

The All-Encompassing Grand Purpose of God to Manifest His Own Glory

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Grab your Bibles and go to Romans 9. Romans 9. We'll be in Romans 9 off and on through this series. We will kickoff there this morning looking at Romans 9:16 as we begin this series on the unbreakable eight strand cable of sovereign grace. I want you to picture in your mind, there's a good image on the screen of those massive cables that hold up suspension bridges like the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. They design these with cables all wrapped together around a center cable. The center cable basically holds everything else in line, it's the most important, and that's where we are this morning, we're going to deal with the center cable; the center of it all, the most important of all the strands that form this unbreakable cable of sovereign grace.

Romans 9:16,

16 So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs,
but on God who has mercy.

That is, in sovereign grace, God saves his own and in ultimate or in the ultimate sense, it's not up to man's will, not the man who wills, it's not up to man's efforts or works, the man who runs, but to God who has mercy.

Now when you think about the phrases the doctrines of grace, or the phrase I prefer, the doctrines of sovereign grace, now my friend David Miller says that's redundant, it's unnecessary. If God is the author of grace, he is sovereign, you don't have to use it, but I use it because we need the emphasis today. Doctrines of grace or the doctrines of sovereign grace or even Calvinism, these are all short phrases or words to refer to a body of biblical doctrine that was comprised many centuries ago. Now these men studied the Scriptures and pulled out these doctrines from the Scriptures primarily to refute the teachings of Jacob Arminius. Jacob Arminius lived from 1560 to 1609 and Jacob Arminius' teaching began to stray from what was considered primary or orthodox Christian doctrine. Jacob Arminius basically taught that man's will was free and man's will determined him obtaining salvation and determined whether he could keep his salvation. Did you get that? The cornerstone teaching of Jacob Arminius was man's will either secures his salvation, I should say does secure his salvation, and keeps his salvation. So in other words, it's man-centered, man is the key. So the teachings of John

Calvin, which was established earlier than Jacob Arminius, was somewhat undermined. So you have the Arminian/Calvinism debate going back hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years. So what happened was in 1618, church leaders convened an international conference that they might give a thoroughly biblical and adequate refutation to Joseph Arminius' teaching. This international conference to refute Arminianism was held in Dort, Netherlands, thus it has been called the Synod of Dort, and in that conference, they came up with this acrostic: TULIP, T-U-L-I-P, and this has been used for centuries now. The T stands for man is totally depraved. The U stands for unconditional election. The L stands for limited atonement. The I stands for irresistible grace. And the P stands for the perseverance of the saints.

Now this acronym, TULIP, in my opinion is not the most thorough or accurate way to expound the doctrines of grace. Let me just pause from my notes here and say that one of the reasons why it's not the most accurate is because words begin to change their meaning over time and a word that didn't have very much of a negative context 400 years ago can now have a negative context. So it's better to kind of get away from one word or two and use more expressive phrases which I'm trying to do in this series. But even though it's not the most accurate or I think the best way to explain the doctrines of grace, it has through the centuries become the most common, and it's interesting to note that John Calvin did not come up with TULIP. This was the Synod of Dort after Calvin's time.

So on the one hand, I like the acrostic, T-U-L-I-P, sometimes people will save the five points of Calvinism. If you pinned me down and water-boarded me and say, "You've got to say one way or the other. Do you agree with the five points of Calvinism?" I'd say, "Yes, I do," but I need to explain because the Bible doesn't organize it that way. It's not the best way to express it, I believe, though it's an acceptable way because if it was the best way, there would be a book in the Bible named the TULIP and God would have explained it that way, but he didn't. But all the things that are taught under that acronym of a way to present the doctrines that the Bible teaches about salvation or what we call sovereign grace, you have been taught from this pulpit over and over and over again, I just don't use the catchphrases.

So it's really interesting, it's not unusual, my daughter actually told me of a time that she was in school and a child came up as if she had a Scarlet A on her or something and said, "You're a Calvinist!" And she said, "What is that?" Now if you would have exegeted a text and said here's the truth of this text, do you agree with it, she would have said, "Well, sure, that's what I believe." So the catchphrases are very misused and misunderstood. As a matter of fact, most people who hate Calvin have never read Calvin. He was a wonderful expositor, and I might add, if you take John Calvin, Calvinist obviously, and you take George Whitefield, the great evangelist who God used to light a flame in Europe and early America, probably the greatest awakening we've seen in a thousand years, both of these men were ardent Calvinists and both of these men did more for evangelism and missions than hardly anybody else you could find. Well, let's move on. So I don't like using the acrostic TULIP, I think it's too simplistic, words are misunderstood, etc. I do understand while someone as venerable as Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the most prominent Baptist preacher of all the ages, when he would hear somebody criticize

Calvinism he would say, "Oh, Calvinism, you mean the Gospel." Many times Spurgeon, our great Baptist forefather, would simply say Calvinism is the Gospel.

Well, back to the phrase I like, the doctrines of sovereign grace. Let's be reminded in this preface that I'm giving you right now to our series, that these doctrines are thoroughly contained in the Old Testament, these doctrines were taught by Jesus and he primarily used them, I shouldn't say primarily but it's interesting that he used them in refuting his enemies. They are taught thoroughly in the Apostle Paul's letters, Romans 8 and 9, Ephesians 1 and 2, being two very thorough rich examples. A little later in church chronology in the fourth and fifth centuries, Father Augustine taught these doctrines and argued them against Pelagius. Pelagius was an Arminian-type preacher and historians tell us that other than the Apostle Paul, Father Augustine had more to do with influencing the ages with the doctrines of grace than any other man.

Then you come forward in church history and you come to the great Reformer, Martin Luther, the early Baptist contemporary of Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, and then the Bible translator, William Tyndale, we have Tyndale Bible publishers today in his honor, all strongly committed to the doctrines of grace. Interestingly when William Tyndale was translating the Bible into English for the common man, the Roman Catholic Church put out an edict that said the consequence for translating the Bible into the language of the common man will be the death penalty. So they killed him. You might say, "Why would the Roman Church be against having the Bible in the language of the common man?" Because if the common man understood the Bible, they'd reject Catholicism, so they knew not to let men start studying the Bible for themselves but they couldn't stop what God had started. But all these men committed to the doctrines of what I call sovereign grace.

Then you go forward to the Puritans like John Knox and Thomas Cartwright and Richard Sibbes and John Owen and the Baptist Puritan, John Bunyan, who we have a children's musical based on one of his books, of course, Pilgrim's Progress. Most all of you have Matthew Henry on your Bible program and Thomas Boston and many many others, all men strongly committed to the doctrines of sovereign grace, not Arminianism.

You come over to America and the venerable Jonathan Edwards, Cotton Mather, and the work of George Whitefield, all men committed to the doctrines of sovereign grace. The leaders of the modern missions movement, William Carey, David Livingston, and the Baptist, Adoniram Judson, all men held strongly to the doctrines of sovereign grace.

The early English and American Baptist leaders were strong on this doctrine. As a matter of fact, an early Baptist historian by the name of John Asplund did a survey of the Baptist churches in America in 1793 and at the end of this survey in 1793, John Asplund said, "There are now 1,032 Baptist churches in America and of those 1,032 Baptist churches in America, 956 of them are committed to the doctrines of sovereign grace." To make it short, I know this upsets modern Baptists but the overwhelming majority of our Baptist forefathers were Calvinists. Don't tell anybody. It's just the facts of history. You didn't see this man-centeredness, this manipulation of getting men to believe they controlled

their salvation if they would will to call on Jesus. You didn't see that simplistic teaching until the churches started going liberal, and when you see man-centeredness and man in control – listen to your pastor – you'll always see churches veer toward liberalism because, after all, if man is in charge, he's smart enough to decide for himself what's good and bad, what's right and wrong, what's good doctrine and what's bad doctrine. And we fight it in every age, this man-centered, man's in charge pragmatism to help God out in building his church. Well, I'm digressing from my notes. I want you to be home by 2 o'clock so I've got to get back on these things.

Even the earliest majority African-American congregations were committed to the doctrines of sovereign grace. African slave, David George, founded the Silver Bluff Church in 1773 and it is noted as the first long or enduring African-American church in America and he was a man committed to the doctrines of sovereign grace. He escaped slavery and went to Nova Scotia and planted many sovereign grace churches there.

Over in London in 1889, the Baptists got together there and in 1889 they came up with the London Baptist Confession which is very strong in its commitment to the doctrines of sovereign grace. In America along the same time, a little bit later, well, a good little bit later actually, James Petigru Boyce, the first President of the first graduate school of theology, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary located in Louisville, Kentucky, was a strong devotee of the doctrines of sovereign grace. The first President of the Southern Baptist Convention, William B. Johnson, was strongly committed to the doctrines of sovereign grace. The first President of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, B. H. Carroll, strongly committed to the doctrines of sovereign grace. And there are many many many others.

Now, today it's commonly held that those of us who hold to these biblical doctrines of sovereign grace, that we are some Johnny-come-lately, some new errant movement to be opposed. They are grossly mistaken and terribly ignorant of evangelical Baptist and generally Christian history. These doctrines are the doctrines held by the great majority of early Southern Baptist leaders. These doctrines are the doctrines held by the great majority of the early missions movement leaders in America and in England. These are the doctrines held by the majority of early Baptists in England and America. These are the doctrines held and taught by Augustine, the doctrines taught by the Apostle Paul, the human writer of much of the New Testament, and the doctrines taught by Jesus Christ himself. The doctrines of sovereign grace are nothing less than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the Gospel. To deny these doctrines is to deny the clear teaching of Scripture, to deny the true Gospel, and to deny the Almighty eternal God who gave them to us.

Now, let me say this. We have brothers and sisters who are not where we are and even we don't agree on all of these things. My wife and I do not agree perfectly on the extent of the atonement but she's coming along. Now, she does not disagree with anything fundamental about it but just in a nuance there and we may talk about that more later when we will talk about marriage counseling maybe in one of our sessions. My point is we are all learning and we are all growing, amen? But these doctrines rightfully understood are God's word. They are the Gospel.

Now, I want to give you three thoughts this morning. First of all, that's the preface to the series, all right? First of all, God delights in being God and is worthy of all glory. God delights in being God and is worthy of all glory and I'll go ahead and give you the other two and we'll look at them in a moment. Number 2 is going to be: God delights in his own wisdom and work of sovereign grace and these are for his glory. That will be in a moment. Then a dim light that grows ever brighter, that will be our third point.

Point 1: God delights in being God and is worthy of all glory. Now, as we think about these things, you might ask, "Now, if we're going to study the doctrine of soteriology or the doctrines of sovereign grace," soteriology just means the doctrine of salvation, "if you're going to study that, why are you venturing over into the nature of God? Why are you venturing? That would be under the doctrine of God, wouldn't it? We're talking about the doctrines of salvation right now and systematic theologians separate those out." Well, I understand that and you would be right, that we are venturing over into another area if technically speaking you want me to view this from the typical way that scholars would view things, but the Bible doesn't separate these things. That's why you must learn your doctrine from exposition of Scripture, not from a systematic theology. Systematic theologies put together by men are good and helpful but must be minimized in the church. The emphasis of the church should be on expositions of the text. It just kind of put things in the right balance. You see, since the Bible didn't separate them, I'm not so sure we sometimes do not do damage when we categorize things off too much. You see, the waters of sovereign grace flow from the fountain of an all-glorious, all-holy, eternal God and you cannot drink of the water if you do not know the fount from which it springs.

So to properly grasp the doctrines of sovereign grace, you must know the purpose of the God who gave them. Did you get me? If you're going to grasp the glories, the wonders of sovereign grace, you must know something of the God who gave us these doctrines. You know, if a workingman goes out and buys a new pickup truck because he needs this truck to help him in his trade, but when you ask him, "But what's going to be your trade? What's going to be a work? Is it going to be an electrician or a plumber or a carpenter? What's it going to be?" And he says, "Well, I'm not sure yet." And he may know everything about that truck but he's no better off than he was before, and likewise you may know every I to be dotted in the so-called classical outline of the doctrines of sovereign grace, you may have every T crossed also, but if you don't know the God and the purposes of God behind it, you're no better off than when you started. As a matter of fact, that can lead to just mere knowledge and knowledge can puffeth up; it can make you dangerous and arrogant. But the purpose for these doctrines and their saving transforming effect is God's glory.

Bishop Henry Scougal wrote "From the Life of God in the Soul of Man," that's the book, this statement, quote, "The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by what it loves." The worth and the excellency of a soul is measured by what it loves. John Piper said this stirred his heart in all his writings on this theme and I appreciate Dr. Piper's good writings. It is very helpful, but the concluding notion there that the worth and the

excellency of a soul is seen in what he loves, then the excellency of God is seen in that God loves being God. God delights in God. God is the only being in the universe that can look in a mirror and say, "Wow, you're all-beautiful, all-perfect, all-wise," and in doing so he is neither vain nor in error. If you do it, you're both. But not God.

In Mark 1:11 Jesus is being baptized and the Father, God the Father, looks down at God the Son and he says, "This is My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased." Do you understand what you have there? You have God looking at God and saying, "I am well pleased with you." Actually the phrase means delightful. God looks at God and says, "I'm just delighted in you." I just can't say to you how deeply I'm delighted that God's delighted in God. I just really am.

Now, the construction of the phrase here in Mark 1:11 is such that it emphasizes timelessness. What God is saying to God is, God the Father saying to God the Son, "There is never a time when I have not been fully pleased or delighted in you, and there never will be a time when I will not be fully pleased and delighted in you." God is consumed with God. God is overwhelmed with joy about himself. Do you know why? Because he's so holy and perfect he's incapable of finding joy and delight in anything less than perfect, but there is only one perfect being, himself. So he must delight in himself.

Isaiah 44:6 and 44:8, "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me.'" You just sense God here is saying, "I like what I am and I'm like no other." Then verse 8, the prophet says, "Do not tremble and do not be afraid; Have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, Or is there any other Rock? I know of none." God says, "Check out everybody, nobody like me." God delights in being God.

In Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17:5, he speaks to his heavenly Father and God the Son says to God the Father, "Now glorify thou me together with thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." The sense is God the Son and God love Father enjoyed this delightful glory together, now Jesus is on the earth in Incarnate form and he prays to his heavenly Father and says, "Now let's just add to the glory of it all. Let's keep delighting in ourselves and delighting in this work and keep glorying in the things we are capable of doing." The Godhead enjoyed the glory that they shared together before Jesus came in his Incarnation, and now Jesus' work that he's going to perform will even add to their glory. There is such great love and delight within the Godhead and Jesus has also prayed, John 17:24, that not only was he and his Father continuing to grow in the love and the joy and the delight that they had together, but that we, his children, would get to enter into that also; we would begin to apprehend; we would begin to feel; we would begin to sense this love and this delight that God has for himself because he has made us one in his Son. If we are one in his Son, then we are one with God the Father.

So God is unique. He is transcendent. He transcends everything we know and understand. He's not only infinitely superior to man in every way he's like man, he is unlike man and

radical in unnumbered ways we can't even comprehend. He's holy and God help our churches today who are trying to dumb down God and make God so relevant. God's not relevant if you're in rebellion. He's against you. He's God, he's holy, he is transcendent, he is righteous, he's special, he's wonderful and he loves being God. He is worthy of all glory.

II. We move a step toward where we are coming from in our series. God delights in his own wisdom and works of sovereign grace to bring him even more glory. God the Father says to God the Son, God the Son says to God the Father, "What glory we have, what delight we have together," but it's almost like God sits in the heaven and says, "But do you know what? We are just too awesome for this not to expand, so I'm going to send you, God the Son, to the earth and you're going to perform some works on the earth in saving for us a people out of those miserable, sinful wretches down there, and the way you're going to get it all done will bring us even more glory." That's the purpose behind it all, God's glory.

1 Corinthians 1:21 is a good cross-reference here, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased," delighted again, "through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." Here's what God is saying, he said all, "The men of the world who do not know me will take my method to do my work and will scoff at it. 'You mean you're going to build an eternal people out of these mortal men preaching this Gospel and they're going to be changed? That's foolishness. Preaching is outdated. That's foolishness.'" And God says, "No, I look at it and I'm delighted in it because this is my wisdom. These are the means I have ordained and I delight not just in me, I delight in my wisdom and the works I perform through my Son Jesus Christ." Now, what work is that? Of course, that's the work of sovereign grace. Grace just means favor, unmerited favor. God has chosen to cast special favor toward some and that's his work and it's all of grace, and as Jesus performs this favor to us that we do not deserve, it resounds to greater glory to God.

Let's go through Romans a little bit here. As a matter of fact, Romans 9, go back to verse 5 and notice how in this chapter, Romans 9 where the apostle writes to the Roman church and is expounding precept upon precept of the doctrine of sovereign grace. Now he's primarily focused on two thoughts here. Now sovereign grace has a lot of points to it and we're going to unpack those as we go through it, but as you get to Romans 9, two thoughts need to stay in your mind. 1. God's unconditional election of some. God's unconditional election. In other was, God shows grace and saves some and it has nothing to do with what they did or didn't to. It does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but God who has mercy. We read that earlier, amen? God's unconditional election. The second thought here is and this is radical for this day, not radical for you and I today but it was radical in this day: it includes the Gentiles. That was radical. God has chosen a people for himself outside of Israel, outside of the Jews? Yes, that's what Paul is saying. He unconditionally elects his own and some of them will even be Gentiles. As a matter of fact, the majority of them turn out to be Gentiles.

So as we're studying through chapter 9 we have this great treatise on sovereign grace but look what he keeps bringing out is behind it all. Verse 5, chapter 9,

5 whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

So right in the middle of his teaching here, he says, "We just need to remind ourselves it's all about God blessed forever, God being glorified. It's about the glory of God."

Now when he says "God blessed forever," I think the first thing he's saying is he's God and he deserves glory, he deserves to be considered the blessed one, he deserves praise, his worth is so wonderful, but now even more so, his Son Jesus Christ is doing some marvelous things in the earth that we didn't know beforehand, so even more so God is adding to the known element of his worth, he's adding to the glory he deserves to receive through the work of his Son Jesus Christ. The wisdom and his work. The Reformer Martin Luther said, "God praises in himself." In other words, God just loves praising himself, but Martin Luther went on and said, "may he be praised among us too." May we be as smart as God is. May we be in awe of God. May we be in awe of his wisdom. May we be in awe of his work primarily through his Son Jesus Christ. May we praise him too.

So he's talking about praise and glory being brought to God for this work of sovereign grace. Now let's go a little further, look at verse 17 of Romans 9. Paul uses an illustration from pharaoh of how God does what he does for his own glory.

17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth."

He's writing to the Romans and he says, "Do you not remember God used pharaoh the way God wanted to use pharaoh so he would be praised." Now was pharaoh more wicked than other men? No, we are all fallen sinners. The point is God allowed pharaoh to go on in his evil devices, so even in pharaoh's evil, he served the final purpose of God and that's to glorify God's name. What's the context? The context is sovereign grace. The context is the doctrine of unconditional election. So what he's saying is, "God is saving people the way he's going to save them so that it will be proclaimed and known and he'll get more glory, just like he did with pharaoh." Don't rob it of the context. This is saying God's wisdom and work of sovereign grace is to resound to God's glory.

Now, look at Romans 9:22.

22 What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?

A lot to say here. I'm not going to dig into it, that will be later in the series. But what he's saying here, if God had a purpose and he allowed some who deserved wrath to go on and

get that wrath, then that's fine. Why are you arguing with God about it? He's not to be argued with. He's to be submitted to.

Now look at the next first, verse 23,

23 And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory,

He did so that he might show forth something, his glory. He did so that there would be a contrast, if you will. Here's what's happened. Sinful fallen men, if I do not act on their behalf, they deserve the judgment and wrath they've earned, but if I do have mercy and grace on some, you contrast that with what happens to those who get what they deserve and I'm to be praised for the greatness and the wonder and the glory of the grace and saving power I had on those undeserved vessels of mercy. But what's the great point here I want to bring out? It's all for the glory of God. Don't you miss the great doctrines of grace, God's electing choices has a purpose. It's not just an arbitrary thing where God spun something in heaven and said, "Okay, that's one I'll save." That's not what's up. God has a purpose. For his own glory, that's the purpose.

Now, we have other sections in the New Testament that are rich with this truth. We're in Ephesians on Sunday night again and so I'll not spend any time there other than to mention that in Ephesians 1 and 2, let me just read these quickly. Ephesians 1:6. He has given us this great treatise again in Ephesians 1 and 2 on the doctrines of sovereign grace and he says it's "to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." Verse 12 of Ephesians 1, "to the end," what's the end of this sovereign grace work? "That we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory." Ephesians 1:14, speaking of the Spirit's work in our conversion, he "is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory." Ephesians 2:7, "so that in the ages to come He might show," he's showing it off so he will be glorified for it, "He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." I guess if we have a theme verse here, it's Ephesians 3:21, "to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations," that's time, "forever and ever," that's eternity, "Amen." In other words, "I'm saving my people, my church, to the end that there will be glory brought unto God both in time and in eternity." Some things only bring glory to God in time, I mean the present creation, the heavens, the stars, the sunset, beautiful things which show us the glory of God for sure, but there will be a day when God is going to crush all of that into oblivion and create a new heaven and a new earth. That's temporary but his church is for God's glory for time and eternity. His work of sovereign grace in building his church is the centerpiece of his purposes and his glory.

III. A dim light that burns ever brighter. A dim light that burns ever brighter. What I mean by this is hopefully because this ain't the first time I've preached this stuff, hopefully the light is dawning in your soul and you're beginning to come out of a man-centered Arminian thinking and getting back to where the Bible is in a God-centered thinking and it's all for God's glory. Listen to me this morning, listen to me: every event

on earth from the beginning of time to the end of time serves two purposes, the good of his church and the glory of his name. Vladimir Putin in Russia is serving today to the end of the good of the church and the glory of God. "Well, I don't see it." You're too stupid to see it, and so am I, but I believe it because the Bible teaches it. Everything, everything is being orchestrated by an omniscient, omnipotent hand and comes out of an all-wise mind to the end that God's church, God's work of building his church, preserving his church and one day glorifying his church, will be done and his name will be glorified. That's why I tell you a thousand times over, there are 1,000,001 things you can give your life to but you'd better make sure the centerpiece of your heart is the good of God's church because the Scripture leaves no other alternative but that as the centerpiece of God's purposes and God's work. And hopefully that light has come on in your soul and you're saying, "Pastor, I'm beginning to see it." And do you know what? If he's turned that little dim light on, he'll keep brightening it, and brightening it, and brightening it, and brightening it until one day you will be glad to leave this sinful sod, this fallen, wicked, godforsaken world and be in the glory of the one whose light began to burn in your soul years ago.

A good insight is 1 Peter 1:12. 1 Peter 1:12 is the verse that tells us, have we got it up there, brother? I don't know if they've got it up there or not. They've been telling me to get my outline to them sooner. I said, "But God doesn't get through with me until right before I get ready to preach."

"It was revealed to them," now what is "it"? The saving power of God, the works of sovereign grace and how God was doing this, "It was revealed to them," this is talking about angels, "that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven--things into which angels long to look." I misinterpreted that. The first part is to the forefathers of the faith, the last part is to the angels, "things into which angels long to look." Angels. Angels who are vastly stronger than humankind. I mean, angels can just appear and be gone again. Angels who are vastly more intellectually capable than humankind, long to grasp what God is up to in this work of sovereign grace. Literally the text means that they long to look into it. It means they are bending over to get to the bottom of it, "How is this all going to work? I can't wait to see how this works?" Because angels, though they are vastly superior to humankind, they are not God, they are not omniscient so they are learning, and for whatever reason, God didn't let them in on everything. He is letting it unfold and they'll learn as it happens.

So as God gave the truth of sovereign grace to the Old Testament writers and the Old Testament prophets, the angels knew something of it but the angels wondered, "How is this going to work?" You see, angels do not have to learn that God delights in being God. You've got to learn that, they don't have to learn that. They are around God, they know why God would delight in being God. Here's what an angel would tell you, "Look at him for one second and tell me why he's not delighted in himself." Angels get why God is delighted in being God. They understand that thoroughly. Angels understood why God is worthy of all glory but something they do have to learn is how God's wisdom and will is

going to unfold to further his glory, and that's the work of sovereign grace, how God is saving men. They didn't understand that completely. They longed to look into it.

This work, this work of sovereign grace, this work of saving souls, this work of building his church, is a work that is above all other works in manifesting God's love, God's wisdom, God's justice, God's grace, God's mercy, God's power, and on and on we can go. Every time a soul is saved and a church is planted or built up, the angels increasingly see the wonder and the glory of God's work. They long to watch it happen.

Can you see a holy angel from eons back before there was the New Testament and they start learning of this truth, "That our God, the God we love and worship and serve faithfully, the God who we know is worthy of all worship and glory and praise, are we hearing that he's going to save for himself a people from wretched, offensive, fallen sinners, and he's going to call them holy as he is holy? Did we hear that?" The angel would look at another angel, "Did we hear that God, the Triune, transcendent, holy God of all righteousness, is going to look at these wretched sinners and call them righteous as he is righteous? How is that going to work?" They are just longing, "How is this going to work?" And one day the Prince of Glory leaves and comes down to earth. He is wrapped in clothing as a little baby laying in Bethlehem's manger, and the angel said, "I don't know where this is going but this is exciting. God's doing something." God didn't send an angel, he didn't send Michael this time, he sent himself this time. So they just said, "There's about 10,000 of us, Lord, and we've got to go to Bethlehem and we've got to meet with these shepherds because we've got to praise God." And he sent them down to Bethlehem and started shouting, "Glory to God in the highest! Glory to God in the highest! Do you know how long we've waited?" They longed to look into it. Then Jesus lives his perfect life and they nail him to a cross. Can you imagine the anguish in the angels' souls as they see the Prince of Glory, the one they love more than anything in the universe, nailed to a cross and they see him suffer and bleed and die and they see him buried in the grave, and on the third day, up from the grave he arose, and the pieces start coming together. And they glory and they marvel.

It was a dim light but now they are learning and it's getting brighter and brighter and brighter. Now they understand what we understand and every time another facet of God's absolutely perfect work of redemption and absolutely – are you listening to me – every single soul that belongs to Jesus will be regenerated, will be redeemed, will be made holy with his own holiness, will be made righteous with his own righteousness, and will be with him in heaven forever. Every little piece is coming together, piece by piece, and the angels marvel and glory and wonder as this is giving more and more glory to the great wisdom and work that only God can do.

1 Corinthians 13:12 says, "now we see in a mirror dimly." Now their mirrors were polished metal so when they would look at themselves, they couldn't see themselves clearly. I'm thinking about changing my mirrors out to some of that as I get older. So they couldn't see clearly and that's what God is saying, God's saying, "You're getting tidbits of it, aren't you? You're getting it a little bit." But can I say this for the 400,000th time, that's why you must have a strong pulpit so you can learn who God is. Not lean on the wisdom

of man and the manipulations of a crafty evangelist but know God. Then it's going to increase and increase and increase and we will see more and more fully and one day he says face-to-face. You see, the story of sovereign grace is the story of glory. God is doing it for his own glory.

Now it's good for us, amen? But I'm sorry, you're not the centerpiece of God's heart, God is. But isn't it quite amazing that he sees you in his Son who is him? So he can delight in you and delight in himself at the same time. Brother, if you could comprehend that gift, you wouldn't go home, you'd say right here on your face in tears and gratitude that God can delight in me like he delights in his Son because only God can delight in God and I get to be in his Son. What a marvelous unspeakable gift. Actually, the doctrines of sovereign grace or the doctrine of salvation or the doctrine of redemption, use whatever word you want to use, it's not just the story of glory, his glory is the story. His glory is the story. Are you listening to me? If he did not desire his glory, you'd go to hell. You were not what moved him. His own desire to magnify his own name moved him to save you. Get over yourself. Repent. Be humble. It's God delighting in God that saves us.

Put the Spurgeon quote up there. Some years ago, my wife had this run off and she put it in a frame and it's on her vanity in her bathroom. "At the last it shall be clearly seen that in every chosen vessel of mercy," that's us who have believed, "Jehovah did as he willed with his own and that in every part of the work of grace, he accomplished his purpose and glorified his own name."

Our forefathers called it perseverance of the saints, that once you are saved, you persevere and get all the way to heaven. We sometimes call it eternal security. By the way, that's one of the five points of Calvinism, so if any Baptist says, "I'm not a Calvinist," say, "Yeah, you are. If you believe you're going to heaven and you can't lose your salvation, that's a Calvinistic doctrine, Goofy." Don't say that. When somebody asks you, the devil tempts you, "Are you really God's? Have you lost your salvation? Can you be forsaken and forgotten to condemnation after you've come to Christ?" God would have to deny his Son and fail at his purposes of grace for me to lose my salvation. Do you not understand? We've taught eternal security of the believer because, "I drove a tomato stake behind the house and told the devil that's the day we ask Jesus to save us." That's stupid. Our security rests in an omnipotent, omniscient, Almighty, eternal God, whose purpose of grace cannot fail. They cannot so I am secure. I am secure. In Bill Stafford's words, "I'm so saved it's pitiful." You can't keep him but he will keep you because he will not be denied the glory that's due his name by keeping you to the end. Is that not good stuff? I don't care if you don't like my preaching, that's good stuff right there. That's good stuff.

The centerpiece strand in the unbreakable table of sovereign grace is God's all-consuming grand purpose to glorify himself. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. And hallelujah.