

“Our Sovereign Lord” *Acts 4:23-31*

INTRO:

As I prayed about what message to bring this Sunday, it did not seem appropriate that we should remind ourselves of a reality that is the root of our thankfulness this Thanksgiving season. Although this truth is found throughout the Bible, it is denied by many well-meaning, but mistaken Christians. It is the truth of the absolute sovereignty of our God.

As a launching point for our study, I want to take us to a place where the truth of God’s sovereignty intersected with a major crisis in the life of the early church. In **Acts 4**, as we come on the scene, God had healed a man who was a cripple for forty years by the hand of Peter and John. Using this miracle as an occasion to preach the Gospel, Peter and John caused quite a ruckus in the Temple. The powers that be had commanded them to not preach in the name of Jesus any more. So, Peter and John go back to the church and tell them what happens and they immediately enter into prayer to the Lord of the church. It is their prayer that will be the springboard of our study. Our exploration of the Sovereignty of our Lord will fall into three divisions.

- I. How High His Sovereignty Reaches
- II. How Low It Condescends
- III. How Immutable It Is

I. How High His Sovereignty Reaches

A. The baby church in Jerusalem took baby steps shortly after its birth. They were just beginning to be the church the Lord Jesus wanted them to be. But their ministry is not without trouble. Peter and John go into the Temple and end up healing a lame man and preaching in the Lord’s name. Five thousand people believe (**vs. 4**), but the Sanhedrin is not happy with Peter and John. They put them in jail. The next morning they are dragged before the Sanhedrin, the highest authority in the land under the Roman conquerors. There they are warned not to ever preach in the name of Christ again. This was very serious business. How do they react when they are released? They got together with the church and prayed. (**vs23-24**)

“And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: “Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them.”

These believers began their prayer with an unusual word. The word they used is not the expected word for Lord. It is a word that is rarely used in the New Testament to address the Lord Jesus – *despotes*. It means **one who owns all things and whose authority is without limit and is not subject to law.**

1. When the word despot is used we are usually referring to some terrible dictator who inevitably abuses his power. Men like Adolph Hitler, Benito Mussolini, and Saddam Hussein have been given this title. It is a horrible thing when sinful man is a despot because his sinfulness takes control and has no boundaries.

2. However, the term despot is a wonderful term when it is used of the God who is light and in whom is no darkness at all. He does all things well and according to His holiness. That is exactly what the Apostles were saying in their prayers. Here, Lord, as we are gathered and praying because our world is falling apart and the foundations are being destroyed, we want to begin by acknowledging to you and reminding ourselves that You, our heavenly Father, are absolutely sovereign in the Universe that you created!

B. We might be tempted to say to the Apostles, "So, God is sovereign, how sovereign is He?" They go on to tell us in the rest of this verse. His sovereignty is seen in that He created all things.

1. How does God's creative power demonstrate God's sovereign control over all things? Remember how God created? He stood out in nothingness and said ***"Let there be light."*** (Genesis 1:3) God did not create out of something. There wasn't any primordial clay that God formed into planets and then people. No, God spoke things into existence. He demonstrated His power over being in that molecules that did not exist before, now suddenly existed.

2. So, everything came into being because He willed it. And it remains because He keeps it in existence. **Colossians 1:16-17:**
"For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist."
From the farthest corner of the Universe to the atoms that make up our bodies, God is sovereign over all these things. They do not move without His knowledge and His command.

C. Let me turn your attention to three simple statements from the **Psalms** on the fact of God's sovereignty before we move on.

1. **Psalm 93:1-2** says: ***"The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty; The Lord is clothed, He has girded Himself with strength. Surely the world is established, so that it cannot be moved. Your throne is established from of old; You are from everlasting."***

The statement is simple, yet difficult for sinful man to accept. God reigns. He is right now in absolute control of His universe.

2. The thought is repeated later in **Psalm 97:1**;

“The Lord reigns; Let the earth rejoice; Let the multitude of isles be glad!”

Here is the believer’s response to the truth that God reigns! We should rejoice and be glad, for the all wise, all knowing God rules over the affairs of men. There is a purpose in life and in everything that happens!

3. The final rhyming of this thought is in **Psalm 99:1**;

“The Lord reigns; let the peoples tremble! He dwells between the cherubim; let the earth be moved!”

This is the posture of all those who will not submit to the Lord’s authority to run their lives. Be afraid because He does reign and He will call us all to account someday!

II. How Low It Condescends

A. God’s sovereign reign touches the highest parts of creation. God is in control of the movements of the heavenly bodies, the stars, the moon, and the sun. But how does it affect us? That is what I want us to contemplate next. How detailed and fine is God’s sovereignty? Let us consider some examples. First, let us look at **Proverbs 16:33**
“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.”

The writer of **Proverbs** tells us that God is so sovereign that even the so called random result of casting lots is not random at all. God controls the roll of the dice! God sovereignty extends to whether you roll a six or a three.

B. We find a second example of how fine God’s sovereign control over all things is in the Gospels. The Lord Jesus Himself teaches us in **Matthew 10:29-31**
“Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

1. A sparrow cannot fall from the sky without the permission of the God of the Universe. Jesus uses this fact as the basis for this wonderful argument. If a sparrow who have little value cannot fall to the ground without God being involved, how much more will God care for us, whose hairs God has numbered?

2. Again, God’s sovereignty extends to the most insignificant of things. Is there anything then that is out of His control? The obvious answer is no!

C. The third example is one that is near and dear to each of our hearts. If we know the Lord Jesus as our Lord and Savior then we know that He is in control of everything that enters our lives. **Romans 8:28** is there only because God is absolutely sovereign over all things!

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

The only way that this promise could be true is if God is in control of every single detail of life.

What does this do for us? Is this an abstract theological truth that we need to confess and forget? No, it is absolutely vital that we make this a part of our souls. Here are just three ways in which this helps us.

1. It gives us steadfastness in the face of troublesome times. **Psalm 46:1-2:**

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.”

When our hearts are anchored in the God who controls all things, we find great help and stability in a time of great trial and distress.

2. Second, this reality helps us find comfort and strength when facing an apparently unsmiling providence. Remember Job in **Job 1**? What did he do when the stress points were piling up upon each other?

“Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’ In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.”

How could Job do that? Do we bow down and worship God when everything is going wrong and the bottom has just fallen out of our lives? How could Job do it! Job’s unshakable conviction that God was in control of everything which gave him the strength and character to stand in the face of an apparently negative providence.

3. Lastly, this truth motivates us to worship. In the middle of those Psalms on the sovereignty of God we find this wonderful statement in **Psalm 95:1-7.**

“Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. For the Lord is the great God, and the great King above all gods. In His hand are the deep places of the earth; the heights of the hills are His also. The sea is His, for He made it; and His hands formed the dry land. Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand.”

Because He is our sovereign Lord we want to worship Him! We rejoice because He is sovereign over all things! And He is our Father, Savior, Shepherd, and King!