Joseph receives a dream from God
 - Joseph tells his elder brothers that in the dream he would one day rule over them and over his parents, and naturally they became jealous and angry with him
 - They plotted against him and they determine one day to destroy him so that his dream could never come true

Gen. 37:18 When they saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death.

Gen. 37:19 They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer!

Gen. 37:20 “Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, ‘A wild beast devoured him.’ Then let us see what will become of his dreams!”

- As they are considering killing him, at the last minute they see traders heading to Egypt, so the brothers took the opportunity to sell him into slavery instead

Gen. 37:25 Then they sat down to eat a meal. And as they raised their eyes and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing aromatic gum and balm and myrrh, on their way to bring them down to Egypt.

Gen. 37:26 Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood?

Gen. 37:27 “Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” And his brothers listened to him.

Gen. 37:28 Then some Midianite traders passed by, so they pulled him up and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt.

- So who's idea was it to sell Joseph into slavery? Was it the brothers' idea?
 - Well, consider later that after Joseph becomes second in command of Egypt, his brothers eventually come seeking food during a great famine
 - As they come before him not knowing who he is, they bow down before him – later the rest of his family – the whole Jewish nation joins the brothers in Egypt and pay their respects to Joseph
 - And when that happens, the dream Joseph had has come true
- So, now consider that God gave Joseph a dream that caused the brothers to get so jealous and angry. that they plot to kill Joseph
 - When they finally decide to take action, the Scripture says they believe their choice will ensure the dream never comes true
 - But of course, their actions only ensured that the dream would come true...so who was making the choices: God or the brothers?
 - Psalm 105 explains it this way:

Psa. 105:17 He sent a man before them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave.

Psa. 105:18 They afflicted his feet with fetters, He himself was laid in irons;

Psa. 105:19 Until the time that his word came to pass, The word of the LORD tested him.

Psa. 105:20 The king sent and released him, The ruler of peoples, and set him free.

Psa. 105:21 He made him lord of his house
And ruler over all his possessions,

**Psa. 105:22 To imprison his princes at will,
That he might teach his elders wisdom.**

- God sent Joseph to Egypt, not the brothers
 - It was God’s plan that Joseph be enslaved and later imprisoned so that Joseph might be tested

Gen. 45:7 And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

Gen. 45:8 So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

Gen. 50:19 But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place?

Gen. 50:20 “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

- And it was God’s way of teaching Joseph’s elders, his brothers, wisdom...and it certainly had that effect
 - Are we saying that God caused the brothers to sin...absolutely not
 - But as the brothers sought to sin, because their hearts were depraved by nature, God then directed it so that His good purposes would be met by their sin – yet they would still see consequences for their mistakes
- Our story is quite over, because for many years the nation of Israel lived in Egypt, just as God foretold to Abram
 - God was waiting for the right time to judge the Amorites
 - Later, we learn that it was God’s purpose to destroy the Amorites and other peoples in Canaan by the hand of the Jewish armies
 - But of course in Abram’s day, there were no such armies
 - And even by Joseph’s day, there were still only 70 clans in the entire nation of Israel
 - So if God desires Jewish armies sufficient to destroy the Amorites, then it was necessary that the Jewish people continue to grow and prosper as a nation – while remaining separate and uncorrupted by the world around them
 - But if they remained in the land, they would have never survived long enough to become that nation, much less a powerful people
 - Instead, they are taken to a rich country, and set apart from the Egyptians, later enslaved, so that the nation would have no opportunity to mix with other cultures
 - So that on the day appointed, on exactly the day God said it would happen, Moses brings them out of Egypt, nearly 2 million of them, just as God promised Abram 430 years earlier
- Now think about all the thousands of people who had to make millions of decisions in those 430 years to ensure that specific outcome would take place on that specific day

- The marriages that had to take place, the children that were born
 - The many details of life both great and small that had to combine so that everything would happen as God directed
 - And we're not simply talking about God predicting the future...we're talking about God obviously controlling the future – in minute detail
 - Because God can plan the end without also planning the means to that end
 - And that means is you and I and millions of people like us
- It's stories like these that causes us to take a second look at where we've drawn that line in the sand between God's control and ours
 - And if you're like me, you've been forced by the truth and power of God's word to move it back and back and back until it's come right up against you and pushing against your pride
 - And it's staring you in the face and it's asking you, who are you to dare draw any line between you and God?
 - That's where we all begin...with a line between us and God
 - God gets only what we want to give Him in our lives
 - But that's God's role. In fact, He not only gets to draw the line, He created the stick, and the sand and He created you
 - But maybe you're someone who's drawn that line a long way away...so far that you can't even see God



Thy Word Above Thy Name

The most important
teaching in this series.

The sufficiency of God's
word.

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- As our summer draws to a close, so does our Wednesday night series on the Sovereignty of God with our last lesson called Thy Will Be Done.
- Of course if you have lived in San Antonio for even a year, then you know that our summer weather continues long after the calendar says summer is over
 - I hope this series will have that same lasting impact in the life of this fellowship and in the lives of the many people who have followed this teaching through the internet
 - I suspect this series at times has probably made a few people as uncomfortable as a San Antonio summer
 - And I know some folks felt like a few of those Wednesday nights lasted as long as a San Antonio summer
 - But nevertheless, relief is in sight
- Tonight's lesson, the final installment in this series, explores the most important and most under-appreciated area of God's sovereignty – His sovereignty in and through His Word – The Word of God
 - I'm not talking about the inerrancy of God's Word – God's sovereignty over the accuracy of His Word. That too is an important lesson, but it's not the lesson for tonight
 - Tonight's lesson is focused, rather, on the sufficiency of God's Word – a principle all but forgotten by the modern church
- Throughout this series, as we've examined the various aspects of God's sovereignty in His creation – over wealth, health, prayer, evangelism, world events – at various times I've taken elements of the church to task for its immaturity in these areas
 - I objected to the church teaching that our prayers are designed to give God new thoughts when the Bible says our prayers are designed to give *us* new thoughts
 - I objected to the church teaching that God's desire is to give us material wealth in this lifetime when the Bible clearly teaches that God's desire is that we spend our worldly wealth freely so that we may build up treasure in heaven
 - I lamented how the church encourages Christians to see their physical health as a key measure of God's blessing when scripture demonstrates repeatedly that those who are most obedient and committed in living their faith usually face the greatest earthly trials and sufferings
 - I expressed my concern over how the church has twisted the Great Commission into a marketing initiative designed to create believers, while the Bible teaches that only God can create faith so the church is called to baptize and make disciples of new believers.
- Finally, last week I explained how the church has lost an appreciation of God's control over all things great and small leading to a culture of fear and dread over world events
 - Rather than resting on the promises of scripture that tell us never to fear
 - To trust in God's goodness, and...
 - To rest in His promise to work all things to good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose
- Now in each week you noticed we turned to scripture for correction on these issues, to know the truth, to find our path and set a new course

- This was no accident...it wasn't merely a practice of habit
- It's because truth is found in His Word. A truth that is completely and entirely sufficient for all our needs, concerns and instruction.
- It was because of the sufficiency of God's Word
- So tonight, we conclude our series Thy Will Be Done with the seventh lesson entitled "Thy Word Above Thy Name."
 - We're going to move a little closer to home with tonight's topic...
 - Tonight we'll consider God's power to do the greatest work of all – to change us through His Word
- One of the fastest growing genres of non-fiction books are the self-help books, books that promise solutions to all of life's problems
 - Many of these books are secular, using principles drawn from modern psychology, new age mysticism, medicine and other sources. Examples: Oprah, Dr. Phil, etc.
 - But a notable minority of these books portray themselves as Christian-focused self help. They promise to help Christians live the good life. To walk closer to Christ, to live out our faith, to get closer to God
 - And just as the world is hooked on self help bestsellers, so are many Christians – both by the Christian books as well as the secular books
- Why are these self help books so popular among Christians?
 - First, because the church has truly come to resemble the world.
 - Judging from how many social problems and persistent sins we share with the unsaved world, I think it's fair to say the church is sick. The church is weak, it's stunted in maturity
 - And as a result, it's often ineffectual in its commission and calling
 - If you think I'm overstating my case, consider these statistics:
 - The Christian's divorce rate is the same or sometimes higher than for the unbelieving world
 - Christians declare bankruptcy at the same rate as unchurched
 - Roughly 10% of Christian teens report having premarital sex and 15% drink alcohol underage and 25% report physical or sexual abuse by parents
 - Most believe the true numbers are even higher, since Christian kids actually feel more guilt over their behavior and are therefore less likely to self-report
- But honestly...is it any surprise that Christians share in life's failures at virtually the same rate as the world when we so often seek help from the same sources as the unbelieving world?
 - Christians today are commonly reading the same books as their unbelieving neighbors, we're watching the same television programs, following the same fads, investing their time studying the same powerless teachings
 - And as a result, we end up just as spiritually malnourished as the unbelieving world around us
- So why are so many in the church having so much difficulty living a life that's called out – a life that shows the world the victory they've already won in Christ?

- Because we've largely set aside what it is that makes us different. We've set aside the very source of that power – Christ Himself
- We've set aside the sufficiency of the Word of God
- In the first century church, the writer to the Hebrews was contending with a similar problem when he wrote his letter. Turn with me to our first passage for the night, Hebrews 5
 - Near the end of Chapter 5 in that letter, the writer was about to explain a complicated issue concerning Melchizedek, the high priest from Chapter 14 of Genesis, but the writer paused beforehand to admonish the church with these words:

Heb. 5:11 **Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.**

Heb. 5:12 **For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.**

Heb. 5:13 **For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.**

Heb. 5:14 **But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.**

Heb. 6:1 **Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,**

Heb. 6:2 **of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.**

Heb. 6:3 **And this we will do, if God permits.**

- The writer is forced to pause in his discussion of Melchizedek because he's frustrated at how immature and unprepared this church is for his topic
 - And in fact this church's immaturity extended well beyond merely a poor understanding of Melchizedek
 - He said they had become dull of hearing (*nothros*), which means sluggish, lazy
 - This church can't appreciate these difficult teachings because the church is not accustomed to the difficult work of hearing – of studying – God's truth
 - Notice, this isn't a matter of ability or training or spiritual gifting or role in the church
 - This is a matter of effort and diligence – of commitment to maturing
- If they had been attending to the duties, the writer says this church should by now have gained the capability through study or teaching others about difficult subjects like Melchizedek
 - But of course they are far from that ability, and he is scolding them over it
 - Now understand, he wasn't suggesting they should all have the spiritual gifting of teaching nor even the role of a teacher

- He was merely pointing out that they should have applied themselves to the extent that they obtained enough knowledge and understanding, that if called upon, they could teach someone else
- But they couldn't. In fact, it's worse than that. This church needs remedial education – they've forgotten what little they may have learned in the past
 - The writer says they have need again to be taught the elementary principles from the oracles of God – from the Word of God, in other words.
 - That like an infant they need to return to living on milk rather than solid food
- If you were to take an infant and feed it solid food before it was ready, you would kill it
 - It would choke on it or its digestive tract would not be able to process the food and it would starve
 - It must have something easy to digest, something simple, yet something nourishing. So for an infant, milk is the perfect food.
- But at some point, the child's body reaches its limit on milk
 - It can't grow further without more complex foods
 - The food that sustained it in its early years can't continue to fuel its growth to maturity...it needs solid food
 - But if instead of solid food that child was to continue to be fed milk, the body would begin to grow anemic
 - What was once the perfect food would now become completely useless for the growth and maturing of that body
 - In fact, taken long enough, the milk becomes the death of the child. Growth will cease, strength will fade, sight grows dim, life is extinguished
- That's the writer's concern for this Hebrew church.
 - They received the essential teachings of the church, they received their milk, but when the time for maturing came they never progressed to solid food
 - They remain stunted. They continue to feed on the elementary teachings.
 - In fact, they've now even left those aside, which is why the writer says that they now again have need to repeat those teachings
 - By perpetually subsisting on milk, they have stunted their growth and their very existence as a church is in question
- And just what are these elementary principles? What is the milk that every Christian needs from his earliest days in the faith?
 - The writer lists them in verses 6:1-2
 - First, the need to repent from dead works and show faith toward God - the gospel message
 - As a new Christian enters into their faith, it's important to teach them how that change occurred
 - Of how the Holy Spirit changed them and what grace by faith means
 - Of how works fit into the life of a Christian – being a response to salvation rather than the means of salvation

- Yet so often Christians attend their regular service every Sunday hoping to be edified in the meat of the Word only to discover that the main message in the sermon is yet another exhortation to repent and believe in the Gospel
- Where is the challenge to press on to maturity?
- Secondly, teachings on washings and the laying on of hands – baptism and anointings and giftings, the works of the Holy Spirit in other words
 - The writer says these teachings are milk, something even the newest Christian should be taught and understand
 - And just as with the gospel message, once taught, the Christian should be prepared to put those teachings aside and move on
 - Yet how many of our brothers and sisters remain utterly confused even to this day on what the Bible says on the spiritual giftings, on the purpose and meaning of baptism and on the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Body of Christ
- Third, the resurrection of the dead – an understanding of our destiny to be resurrected in bodily form and to reign with Christ on earth for a thousands years
 - Here again, a elementary teaching for all Christians
- Finally, eternal judgment – the teaching from scripture that all unbelievers will likewise be resurrected into a new body so that they may be judged and suffer the penalty for their sin in the Lake of Fire
- These are elementary teachings the writer to the Hebrews says
 - Something every Christian should learn in Christianity 101
 - How many of our brothers and sisters in Christ really understand much less teach these things?
 - I venture to say not many
 - In fact, I've encountered a few pastors who couldn't adequately explain these things
- And if that's so, then where does our church stand compared to the Hebrew church who received this letter?
 - May I suggest we're just like them if not worse
 - In most churches today, pews on Sunday morning are filled with spiritual infants requiring milk when many should have long ago progressed to solid food
 - And that food is the meat of the Word of God
 - Somewhere along the way churches came up with this crazy idea that only the pastor need understand the depth of the Word
 - If a disciplined, in-depth study of the Word of God is the medicine that can heal us of our sickness of sin...
- Now, consider verse 5:14
 - Those who fail to mature beyond milk and who therefore cannot stomach solid food will never be able to discern good from evil
 - Such a church won't be able to discern good teaching from bad
 - Such a church is likely to fall prey to those teaching a return to the Law, as was

the case in the time of Hebrews

- Or such a church will succumb to false teaching on prosperity, healing, prayer and other issues as is the case in our church today
- Such a church will find men and women submitting to doctrines of works and trying to bear the yoke our spiritual fathers could not bear
- And such a church, a church that cannot discern the good teaching of scripture from the evil teaching of the world, will accept as truth the falsehoods of the unbelieving world
 - Teachings like evolution, The Da Vinci Code, The Word Faith movement, and new age spirituality in all its many forms
- And if our church cannot discern good from evil, then we have no hope of witnessing to the world by the difference in the lives of Christians
- God's sovereignty over His church and over its members begins and ends with the sufficiency of the Word of God
 - We know from a previous night here that Faith itself comes by the Word of Christ, brought into the heart by the Holy Spirit
 - But scripture also teaches that the Word itself is the way God has chosen to change us, mold us, conform us to the likeness of Christ

Heb. 10:12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God,

Heb. 10:13 from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool.

Heb. 10:14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

- Consider that Hebrews 10:14 tells us that Christ's one offering of Himself on the cross perfected believers forever
 - Our perfection before the Father is complete
 - We stand blameless before Him – not by our own account – but by Christ's account – His perfection attributed to us
 - Yet notice that those same individuals who are already perfect in position before the Father yet still must be sanctified – made holy, set apart in perfection
 - How is it that the same ones who are perfect must still be made better?
 - It's because while we stand perfect in position by virtue of Christ's work, we still experience imperfection and sin within our lives
 - And God wishes to remove the presence of sin in us every bit as much as He has already removed the penalty of sin upon us
- And the means by which God does both works is His Word
 - The Word of God is the means both of our justification as well as our sanctification

Eph. 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,

Eph. 5:26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

- Peter encourages the early church in much the same way when he says

1Pet. 2:2 like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

- The word of God will grow the believer in respect to salvation – meaning in living out the perfection that he has already obtained through Christ
- I'm sure most of us have heard the often told story about how God provides for our needs though we don't often recognize His provision
 - A farmer's house is flooded and he crawls onto the roof of his barn to escape the flood waters
 - Multiple rescue craft float by offering aid, but he turns them down stating that God will save him
 - Even a helicopter tries to save him, but he refuses insisting that God will save him
 - Ultimately he dies in the flood, and in Heaven he asks God, why God didn't you send me help after all?
 - And of course you know the ending of the story, God responds by saying I sent three boats and a helicopter, what more did you want?
- And in the church today, I want you to consider that we are all sitting on the top of that farm house even now
 - Our congregation are suffering with crumbling marriages and we watch Oprah to learn how to reconcile, and wonder why divorce rates in the church are no different than in the world
 - Our congregations feel the stress and emptiness of hectic and over committed lives, and we read Dr. Phil for answers, and wonder why church participation plummets
 - Our people come to us with a lack of direction and purpose and fulfillment in their lives, and we give them a 6-week program and a best selling hardback, and six months later we wonder why nothing seems to have changed
 - Our children stray into behaviors and thinking that mirrors the world around them, and so churches respond with youth programs that resemble little more than an MTV concert or summer party
 - And we wonder why so few ever show any spiritual fruit
 - The majority, in fact, leave the church altogether by the time they're adults
- And as the flood reaches the rooftop, and one congregation after another succumb, we watch from our own rooftop wondering why doesn't God do something to preserve His church?
 - And God stands before us now, just as He does in Luke 16 in the story of the rich man and Lazarus

- The rich man, an unbeliever, is in torment while Lazarus, a faithful man, is in comfort attended by Father Abraham
- The rich man recognizes that his family is in danger of this same fate if they don't believe, so he asks Father Abraham:

Luke 16:27 “And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house—

Luke 16:28 for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’

Luke 16:29 “But Abraham *said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’

Luke 16:30 “But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’

Luke 16:31 “But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”

- Abraham tells the rich man that his brothers can look to Moses and the Prophets – the Torah and the prophetic books of the Old Testament – for their warning
 - But the rich man says – oh that's not enough, Father Abraham. They've already dismissed that – they need something bigger, better – something more spectacular to convince them of the reality of hell
 - And Abraham says that if the Word of God isn't enough, then nothing else will work either
- And friends, if the Word of God isn't enough to address our hardships and weaknesses and failures and heartaches and endless number of potholes in the road of our lives, then nothing else will work either
 - Because as we sit atop our farm house waiting for Martha Stewart to save us, or another Chicken Soup for the Soul, or another book about the Bible...and one by one we drown waiting for the solution that never comes
 - And as Hebrews taught, without a life of study and time spent with the Word, we have no hope of ever understanding the truth, much less choosing good over evil and overcoming all the plagues that accompany a life marked by wrong choices
 - Because it is God's sovereign choice to use His Word to accomplish His work in this world and nothing else
 - It is His Word that goes out and will not return void
 - It is His Word through which he created all things and sustains all things
 - It is by His Word that He will make His church Holy
 - Because as it is written in Psalm 138

Psa. 138:2 I will worship toward Your holy temple,
And praise Your name
For Your lovingkindness and Your truth;
For You have magnified Your word above all Your name.

- God has magnified His Word above even His name...
 - So is there any wonder why He won't give satisfaction to those who forsake His Word and go seeking answers elsewhere?
 - The sovereignty of God means He chooses to work miracles in the lives of His people by His Word rather than through other means so that when the work is done, He will rightly receive the glory
- So as we cry to God asking why he has left us to despair in our sinful and hurting lives
 - The Father stands before us saying I sent you the best help I could, I sent you my Son, The Word...
 - He is in you now in the form of my Spirit
 - And He is before you now on the pages of that book
 - With every page testifying to His power and to His sufficiency
 - And yet so often we set it aside. It sits on our shelf like a reference work – like the dictionary
 - And when we get stuck and need to look up a passage, we pull it down
 - Or when we go to church, we drag it along, and maybe we'll open it up
- The Body of Christ is weak and anemic and struggling to live
 - And it's this way because somewhere along the way we pushed the Word of God aside and made it something only our pastors should know in depth – and many of them have abdicated even in that responsibility
 - We've declared the Bible useless and out of step with our times, and we would rather turn to Cosmopolitan magazine and horoscopes for relationship advice
 - And because we don't have the patience to let God work us through our struggles over the years of a lifetime, we would rather read the latest paperback book about the Bible than take the time and effort to read and study the depth of the Bible itself
 - I once heard a pastor say from the pulpit that one of his chief concerns was that people in his congregation were spending too much time in Bible studies
 - He would rather they spent more time in home groups, if I remember right
 - Home groups that rarely opened a Bible, and were led by people who knew little or nothing of scripture themselves, and yet were expected to counsel the group on all of life's challenges – the blind leading the blind, in other words
 - While the Word of God stayed safely zipped in its Bible cover most evenings
- But brothers and sisters, I'm not suggesting we abandon all other church activities
 - I'm pitting Bible study against other pursuits
 - In fact, I would settle for most Christians merely putting spending time in God's Word on a par with all the other things in their schedule that they think are important
 - This isn't an either or...but rather a matter of using the proper tool for the job
 - And if our job is repairing broken lives, building up the faithful, equipping the

saints for ministry and training in righteousness, then our tool is the Word of God

2Tim. 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

2Tim. 3:17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

- And in fact, I'm so convinced in the sovereignty of God by the sufficiency of His word
 - That I believe if we truly want to see revival, to see God's people changed, healed
 - To see, as Paul says,

Rom. 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

- Then we must demand that our leadership inspires us in that way
- Turn to 2 Kings 22

2Kings 22:1 Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty- one years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Jezidah the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath.

2Kings 22:2 He did right in the sight of the LORD and walked in all the way of his father David, nor did he turn aside to the right or to the left.

2Kings 22:3 Now in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent Shaphan, the son of Azaliah the son of Meshullam the scribe, to the house of the LORD saying,

2Kings 22:4 “Go up to Hilkiah the high priest that he may count the money brought in to the house of the LORD which the doorkeepers have gathered from the people.

2Kings 22:5 “Let them deliver it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the LORD, and let them give it to the workmen who are in the house of the LORD to repair the damages of the house,

2Kings 22:6 to the carpenters and the builders and the masons and for buying timber and hewn stone to repair the house.

2Kings 22:7 “Only no accounting shall be made with them for the money delivered into their hands, for they deal faithfully.”

- The nation of Israel had experienced the pain of years spent under poor leadership
 - Past kings had brought Israel into idol worship and widespread apostasy
 - The Word of God had all but disappeared in the nation of Israel
 - In fact it was all but forgotten
 - The temple was in disrepair

- The sacrifices had ceased
- Idols were everywhere
- And since the Word of God had been removed from the minds and hearts of the people, they no longer knew the difference between good and evil and followed their flesh
- But God raises up Josiah...who we're told lived his life like David, neither turning right nor left
 - And as he desires to restore God's house – the temple – he instructs the priest to take the money donated by the people
 - People coming into the temple to worship the idols that were placed there
 - He says use that money to begin repairs on the temple
 - And he says do not ask the workman selected to perform the repair for an accounting of the money they receive
 - Because anyone who Josiah trusts enough to repair the temple of God is certainly trustworthy enough to handle the money for the assignment
- So repair work begins...

[2Kings 22:8](#) Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, “I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD.” And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan who read it.

[2Kings 22:9](#) Shaphan the scribe came to the king and brought back word to the king and said, “Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the LORD.”

[2Kings 22:10](#) Moreover, Shaphan the scribe told the king saying, “Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.” And Shaphan read it in the presence of the king.

[2Kings 22:11](#) When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes.

[2Kings 22:12](#) Then the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Achbor the son of Micaiah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah the king’s servant saying,

[2Kings 22:13](#) “Go, inquire of the LORD for me and the people and all Judah concerning the words of this book that has been found, for great is the wrath of the LORD that burns against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.”

[2Kings 22:14](#) So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter); and they spoke to her.

[2Kings 22:15](#) She said to them, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘Tell the man who sent you to me,

[2Kings 22:16](#) thus says the LORD, “Behold, I bring evil on this place and on its inhabitants, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read.

[2Kings 22:17](#) “Because they have forsaken Me and have burned incense to other

“**god**s that they might provoke Me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore My wrath burns against this place, and it shall not be quenched.””
2Kings 22:18 “But to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of the LORD thus shall you say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD God of Israel, “Regarding the words which you have heard,

2Kings 22:19 because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before Me, I truly have heard you,” declares the LORD.

2Kings 22:20 “Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes will not see all the evil which I will bring on this place.””” So they brought back word to the king.

- As work proceeds, the workman come across a most curious discovery
 - The scroll of the Word of God – specifically the Law of Moses
 - And the words of the Law so struck the king, that he immediately appreciated their importance, and he tore his clothes in mourning and distress
 - This was not a people without religious fervor – there were idols everywhere
 - They looked very holy – but it was an empty shell
 - The appearance of holiness without the substance
 - In fact, these words were so foreign to the King’s ears, that in verse 13 he asks the priest to inquire what these words mean – what is the verdict from God for Israel’s disobedience – for his sake and the sake of all Israel
 - What will God say to this people for how they have treated his word
 - For how they have tossed it aside and buried it beneath their idol worship and forgotten the words from neglect
 - And finally the answer comes to the King from a prophetess
 - God will bring judgment for those who trampled His Word, but He will bring relief in Josiah’s day because He had a heart for God’s word and respect for God’s power
 - Because he humbled his heart and wept before God
 - Because Josiah felt the same pain as our Father in Heaven at the thought of God’s people rejecting God’s word
- As I end this series, I leave you with two final thoughts
 - If you seek the power to truly live the faith you claim, if you seek to know the peace that surpasses all understanding, if you seek to hear your Lord say on the day of your glorification, “Well done, good and faithful servant...”
 - Then you need only spend time with your Lord, in His care and under His instruction, through His Word
 - Service is good, fellowship is helpful, prayer is important, home groups have their place, and the Christian bestseller list may offer encouragement from time to time...

- But only the Word of God has true power
- The sovereignty of God through His Word means that only the Word has the power to change who you are, and what you do, and how you think
- And finally, I know you have embarked upon your search for a new pastor, and though no one asked for my advice, I would like to offer some nonetheless
 - As you consider the qualities that make a good pastor
 - And as you try to list the various characteristics that determine success
 - As you consider your candidates, consider this:
 - Though a man can deliver the most entertaining 25 minute sermon you've ever heard
 - Though he has the resume of Billy Graham
 - Though he has the accounting skills of a Alan Greenspan, the counseling skills of James Dobson, and the management expertise of Jack Welch
- Though he has all those skills
 - If he has no delight in exploring the mysteries hidden in the Word of God
 - If it is his habit to present his flock with the same diet of milk Sunday after Sunday and shrinks from declaring to his congregation the full counsel of God – the height and depth and breadth of the Word
 - If he will not exhort the congregation to study the Word themselves – to make knowledge and understanding of the meat of the word their priority in obtaining the holiness that pleases God
 - And if he does not make knowledge of the word and the ability to teach it the principle qualification for spiritual leadership in His congregation
 - Then he may be effective, and he may be sincere, but his ministry will lack the power to bring maturity and true growth...for he will have come in his own power
- But if you will seek first a man who devotes himself to the scriptures
 - A man who would not neglect the teaching of the Word even to feed the widows of the deacons
 - A man who believes there is no better solution for that which troubles the soul than the one God has already provided in His Word
 - If you find a man who would weep over the discarding of God's word as Josiah did
 - Then you will have found more than a man. You will have found man of God who comes with God's power
 - I pray God sends you such a man, so that by his instruction, you all may grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. As Peter wrote:

2Pet. 1:19 So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.

Psa. 1:1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the

wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

Psa. 1:2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.

Psa. 1:3 He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.

Psa. 1:4 The wicked are not so,
But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.

Psa. 1:5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

Psa. 1:6 For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish.