

Sovereign Lord of All
Ephesians 1:11-14

2nd Corinthians 5:1-11
2nd Corinthians 5:12-6:2
Responsive Psalm 141

This morning we are going to be picking up in verse 10 of chapter 1. In this first half of this chapter Paul has wasted no time in getting into one of the main points of his writing. Revealing to us, his readers of God's absolute sovereignty in salvation, but it isn't as if God simply chose who will be saved some day through the dispensation of times, but he has also worked out the situations, the events, the exact and very moment of that calling. The point I keep driving home week after week because I don't want us to every forget it, or even to be come passive in our understanding of it, is that God is sovereign over each and every aspect of our lives, he loves us, he cares for us, and he wants what is best for us. And the truth of the matter is, what is best for us is not always what we think it should be. Sometimes it can be painful to be molded into what he wants us to be and we need to be broken so he can rebuild us.

Certainly we can look back at moments in our own lives where this has been true, where God has used what seemed to be awful circumstances to bring about something for his glory. The reality is, if God is not at work in such a way in our lives, then he is not God. If God is not in control during our struggles, tribulations and trials, then he is not sovereign, and he is not God. Our natural inclination when we are in such times is to feel as if we are being abandoned by God, but nothing can be further from the truth. Imagine if this was the reality, if just by random happenstance you are made to struggle, without purpose, without meaning, or even worse, that it is all Satan's doing, and he has ultimate control in causing your affliction. A few weeks back in Josh's message that he brought, he mentioned Job, the suffering, that came upon him where he lost everything, and even his wife telling him, your life is so miserable why don't you just curse God and die. But Job understood the realities of God's sovereignty in his tribulation, and he responded to her saying, "You speak as one of the foolish women speak. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

Job understood that all that had befallen him was allowed by the one who holds all things, and ultimately it was for God's purpose in glory. And I would argue, that one of those purposes of Job's suffering was for our benefit today. Which one of us can identify with Job, having lost everything. There isn't a single one of us here today who has yet been called to suffer as Job had. So, the great encouragement we can take from the account of Job, is that God does not leave us, nor forsake us, nor does he allow our sufferings, and tribulations to exist without purpose and meaning. Some of our reaction as believers is to seek that purpose and meaning. We often want to think that whatever it is that afflicts us is outside of us, happening to us, but often times it is God working to mold us, shape us to be who he wants us to be, sometimes he has to cut off things, or break things in us to accomplish this, so seeking what that may be, or what God is working to accomplish in us, should be a large part of our reflection as we journey through such moments in our lives.

Another misconception of suffering, is we think it is punishment, we feel as if God is punishing us for something, and sometimes there maybe an element of that, there is the simple reality as the saying goes, play stupid games, win stupid prizes. Sometimes we play stupid games and God allows us to win stupid prizes, he is the creator of cause and effect, and sometimes simply we suffer the outcomes of our actions brought about by our own sinful inclinations. But we like to attribute all suffering and tribulation as to some sort of punishment for wrongs. But that is not always the reality, again we have Job as the example, a righteous man, yet was afflicted beyond measure, for God's glory.

This is all a picture of God's sovereignty, and a constant reminder of how powerless we truly are, especially when it comes to the things of God. But thank God who is rich in mercy, who by his grace has chosen us out of this world of sin and despair to be his adopted children in which we have obtained an inheritance in Christ. This morning we are going to be looking into that inheritance, that promise which is bound in the infinite, eternal, sovereign God. So again, this morning let us go ahead and read starting in verse 1 to verse 14 and we will be focusing this morning on verses 11-14. (read Ephesians 1:1-14)

Again we see that Christ is the center of all thing, and it is in him, and for him that all things exist, including us, the adopted children. Our inheritance, that promise of our salvation, and eternal life are wrapped up, and only found in Christ. As we talked about a few weeks ago, this salvation, this inheritance is personal, and individual. God does not call groups of people as his children, but rather the individuals who make up the group of his chosen people. Though this should be a simple and easy understanding of God's work in salvation, there are still yet so many today who find their christian identity within the organization in which they belong. In some circles salvation has been equated with membership and attendance of a local church. We even see this a bit with our Reformed brothers and sisters with the concept of covenant children, that is often times the salvation of the children of believers is assumed within the church, again laying the focus upon the corporate body, instead of the individual person. Without the personal and intimate work of Christ in the life of the believer, it is merely an intellectual, and therefore a dead faith.

Looking to anything other than Christ for redemption, justification, and holiness is a dead end and sadly a spiritual delusion. Earlier this year Jim talked about the deception and the fiery arrows, the attacks of Satan and I believe that the biggest attack from Satan is delusion, where we can convince ourselves that due to our morality, or our community we bind ourselves to that we are right with God. When the reality is we can only be right with God through Christ, and there is nothing outside of him that can fulfill that need for our righteousness. It can not be found in the corporate body, we can not merely make a statement of belief, but it must be given to us from the highly personal relationship with Christ. Sadly Satan has deceived many to believe that they are right with God, Satan has deceived many to believe that they have the power within themselves to approach God. But the reality is we are powerless before God, and we need his sovereign intervention to draw us from our delusion. To show us our sin, our rebellion so that we may repent and believe.

Mankind is not in a good place, by our sin, which is our inheritance from Adam we have all been separated from God. But again, this concept of individual vs corporation works in the negative as well. We are each individually held accountable for our own sin. Though we are corporately, by nature children of Adam, we have been given the inheritance of his nature, a nature of rebellion and sin against God, which is our natural state, the state in which we as humans exist, and will exist until something changes that reality of our nature. Again, though we are as humans a part of this corporate group of sinful, rebellious people, we are all individuals guilty of our own sin and rebellion. That is why it takes a personal call from God to break us out of that cycle, and a personal relationship with Christ who has provided the way out from under the that curse in which we are, by nature all bound.

So when Paul makes the statement in verse 3, “ We are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” he is talking about this very thing, the gift of our faith, and subsequent salvation through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. We have been given the Son of God as the greatest gift in whom we can be called righteous, in whom we can be seen as sinless, in whom we can rest knowing that or salvation is sure, and there is nothing that can separate us from this reality.

As Paul wrote in his letter to the church in Rome, “for I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, angels nor principalities or powers, nor things present nor things to come, neither height nor depth or any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” When you are in the hands of the sovereign creator, there is nothing that can snatch you out of them. God has defeated Satan, rendering him powerless over us, we are protected by him, and held close as his precious ones. Verse 14 of our passage this morning, “Christ is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of his glory.” We are that purchased possession. Christ paid for us with his own life, by the shedding of his own blood so that we may be broken free from the sin and rebellion that has so corrupted our nature through the fall of Adam and the subsequent curse. Paul in this letter really wants his readers to understand this concept of God's sovereignty not only in salvation, but in our day to day lives as well. This is a point that I have been trying to really drive home as well these past few weeks, simply because I myself am in danger at times of forgetting, or not realizing this reality.

Sometimes anxiety over perceived things can get the best of me. For instance, through all my years at my job we have one through 2 bouts of layoffs, each time is an anxiety filled few weeks not knowing from day to day if I am going to have a job. The idea of losing what I have, starting over somewhere else frightens me, and I can't help but feel a rising bit of dread in the back of my mind now as everything keeps slowing down. But it is a great comfort to me, and I remind myself that God is sovereign in all things, and if one of these days I find myself on that chopping block, as Josh and Jody both say...”it is better this way.” We have to learn to trust God in all things, and it is an easy thing to say but when those trials come it can become difficult.

Sometimes there are days where I am feeling off and I start to think my auto-immune disease is flaring back up...that creates worry, and anxiety at the prospect of going through all of that again, the unknown of how bad it might get, the constant feeling that I have a ticking time bomb that could just activate again. But the reality is, we all have that don't we? We are not guaranteed tomorrow, God has given us today, and he says that his grace is sufficient for us for that day. We go about our lives each and every day not realizing how close we probably actually are to death, one wrong step, one wrong turn, but...we have the sovereign God who has determined the how, and when, we have the sovereign God who made us, keeping us alive...every breath, every heart beat is from God. So, for me, as limited as my understanding can comprehend, the realities of God's sovereign control over my own life has been an extremely great comfort for me, someone who as you are probably all aware, tend toward the depressive, and pessimistic side of things.

So these words of Paul, carry a lot of weight for me, they are precious, glorious, and wonderful words. To hear that I am In Christ, to hear that I have an inheritance In him, and that by him I have been blessed beyond all measure. And I hope that all who are in Christ that this is a real and tangible reality as well, that we can find great comfort in our Lord and Savior. In Christ there is no what ifs, there is no chance, there is no maybe, we are his children who have been raised up for his purpose and his glory, and we are merely called to trust in him, and rest in him as he works in our lives. I personally find no greater peace then meditating upon the realities of God's sovereignty, even if all things seem to be falling apart, knowing that God is in it, and that there is nothing that can happen outside of God's will creates a peace beyond explanation.

And I believe that is one of the reasons God allows us to go through hardships and trials, because he is showing us that even in such times, he is with us. At the time I was not fully aware of how bad it really was, as I laid there in the hospital alone...but through it all I had a great peace that I can only explain being from God, and now having gone through that, I find out who close I really was to dying, I find out how close I was to being miss-diagnosed and and subsequently receiving the wrong treatment., but the reality is...I was no closer then what God intended, and I think largely that experience was so I could learn this lesson, to rest in him more, be not anxious about the future but trust in him who controls all things. The other aspect of this as well, is sometimes our suffering is also for the benefit of others. God knows us, and God knows how our lives interact with one another, and he uses such moments not only to build our own faith and trust in him, but to likewise reflect that faith so that others may see the God in whom we rest.

While I was in the hospital, my dad laid on his bed dying....it wasn't lost on me that we were both bed ridden and near death. While I was in the hospital, confined to that bed, He told me that my faith in the face of my sickness was a great encouragement to him in his own struggles. We don't always know why God does what he does, we don't always get a glimpse into why he allows certain things, but another lesson that was impressed upon me is how God works through us in our own trials, to be a faithful witness of him to others. How without trying, just simply by trusting God and resting in him we can encourage one another to do the same. How we deal with difficult situations in our life is seen by others, by our friends, by our family, by our children and it can be a powerful witness to the things of God in their lives.

So I guess my challenge for all of us today, is to look at our own lives outside of ourselves. Getting caught up in our own lives, our own issues sometimes we focus to much on the suffering and we are not seeking to see God in it. Just as Jesus said, recorded in the book of John, " in this world you will have troubles and tribulations, but take heart, for I have overcome the world." We still yet live in this fallen sinful world, we are not guaranteed a free ride, or an easy life, but through it all our hope rests in the one who has overcome the world, our rest lies in the one who has promised us an everlasting inheritance, our peace comes from the knowledge that God loves us with an everlasting love and we will one day be delivered from this world. But today is not that day, and we must continue faithfully resting in these promises to the praise of his Glory. So that the world may see through us, this rest through tribulation, and hope in deliverance.

That is why I have been spending so much time here in this first chapter, as a reminder to myself, and us, the awesome sovereignty of God in all things. The concept of God's sovereignty in salvation is something we have been so engulfed in for so many years now its easy for us to see and accept as the truth of scripture. But God's sovereignty doesn't just begin, or end at our salvation, he is sovereign over our lives, and we are his people, the created ones for the creator's good pleasure to with according to his own will. And that also means the negative, Should we accept good from God and not trouble? Job was a very wise man, and understood the sovereignty of God maybe even more then we do. Through all of his tribulation, the loss of property, the loss of his children, all at once, and then to be mocked by those who he had left, his wife, and his friend...yet he remained faithful to God, looking to God as his hope and salvation. God promises that there is nothing that will separate us from him, and we have Job as an example of this. God did not forsake Job, he did not leave him, but rather used him for his glory as a great and wonderful witness to God's provision and in the end, mercy.

Suffering will come, it is an inevitable part of our lives as humans on this earth. And when it does arrive, the best thing we can do is to seek to see God in it, understand that such a thing is not without purpose, and that purpose is determined by the just and righteous holy God who loves you. Whether it is for our own benefit, or lesson to be learned, or maybe it is for the benefit of others to witness your faith in action. Either way, in all things God is in control as he orchestrates these things in our lives to the praise of his glory. May we learn in all things to praise him, to trust him, to rest in him, and to glory in him. For we have nothing except what has been given to us by the father, should we not also accept struggles from the father so we may grow in our trust and need for him? We as human parents seek to mold our children into what we believe is best, often times the greater purpose can be lost in the moment...that molding is often a cause and effect, our kids do something they shouldn't, we react in punishment..but the goal isn't to punish, but to mold, guide, and teach them so that they may be prepared for this world,

And that is what God is doing with us, using hardship and trials to mold us into the children we ought to be, the ones who will with him, inherit the world. How often in our own stubbornness do we refuse to learn the lessons he is teaching us, how often do we focus on our own suffering and not see the larger picture. God calls us, as the Psalmist says, "be still, and know that I am God." When hardships come we should pause and reflect, and acknowledge God's sovereignty in it. Stop striving to manipulate and control things we have no control over, and rest in God's sovereignty, the one who holds the earth and the stars in the palm of his hand. Then after we are still, get to know God more, reflect upon his power, his wisdom, his love, his mercy and grace and in the midst of turmoil we can find peace in him who works all things to the purpose of his glory, who loves us with an everlasting love and is working in us to draw us ever closer to himself.