

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Isaiah 45:1-13

INTRODUCTION:

The sovereignty of *God* - that is that *God* is ultimately in control of everything - has gotten a bad rap of more recent years.

After 9-1-1, there were people who really questioned the sovereignty of *God*. The discussion went something like this:

"If *God* is sovereign, that means He is in control of all things. And if *God* is in control of everything, how could He allow all those innocent people to be killed? He could have stopped it and yet He didn't."

People then concluded:

"Either *God* isn't a loving *God* or He is not an all powerful *God* or He is not omniscient. Because if *God* knew it was going to happen and He loves us and He has all power, then He would have surely stopped the 9-1-1- bombings. And, if *God* is like that, then how can I trust Him?"

- I. *God* is Way Beyond our Figuring out
He is not like us. Unfortunately, too often we get very uncomfortable with a *God* we can't manage.
- II. *God* Doesn't Need our Permission
He is able to do whatever He pleases, whenever He wishes

Tonight, hopefully, we are going to grow our understanding of how great *God* truly is.

Sovereignty means "independent". That means:

- # *God* is ruler of all
- # *God* answers to no one
- # *God* can accomplish whatever He wants
- # *God* sees all history from beginning to end
- # *God* is afraid of nothing. Ignorant of nothing, needs nothing.
- # *God* always knows what is best, and He never makes a mistake

Examine Isaiah 45 and see *God*'s sovereignty

III. Background to Isaiah 45

Isaiah wrote this section of his book when the Babylonian Empire covered all the countries of the known world. Nebuchadnezzar had conquered Jerusalem and took young Jewish men and made them his court slaves (Daniel).

After Nebuchadnezzar came other kings: Darius & Belshazzar.

Toward the end of Daniel's life, the Medo-Persian Empire, led by Cyrus, defeated Babylon. Cyrus released all the departed Israelites and sent them home. God used Cyrus to re-establish the Jews in Israel.

That is why we read in Isaiah 45:1 that Cyrus was God's anointed. Cyrus was a pagan king, but God led him like a school boy, holding his hand, to accomplish His plan. Cyrus thought he was doing it, not knowing God was at work. (Read Isaiah 45:2-3).

When Isaiah wrote these words, it was still 150 years into the future. Daniel probably smiled to himself as he held the scrolls of Isaiah and watched as Cyrus did God's bidding just as God had predicted.

Why did God do it? (Isaiah 45:4-6)

for the sake of Jacob and Israel

Ezra 1 tells us that Cyrus gave the Jews back all the instruments of worship that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple a century earlier.

Not only did the Jews get to go home as free men, but they carried with them the treasures of Israel. And how did all this happen? God used a pagan king to accomplish His will (Proverbs 21:1)

SUMMARY:

God is the ruler of the universe

Nothing happens in this world by chance

There is no such thing as coincidence (or luck), only a sovereign God who rules over all

EXPLAINING GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY (Isaiah 45:7)

How do we understand a God who is all powerful and loving and yet doesn't stop suffering?

45:7 Not only does God not stop human suffering, this verse says He creates disaster.

How are we to understand this?

God created a world where we have the freedom to choose right or wrong

God is not the author of sin, but He created a world in which we can choose and from our choices flow the sin and suffering we see all around us.

Much pain is a result of individual sin

- # But there is also the suffering that comes from being members of a fallen race, and the effects of sinful humanity show up randomly in human sickness, natural disasters, and the aging process (Rom. 8)
- # While God doesn't hurl these hardships at individuals, He most often refuses to prevent the fallout from a fallen world.
- # In that sense, since God allows pain and suffering, we can accurately say God is the author of a world in which calamity does strike.
- # But, at the same time, God wants us to see that His plan is good and He brings eventual well-being for those who turn to Him (Isaiah 45:8)

An Old Testament and New Testament example to help us see God's goodness in the midst of pain and suffering:

JOSEPH

- # His brothers hated him and wanted to kill him, but instead sold Him into slavery
- # As a slave, He was falsely accused, even though He did what honored God and ended up in prison
- # He was in prison for years and seemingly forgotten
- # When God's time was right, he was brought from prison to the palace and God used Him to save millions and protect the nation of Israel.
- # Joseph was able to see the sovereign hand of God. (Genesis 50:20)

CHRIST

- # He did nothing wrong
- # Everything He did was to honor God the Father
- # He was falsely accused, beaten, mocked, and crucified
- # And, as a result, mankind could be saved
- # God, in His sovereign plan, took that which was evil and used it for good

TWO QUESTIONS ABOUT GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

- A. Am I just a puppet? (Or do I have free will?)
The Bible teaches both the sovereignty of God and the free will of man

God calls "Come unto me" (Matthew 11:28)

We must choose, "Choose whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15)

John 6:37

God's Part: "All that the Father gives me will come to me"

Man's Part: "Whosoever comes to me, I will never drive away"

I don't fully understand it and that is okay. God is beyond our complete understanding. He is infinite and we are not. It is no wonder we don't fully understand His sovereignty, because we are in control of so very little.

Illustrations to help us understand this paradox:

1) Taking a Cruise to England

We get on board this ship headed to England and nothing is going to stop it. On board of the ship, I have the freedom to make all kinds of choices, but they will not affect the fact that the ship is going to England. God has His sovereign purposes and the choices I make will never alter His purposes.

2) Playing Chess Against a Chess Master

Ten people set up boards to play chess against the master, all at the same time. We make our moves and the master effortlessly makes his move. In ten minutes, the master has defeated us all.

This is a bit how God works. We make our moves, but God's purposes are not affected by them. If we make a good move, God knows the next move. If we make a bad move, God knows instantly what He will do. But don't think God is just playing a game with us. God made all His moves in eternity past. We're stuck in time; God is not. He is eternal.

B. How can a loving God allow so much human suffering?

God's love is a transforming love. God's agenda for us isn't just to make us happy, but to make us holy (Romans 8:28-29)

When God allows pain into our lives and we get angry at God and question "why", it says more about us than about God. When hard times come, can you trust God and seek to learn of God via the experience?

It's not that God doesn't care. He loves you so much that He couldn't love you anymore than He does right now, and loves you too much to leave you as you are.

Think about it. If God judged all the evil the world right now that causes pain and suffering, the world would end. And one day, He will, but for right now, He doesn't. (2 Peter 3:9). Why? Because of His love.

The question is will you trust God's sovereignty or question God? That is what we read in Isaiah 45:9-10

Remember, the same sun that melts the ice also hardens the clay. The difference

between people is *not* the circumstances that we go through, but how we choose to deal with those circumstances.

CONCLUSION

God is sovereign. He is so much bigger and complex than we'll ever know. He is able to do exactly as He pleases. What He pleases for you is to know Him through all the experiences of your life. If this truth is not comforting to you, possibly it is because you are still fighting a war with God that you can never win.

Make the choice to bow in submission before our sovereign God. As you do, you will be gripped by knowing that God's purposes will ultimately prove loving and good.

Small groups

1. How does it make you feel about your life when you consider that God is sovereignly in control of all things? Why?
2. How does it make you feel about God when you hear that He is ruler of all, answers to no one, can accomplish whatever He wants, knows everything, and never makes a mistake?
3. How does knowing God's sovereignty impact your ability to trust Him and respond to life's situations with faith?
4. Is there an area of your life that you need to surrender to God's sovereign control?