

The Christian's Warfare Part 5: Biblical Perspective on Power

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The Christian's Warfare

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I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 10, continuing to look at a series of messages that we've entitled "The Christian's Warfare," and the jumping off point for these messages is this 10th chapter of 2 Corinthians, verses 1 to 6, which really provides kind of the framework and the objectives of what we're trying to do each Sunday, and that is to deal with ungodly ways of thinking, ungodly conceptual frameworks, unbiblical thought patterns that we have imbibed from the world, and these thought patterns are impacting us in ways we don't understand and don't see, in ways that are in some ways feel unconscious to us, that is, we're not fully aware of how deeply affected we are by unbiblical ways of thinking. We live in a world where lies are told continually. Satan is the god of this age, he is the ruler of this world according to the Scriptures. The whole world lies in the power of the evil one, 1 John 5:19, and so he is lying continually and he does that in and through the world system, and so we basically like fish, a fish who doesn't know he's wet, we don't even begin to see some of these things and they come into our minds, they then form thought processes that hinder the true knowledge of God, that hinder us from being able to receive the truth of God into our souls in a life-giving way. And so that's why this passage is so foundational, is it tells us that there are always going to be things that we have to be fighting against and the battlefield of spiritual warfare is the mind, it is that we learn to think God's thoughts after him, that we humble ourselves before his holy word.

So the title of the message this morning is "The Christian's Warfare: A Biblical Perspective on Power." A biblical perspective on power. Last week we talked about a biblical perspective on authority, importance of authority biblically and we said we were trying to move from resistance, sinful resistance to joyful submission, and we come to a related concept, it's not exactly the same, it's distinguished, it's distinct but it's related, that is, the issue of power. This is a concept that is of great interest today. In fact, questions of power dominate the social dialog. Much of the debates that are raging in our culture concern the difference and disparities of power. Many people are beginning to think in just this kind of thought structure continually, that is, there are basically two groups of people, those who have power and those who have not. This is a part of the dialog that is going on that critical theory, critical race theory, critical theory in general is

the idea the dynamics of power, that those who have power and those who don't have power and that this is basically the fundamental issue that we should be concerned about.

The Bible has a lot to say about power but one of the things that I think the 2 Corinthians 10 passage says to us, and indeed all of Scripture says, is that we tend to when we come with our questions to God's word, we have trouble in that we frame the questions the wrong way. We don't even know how to think about how to ask the questions because sin has so darkened our minds, sin has so disordered our affections, sin has so bound the will that we need to put on the spectacles of special revelation. John Calvin used that image, that you cannot look at the natural world, natural revelation, issues in society, issues of science, issues of the interactions of people, you cannot look at those and think correctly about them from a spiritual vantage point to really understand them truly unless you first put on the spectacles of special revelation. Man in his darkened mind, in his disordered affections, looks at things and interprets incorrectly. We all do. Our sinful desires dominate the way that we see things and so Calvin says what you have to do is first put on the spectacles of special revelation. You have to learn to think biblically and let biblical thought forms guide you as you now look at reality, and that unless you do that, you will misunderstand, misinterpret, twist and distort what you see to your own hurt, and in some cases to your own ruin.

So the Scripture gives us the way to think about every issue but, again, putting on the spectacles of special revelation means that you don't start from the vantage point of how the world frames the question, how we might want to frame the question ourselves, but we let God set the agenda. We let God tell us what he wants to tell us and deal with what he wants to deal with in the order he wants to deal with it. This is the challenge of learning what it really means to be faithful to the Lord, and so this morning we want to look at this issue of power.

2 Corinthians 10:1-6,

1 Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ-- I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent! 2 I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh. 3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, 6 and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we come as always to Your word inadequate in ourselves. Lord, even with renewed hearts, that those who are born again here today have, we still come

disoriented, distracted, confused because our flesh, our own sinful desires that twist and misunderstand, because we live in a world of lies and, Lord, we come and we ask that You might teach us. We want to humble ourselves before You and acknowledge that we know nothing, Lord, in and of ourselves and we ask You to speak, Lord. Your servants are listening. Help us to follow Christ. We pray in His name. Amen.

So "The Christian's Warfare: A Biblical Perspective on Power." This passage basically tells us, 2 Corinthians 10 says that the goal is to in anytime we're really dealing with spiritual warfare, the goal is to demolish conceptual frameworks that are wrong. This is violent language. This is the language of warfare. It's the language of siege warfare. It's the language of siege towers and siege ramps and battering rams used to take a fortress and to, if necessary, knock the walls down so that you can liberate an area. That's the picture, the word picture he's using here, and Paul is saying, listen, some of his opponents who were in Corinth, you hear this in verse 1, had been insulting Paul. They would say things about Paul, "You know, Paul's not that impressive in person. He's much more impressive in his writing than he is in person." And he says, "I," verse 1, "I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent!" He's basically quoting his opponents and he's basically saying, "I who am meek when face to face, I'm coming and I'm going to be bold and what I'm going to do and what I am trying to do in my ministry is spiritual warfare, and I'm coming to demolish wrong ways of thinking that are holding you captive." He wants to demolish conceptual frameworks, to tear down thought processes that are ungodly because we all, we accept worldly thinking and begin to think according to worldly patterns of thought and they become so second nature that we actually believe these things at deep levels, and these deep, deeply held unbiblical concepts and beliefs then affect our ability to hear the truth and to apply it to our lives, and so we have to go at the foundations, and that's why we've been focusing on the foundational issues that Scripture talks about that will then demolish the surface areas that we struggle with, and we don't spend a lot of time on these surface questions, we're going for the deep roots like Paul is talking about here.

So we want to destroy every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God. I mentioned before that he's picturing the Acropolis of Corinth. He knows the Corinthians see it every day, this massive fortress on top of this large hill outside of Corinth. He says, "That is the kind of thing that's in your mind that needs to be torn down." And you and I need God's grace and God's word to do that. So we have wrong views of power and what we're gonna do, this will be a two part message and please listen carefully. This is going to be a two part message and a lot of the practical application is gonna come in the second message next week, so hang with us through the process both weeks, okay? Today and next week we're talking about a biblical perspective on power.

Now there's essentially two main points. We're gonna cover the first main point today, start into the second main point today and do most of it next week and here are the two main points, okay? To understand power, God says a lot about power, the word is used hundreds of times in the Scriptures, especially when you add strength and might and other synonyms. You'll find it hundreds of times in the Scriptures but what we want to do is think about, to get God's view of it, these two points: the sovereignty of God and the

responsibility of man. Those are the two main points. We're gonna look at the sovereignty of God first and then we'll look at the responsibility of man, and what we're gonna see is, essentially this is the message: there really are differences in power among people, okay? We all have different portions of power and one of the things that's going on today is something called intersectionality and this is where people are encouraged to think about all of the ways they are disadvantaged and aggrieved and the idea is that you think about, it's kind of built on a binary structure, you're either in power or you're not in power and everywhere you're not in power, you are an aggrieved minority, you're an oppressed person, okay? And so it's binary, it's A or B, and there's a bunch of these different things. One would be gender, male and female. Of course, that's no longer binary in the sense, right? There's a bunch, but it's actually, they have a new binary, it's not just male or female, it's cis-gendered or not, and cis-gendered, I think it's c-i-s or c-y-s gender means that you have the same identity gender-wise that you were born with physically, which just means if you were born with male, you know, male attributes, then you identify as male, then you're cis-gendered. But you may have been born biologically male but you identify as something else and so that means that you're actually not the cis-gendered people, cis-gender would be male and female who identify consistent with how they were born biologically, and everybody else is outside of that. Cis-gendered is actually the majority position and the power-holding people and the people outside are those who don't have power. You can see why I don't like to get into all the particulars of these issues because it just confuses things, but there's a better way. But I've got to do a little more of this and then we'll get back to the text.

So if you're a female, you're disadvantaged because the society is patriarchal. The color of your skin can make you advantaged or disadvantaged. If you're white in America, you are privileged and if you're not white in America, you are not. If you have socioeconomic wealth, then you are privileged, and if you don't have wealth, you're not. You see, everything is about who has and who doesn't have. If you have education, opportunities for good education, you are privileged and in power, and if you don't, you are not in power. The same thing would be true of status and position. And so you can look at all these different things and then someone could say, "Well, you know, I'm a female, therefore I am not in power but I'm white so I am in power." And so you have these cross sections of how it actually relates. Very confusing but what I want to do is say here is the issue.

Some of those are not even valid, right? God makes man male, he makes them female, and the Lord determines and it doesn't matter how you and I feel about it according to Scripture. Now it matters in the sense that we care for one another and help one another think biblically and trust in the grace of Jesus Christ. If you struggle with same-sex attraction or if you struggle with feelings of being in the wrong body, the Lord cares about that and we should care about one another enough to invest time and energy in helping one another but the answer is that God is the one who determines these things, and what we're gonna see is when you get right down to it with power, essentially this is the message: God is sovereign, he possesses all power and he gives it as he chooses to whom he chooses, for as long as he chooses, and the responsibility of man is essentially to give thanks. It is to accept what God has done and say, "He is God, I am not. He does

as He wills and I worship Him." It doesn't mean that we don't care about issues of justice but it means that ultimately this issue of power, a lot of it comes down, this fundamental root issue is, "Is God God or is He not?" And you see, sin in us, we want to be God. This is one of the ways you see it. We want to say, "It's not fair. It's not right what You have done." We're standing in judgment of God. Now it's not just that we be humble and grateful, that's part of what we're gonna see, responsibility is to be humble, be grateful, but it's also to be faithful. Whatever power God has given you he's given you so that you can use for his glory and the good of others. And the last point is gonna be fearful, be fearful because he's going to judge you on how faithful you are to use your power for his glory and the good of others. So I gave you the whole message right there. That's it. It's the sovereignty of God, the responsibility of man, be humble, be grateful, be faithful, be fearful. That's what we're gonna cover but we're only going to start now, we're going to start on the sovereignty of God and we're gonna get into probably to be humble. We might get in to be grateful too.

Okay, so that's where we're going. So we're gonna have a lot to say about what it means to be faithful and what it means to be fearful. You understand that? You see, God doesn't just give it out and say, "Enjoy it and use it for your own pleasure." No, he says, "I am God. I have made you. Live for My glory, and if you don't, I will hold you to account." But he totally changes the way we think about these things.

So the sovereignty of God, that's our first point this morning, the biblical perspective on power, the sovereignty of God. This is one of the most difficult doctrines, it's one of the most offensive doctrines to most people, the absolute sovereignty of God. Ted mentioned the word "providence," the name of our church is Providence Church. The doctrine of providence is essentially this, you can actually think of it this way, that basically everything that happens is what God has provided and it would more correctly be said something like this: that whatsoever comes to pass, whatsoever comes to pass happens by the will of God. Even evil, though God is not the cause of evil nor does he tempt anyone to evil. He sovereignly reigns over whatever evil comes to pass so that his providence means that he is absolutely sovereign over everything that happens in your life. He's sovereign over everything that happens in the world and at first glance that creates a lot of questions. It's a troubling doctrine on the surface because we wonder why are these bad things happening in our lives? Why is evil doing so much in this world? And it seems that it's a path to comfort and peace and joy to deny God's sovereignty, but I'm telling you that is a dead-end and it ends in misery; that sovereignty, though it's the most difficult doctrine, when you really understand it in light of who God is, it is the sweetest doctrine. It is the source of greatest comfort. You live in a world where nothing is outside of God's ordination and his plan and will, and if you did, that would be a cause of concern and fear but the good news is the Bible makes it clear you do not. Whether you believe it or not doesn't matter, the fact is God says he's in charge of where every single dust particle in the universe falls. Not a sparrow falls from heaven without his knowledge, his ordaining it.

So the sovereignty of God. What I want us to do is look at his sovereignty in a lot of passages of Scripture so we're going to be going through a number of different passages.

Turn with me to the Psalms, Psalm 62:11, I'll read verses 11 and 12. Psalm 62:11, "Once God has spoken; Twice I have heard this: That power belongs to God." Power belongs to God. "And lovingkindness is Yours." That's what makes his power so sweet because he doesn't just have power and sovereignty, he's also a God of lovingkindness, abounding in lovingkindness, that is, tender mercies. His heart is compassionate. So the same God that rules, loves. And he says, "lovingkindness is Yours, O Lord, For You recompense a man according to his work." That gets to that "be faithful, be fearful."

All power belongs to him, though look with me at Psalm 115:3. We could do this all day on the sovereignty of God. I mean, if you read your Bible carefully, you cannot maintain a position honestly that God is not sovereign over everything. You just can't do it. It's everywhere, on every page. You have to just deny the Scripture. Psalm 115:3, "But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases." He does whatever he pleases. God is in the heavens, he does what he pleases. He is free and one of the things that we see the Scripture does, we want to protect our free will, our autonomy, and what the Scripture does is protect God's free will and his autonomy because by definition of being God he is free.

Psalm 135, just turn over a few pages to Psalm 135:5-6, "For I know that the LORD is great And that our Lord is above all gods. Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps." He is Lord and he does whatever he pleases in heaven and on earth.

You turn to Daniel 4 since we're closer to that. I'm gonna mention to you another passage and you can make a note of it, 1 Timothy 6. Turn to Daniel 4, that's where we're gonna be. Listen to this from 1 Timothy 6. The Apostle Paul in speaking to Timothy says, "I charge you in the presence of God," verse 13, "who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus." So God is the one who gives life to all things. Everything that's alive in the world is alive because he gave it life and he's giving it life. "And of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time," and then he says this, "He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords," that God is the blessed and only sovereign. He is the only one who is ruling over all that we see. There is no other, there is only the Lord, "who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen." The Scripture and the prophets, those who come to know God love to give glory to God and acknowledge his sovereign reign. It is a fact that cannot be argued with. I mean, you can argue with it but only to your own destruction.

It becomes clear every day that God is sovereign. I remember when I was in seminary, my professor one day was explaining chaos theory, and again I'm not a scientist and he wasn't either though he did a pretty good job of explaining it and I won't do as good a job, but essentially he was saying this, that he was talking about the history of science and how science, you know, continues to get better as they continue to observe. You know, science is supposed to be a skeptical search for knowledge. You don't just take things as

dogma, you challenge them. Interestingly today, science has become politicized. Now you can't question things. That's not science, science is always questioning things. Anyway so, you're questioning things, you're learning, you're growing in knowledge, this is natural revelation and all people in the image of God can understand things. They can't understand them spiritually, what they really mean, the real significance apart from the grace of God, apart from the spectacles, but they can truly understand things in some way, just not with the full spiritual benefit and understanding.

But anyway, our professor was sharing that one of the things that had been a great encouragement to him, he had studied under T. F. Torrance in Scotland, and T. F. Torrance was a Christian theologian who also was a scientist and he was talking about chaos theory which is the idea that at the building blocks of matter, the smaller and smaller you go from organisms down into the atom to subatomic particles essentially what you find as science looks deeper, looks deeper and deeper and smaller and smaller things, they find not order but chaos, that is, that it doesn't make sense that things hold together, that you know, when you look at the things we're wondering why do the molecules in an atom, you know, the neutrons and the protons, why do they hold together and the electrons revolve around them and the electrons not go flying out away from them? We can't understand what holds them together but Colossians 1:18 says that in Christ all things consist. He is the image of the invisible God. He is the Creator. Nothing has been created apart from him and in him all things consist. He's holding it together. As science continues, they come to questions that lead them face to face with the reality that something, some power is holding it together. The Bible's been saying it all along. He sovereignly reigns. He holds the molecules in your body together. That's his sovereignty. He's a much bigger and much greater God than we even imagine.

Well, to Daniel 4. He's sovereign over all the big things. This is a chapter where Daniel who has been taken as a prisoner in the first Babylonian captivity, the first Babylonian really incursion into the southern kingdom of Judah where the people of Israel were living, taken hostages, they've taken people back and Daniel and his three friends were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were put into the training school of the Babylonians because this was the custom, the kings of Babylon and other nations would always try to take the intelligentsia or the prospective young people that were really intelligent, bring them in, train them, and so you had more well-trained advisors. You were getting the cream of the crop from whoever you conquered. And so Daniel goes into that training and then he ministers and rises up to the second in command, basically, in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar has a dream in chapter 4. Nebuchadnezzar is an ungodly man who believes that everything that he's accomplished, he's accomplished by his own power, and the Lord does something extraordinary with Nebuchadnezzar. He gives him this dream that Nebuchadnezzar is really troubled by about a tree getting chopped down and the stump growing up. Anyway, the long story short and you can read, I encourage you to read the chapter, it's actually, this is interesting, this chapter of Scripture is actually inspired by, all Scripture is inspired by God, God-breathed, but this was penned by Nebuchadnezzar himself, the fourth chapter of Daniel. Astonishing, and what you see is this man of audacious pride, God humbles him and makes him give glory

to God and Nebuchadnezzar finds that that is the sweetest place to be in the world, is humble before the God of heaven.

But you see this, I just want to show you some of the quotations because what happens, Nebuchadnezzar at the end of his dream, he recounts what these angelic watchers are saying to him after the tree is chopped down. In verse 17, Daniel 4, he said, "This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers," he's quoting them basically, "And the decision is a command of the holy ones, In order that the living may know That the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, And bestows it on whom He wishes And sets over it the lowliest of men." This dream, Nebuchadnezzar, and what's happened is so that all people may know, including you, that the Most High God, the God of Israel, the one true God is sovereign over all the realms of this world, every kingdom, and he sets over them whom he chooses. Even, isn't it interesting that last phrase, even the lowliest of men? It's not your ability, it's not your wisdom, it's God's sovereign will.

Now Nebuchadnezzar hears that dream and when Daniel comes in, this is one of the ways you see Daniel is so gracious and loving to Nebuchadnezzar who is his captor. It's likely Daniel was emasculated as a part of being brought into the Babylonian court. This was customary to make it where you could not have children. He probably experienced that along with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, but you see him still loving his oppressive king because Christians are different. We are not looking at the things that are seen as much as we are looking at the things that are not seen. And so when he hears this dream, this is what he says to Nebuchadnezzar, verse 18, "My lord," this is about, I'm sorry, verse 19, it's toward the bottom of verse 19, "My lord, if only the dream applied to those who hate you and its interpretation to your adversaries!" He'll repeat that again in verse 27, "Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your sins by doing righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity." He's basically pleading with him, "I don't want this to happen to you." You would think Daniel would be saying, "It's about time." No, he loves him because he knows what it's like to be loved as a sinner and when you know what it's like to be loved as a sinner, you have the ability to love other sinners, and if you don't have the ability to love other sinners, you need to go back and look are you understanding how sinful you are? Are you amazed at the love of Christ for you?

But look how many times he says this same kind of thing in the dream. Verse 25 when he's giving him the interpretation of the dream, he reminds him that he's gonna be driven away from mankind, your dwelling place is gonna be with the beasts of the field, you will be given grass to eat like cattle drenched with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is the ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever he wishes. That is the main refrain here. Look at verse 26, "be assured to you," your kingdom will be assured to you, "after you recognize that it is Heaven that rules." Chapter 4, verse 32, "you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes." Immediately at that moment it happens, Nebuchadnezzar is driven away, he

lives as an animal for seven years until he then is given grace by God to see that God rules. He acknowledges the rule of God, God restores his kingdom and his splendor to him, and then verses 34 to 37 is Nebuchadnezzar's praise of the Most High God. "But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar," verse 34, "But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?' At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride." Praise him from the most unlikely person. He came to understand that God is sovereign and the Lord humbled him and he quit fighting it and it became a source of great joy and blessing to him.

So he's sovereign over the big things, he's also sovereign over, so he's sovereign over whoever is in power. God is sovereign, that means that whatever happens that affects power, God is sovereign. It doesn't mean we don't have responsibility, we do, but God is still sovereign and when we give him glory for what he does, will we worship him and trust him. But he's also sovereign over the small ways or our individual lives and the things that bring power.

Turn with me to Exodus 4 because, you know, the abilities that we have... Okay, we'll go to Exodus 4 first. This is an interesting passage. This is where Moses is being called by God to go and deliver the nation of Israel from Egyptian slavery. We talked about this a couple of weeks ago when we were talking about how the Lord used even oppressive regimes to carry out his purposes. You just can't escape that as you read the Bible carefully. You're like, "Why is the Lord allowing this? Why is the Lord allowing this?" His purposes are not our purposes. His ways are not our ways. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so are his ways above our ways and his thoughts above our thoughts, so Isaiah 55:8-9. Here's he's called Moses to go and Moses basically is realizing what he's telling me to do, I'm gonna go and I'm gonna tell Pharaoh to let my people go, and he is fear-stricken because he knows that there's basically a death warrant out for him in Egypt, and he also knows he doesn't have ability. He apparently has a speech impediment. Most scholars think he's a stutterer.

Look what he says in verse 10, "Then Moses said to the LORD, 'Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.'" He's basically saying, "Lord, send somebody else. I don't know what happened, somebody gave You the wrong, Your helpers gave You the wrong information about me. It's Your assistant, they didn't do good research in the recruiting process to help You know that I don't have the ability to do what You're asking me to do."

Now look what the Lord says and look and behold the sovereign freedom of God. Look at verse 11, "The LORD said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?'" Now what this is saying is that however God has made you, even if he's made you with disabilities, you were born with disabilities, the Lord sovereignly chose to do that. If he chose to give you great physical abilities or great intellectual abilities, you know who chose to do that? It wasn't you, it was God, and it is freeing to submit to the sovereignty of God, not to resent what he's done but to trust him that he's got a purpose in whatever he's done. It's like, think about this, Moses, did the Lord know he was going to use Moses before he was born? Yes, but the Lord made him to have a stuttering problem, a speech problem. Now what he's gonna do, even though he's trying to tell Moses, "You don't need help. I will be with you." This is because God is so wise, his whole plan is so great, he's going to give Moses the benefit of letting Aaron be his voice and in that he's gonna be a great word picture of how God speaks through prophets. It's kind of mind-blowing how it all works out but the fact is it wasn't an afterthought. The Lord didn't just slip up, "Oh no, he's got a tongue issue. He's not going to be able to speak. Oh, what am I gonna do? I'm gonna have to bring somebody else along to help him." No, God is working sovereignly with the end in view whenever he decrees anything to happen, and to understand that is a path to joy because it means, at first it can be troubling, it can be difficult, "Why did he put?" But listen, he's good. He's loving. He's a God of grace who puts us in situations where we need grace and then he gives it to those who humble themselves and cry out for it, and in that he gets to know you and you get to know him in ways that you would never have gotten to know him.

And one of the most beautiful, one of the most beautiful Christians I know is Joni Eareckson Tada. I mean, I say that and her faith is so beautiful. I hear the woman talk and I just think the fragrance and glory of Christ just shines out in her life. If you don't know who she is, look her up and listen or watch one of her testimonies. She's a woman who at 16 years old had a diving accident and went from being a very healthy, physically fit, you know, young woman with her future ahead of her, she instantly became a quadriplegic, no ability to move her arms or her legs, paralyzed for life like that. She spent a lot of time fighting that for the first few years. She had a lot of people in the name of Christ teaching false doctrine to her, telling her that if she would just believe and had enough faith, she would be healed. They took her to those healing places and you know what she testifies? Her experience was that the people in the wheelchairs at those healing events are people that they push off to the side because they're looking for people that they can make look like got healed. You see, God had a purpose in her life and when you read her story, you listen to her testimony, what you will see is that the Lord wanted to show himself strong in weakness in her and to show his incredible power through this woman's life, and what he does is so beautiful and so wonderful, so that she says now more than 50 years after that accident, that if she could go back she would not change a thing because she's gotten to know Christ so well.

She explained it, her morning routine is like three hours long. It takes three hours for her to get up and out of bed, to be bathed and changed and to be dressed, and she has

Christian sisters in Christ who come over and help with that with every day. She's married, been married for 20 or 30 years, it may be 35 years, I think. But she has Christian sisters in Christ come and she says every day she has to ask the Lord for grace that she will be like Jesus because she still doesn't want to be going through what she's going through. It's hard, it's difficult, but it makes her cry out to Jesus continually. She knows she needs him all the time.

So the Lord has his purposes but the point is he's sovereign and he then distributes the challenges, the blessings according to his sovereign will. You see this also in Acts 4, I'm sorry, Acts 17. The Apostle Paul, a sermon he preaches at Mars Hill in Athens. He is preaching to people who are spiritually completely in the dark about the one true God and he begins to unpack for them who the God of Scripture is, the true God. He says, "I saw an altar," they're idolaters, there are idols and things of worship all over Athens. There are temples to false gods, the Athenian Pantheon, all around him and he says, "I did see an altar. You're a very religious people," he gives them that compliment upfront but it's just to get a hearing with them. He says, "I found an altar to an unknown god. What you worship in ignorance today I proclaim to you. You made an altar to an unknown god," the idea is there must be some god we don't even know and we want to make sure we make an altar to him so we're covering all of our bases. And Paul begins to preach to them this unknown God who is the one true God and he says in verse 24, "The God who made the world," this is Acts 17:24, "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation."

First of all, that says he made from one man every nation of the earth. There is only one race, the human race. Different ethnicities, yes, but there's only one race, the human race. We are all the same. We are all equally sinful in ourselves. We can become more sinful to the degree that we go on sinning but that we're essentially we're equally lost, equally hopeless, equally separated from God.

But then he says, and this is the key part related to what we're talking about, his power. He determined every single person's appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation. The language is really emphatic here. It's speaking of like the verbs that are used and the nouns that are used are like doubling up on his sovereign prerogative. Basically it says this, that God chooses when you were born and where you will live. Every single person on the face of the earth, he's been determining when they would be born and where they would live. He sovereignly determines that.

Now we know from and we didn't have any choice where we were born, did we? I mean, you couldn't choose your mom and dad. You couldn't choose the time to be born. I would really rather have been, you know, a spring child rather than a winter child. You know, I know that's even kinda silly. Nobody thinks about that but I would rather have been born, have you ever thought, "I would rather have been born in this century. That would've

been really cool to live back then." Been in Bible times? Well, the news is you don't have any say in it and I don't have any say in it. God is sovereign. He determines it. He not only determines when you'll be born, he determines where you will live. He determines, you know, the city of your birth and every place that you've moved since, and even though you've been involved in making a lot of those decisions, ultimately God is the one. His sovereignty works with human responsibility so that he's determining where everyone goes and everyone lives.

So that means if you have a problem with where you were born, if you have a problem with the color of your skin, if you have a problem with the kind of parents that you were born to, you have a problem with how God has dealt with you. His sovereign prerogatives and freedom, he determines. He reserves these for himself. He says, "I am God. There is no other. Who are you to answer back to Me?" This is essentially, this is the tone of Scripture and we're gonna see it in a moment, it's exactly what he says to Job.

Now what this means is he gives you your intellectual ability. "I wish I had more intellect." Well, you have what God gave you. Now you can, you're to be responsible, that's another part of it, how you handle what you've been given is the key but God does not determine to give everybody equally. He determines to give it as he wants. That's something to really meditate on and think about, isn't it? What are things that we resent? We're angry about? That we haven't accepted? It doesn't mean that you, I mean, a disability, what a challenge that is but you can sit there and continue in bitterness and resentment and increase your misery and squander the opportunity to give glory to God or you can submit to God and say, "What the Lord has done I don't understand but I praise Him because His ways are right and good and best and He's going to help me to glorify Him along this path that I'm walking, because that's what He promises to do." He says, "Listen, I lay out your path but I will help you and be with you."

Those wonderful words in Scripture that you find him saying again and again. He said it to Moses when Moses was saying, "I've got a speech problem. I'm not able to do this." "I will be with you." He'll be with you. He'll be with me. He will help us. You can say, "Well, I don't have a disability." You might have one tomorrow. I could have a stroke tomorrow and the question is will I give God glory or not? It's always the same thing, we were created to worship and to know God, to love God, and to glorify him by doing good to others and we cannot do that well if we don't, first of all, accept his sovereignty.

He's sovereign over everything, so that's the first point, the sovereignty of God. He dispenses power, the means of power. He dispenses intellect. He dispenses physical ability. He dispenses these things. He dispenses even the resources around you to help you then use that intellect and deepen that intellect, or to use that physical ability and deepen that ability. You see, he gives you the energy even to do that or not, so that he really is the one who can say, "I gave. I took away."

Now let's look at the second point, the responsibility of man, and the first sub point is be humble and there is a great case study in this in the whole life of Job. Really interesting story when you think about it. There's so much to this. Job is one of the great heroes in

Scripture, in fact, there's a couple places in the bible where it talks about heroes from past time and Job makes the list. It's like Daniel and Job, they were apparently guys that the Lord thought were just exemplary because you'll find in other places, "Are you as wise as Daniel or Job?" And we're told a couple of times in the first two chapters what God thought about Job because he says, "Have you considered My servant Job," and he talks about there's no one like him. In fact, the book even started off telling us in verse 1, Job was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil. The first thing God says about him, "I want to tell you about Job." He's telling us as we're read the book, "I want to tell you about Job. He was blameless, upright, fearing God, turning away from evil." Then tells about the blessings he had. Then it tells about Satan's desire to destroy Job so that he can get Job to curse God to his face, and the Lord twice gives Job into Satan's power. That's what it says, 1:12, Job 1:12, "Then the LORD said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.'" Satan says, "Let me take away his stuff and he'll curse You." God says, "Okay, you can. All that he has is in your power but don't touch him." That's chapter 1 and he loses everything. We talked about this not too long ago. And rather than curse God, he says after he loses everything including all of his children in one day in just a matter of minutes he finds out he's lost all of his possessions and all of his children and he had a lot of possessions and a lot of children, but all of them are gone and what Job does is he says, "Blessed," he says, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Wait a minute, Satan did it. No, God did it. God put those, all those things in Satan's power. God made a sovereign decree to do it and Job understood that.

Then the second chapter, God says to Satan another time they're talking, read the text, read the whole story, it'll be a great blessing to you. He says the second time, "Have you considered My servant Job? He's blameless even though you incited Me against him." And Satan says, "Skin for skin. He only loves You because You won't let me touch his body. If You let me touch him, he'll curse You." And God says, "Okay, his body is in your power, only don't touch his life." So Satan makes Job miserable with some kind of awful affliction where he has boils from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet. He's in misery and agony, such great agony that his wife can't bear to look at his agony and says, "You should curse God and die." And when she says that to him, he says this, "Should we accept good from the hand of the Lord and not also evil?" And you have the editor of Job basically both times he makes statements saying, "In all these things Job did not sin with his mouth," what he's saying is, "What Job said is exactly right."

So Job does fantastic in chapter 1 and chapter 2 and then in chapters 3 to 37, 35 chapters, Job struggles. He struggles and part of the reason he struggles is because he listened to his friends. He has three friends show up and then a fourth friend comes up, and those first three, they are basically saying, "Listen, the reason this happened to you has to be because you've sinned. You did something. We know God doesn't do this to people who are righteous. Come clean, Job." And Job's like, "I didn't do anything." Remember, God had told us he's an upright man three times in the first two chapters. It wasn't because of his sin.

So they're telling him, "It's because of your sin." Job's like, "It's not because of my sin." So then Job starts thinking about, "Yeah, it really is unjust. What is God doing?" And in chapter 13, verse 3, he basically says, "I want an audience with God." He says, "But I would speak to the Almighty, And I desire to argue with God." And he goes on to explain about this. He wants to, he wants an audience with the Most High because the Most High has been unfair to him. He had, yes, and he knew God gave him. Naked he came into the world, naked shall I return. He gave, he's taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. But now he's saying, "It's not right that You took it away. It's not right that You did this to me. It's not right that You took my reputation away so that I'm continually slandered by my friends."

And in 35 chapters there's this dialog going on and he's asking, "Why?" And you read the book and you think about it, there are things that happen where we just don't know why. "Why have You done this, Lord?" You read the Psalms, you find the Psalmist saying this sometimes, "Why, O Lord, why do You stand afar off?" You read what happens and if you really carefully read the Scriptures sometimes you think, "What is God doing here? Why did He let this happen?" From our perspective things don't make sense a lot. From our perspective we see evil winning a lot.

But the point of Job is powerfully seen in the last five chapters of the book, I said from chapter 3 to 37 there's this dialog and Job is struggling, and in chapter 38, finally he gets what he wanted. Remember he wanted an audience with God. He wanted to argue his case with the Most High and suddenly in chapter 38, verse 1, the Lord shows up, "the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, 'Who is this that darkens counsel By words without knowledge?'" Who is this that is basically spouting off all these things and he doesn't know what he's talking about?

Look what he says next. The Lord says, he uses a lot of satire. In fact, in these next four chapters, the Lord's gonna basically ask Job at least 60 questions. Job wants to ask questions of God? God shows up and says, "Let me ask you some questions," and the first is, "Who is this that darkens counsel By words without knowledge? Now gird up your loins like a man, And I will ask," this is God speaking, "I will ask you, and you instruct Me!" And here at the beginning, this is kind of the force of these questions. "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding." Where were you, Job, when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me since you know so much. "Who set its measurements? Since you know. Or who stretched the line on it? On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone, When the morning stars sang together And all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who enclosed the sea with doors?" Verse 12, "Have you ever in your life commanded the morning?" Verse 16, "Have you entered into the springs of the sea Or walked in the recesses of the deep?" Can you walk around in the deep, Job? Verse 22, "Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, Or have you seen the storehouses of the hail?" Can you make it snow? Can you make it hail? Verse 31, "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades, Or loose the cords of Orion? Can you lead forth a constellation in its season, And guide the Bear with her satellites?" Can you make the constellations come on time?

Chapter 39, verse 1, "Do you know the time the mountain goats give birth? Do you observe the calving of the deer? Can you bind the wild ox in a furrow with ropes?" I mean, he goes on and on showing him, verse 26 of 39, "Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars?" Did you create the hawk to be able to fly like it can? Did you design its feathers?"

So 38 and 39, he ends up then in chapter 40, verse 1, "Then the LORD said to Job," he has a concluding question of this first part, "Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God answer it." Then Job answered, he's humbled at this point, he said, "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You? I lay my hand on my mouth. Once I have spoken, and I will not answer; Even twice, and I will add nothing more." You think maybe the book would end there but it doesn't. "Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm and said, 'Now gird up your loins like a man; I will ask you, and you instruct Me. Will you really annul My judgment? Will you condemn Me that you may be justified?'" And he goes on for two more chapters asking questions like that. I mean, this is where the Lord says, "I am God and you are not."

And you and I have an amazing audacity that we think we can instruct God. We do. I do. I find myself when I hear about something that happens to somebody, that in my heart something will come up and actually say, "Lord, really?" Think about that, me saying, "Lord, really?" Who am I? What do I know? How can I accuse God of wrong? I know nothing. I don't see all that he's doing and this is what he's saying in these chapters, he's saying, "Job, I am so great and I see so much that you have no grasp of, you can't understand why I'm doing what I'm doing and your responsibility is not to figure it out, your responsibility is to submit to Me and trust Me and to know not only My sovereignty but My love because I have a good purpose. All things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose." His purpose is that we might be like Jesus and we might know him and walk with God in a way that true knowledge, and what we find out at the end of Job, Job then at the end after these last two chapters, two more chapters of questions and rebuke, chapter 42, verse 1, "Then Job answered the LORD and said, 'I know that You can do all things, And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.' 4 Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You," this is Job saying, "I will ask You and You instruct me. I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You; Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes."

When we understand that God is God and he is sovereign and he has good purposes and everything he's done in our lives, he's done with intentionality and purpose and perfect wisdom, when we humble ourselves under him and we say to him, "Lord, teach me what You're doing. What do You want me to do to deal with the situations in my life?" There are, responsibility is real. We have responsibility to be faithful. We have responsibility to call other people to be faithful. We have responsibility to call out sin and to speak against it, and to reprove it. Yes, we do but we must start from a position of humility on our knees before God because if we don't, we will be, we will just be enemy tools to bring more division, to bring more evil. But when a man humbles himself before God, when a

woman humbles herself before God, when a young person humbles themselves before God, you become a weapon in God's hand to do great good, a tool to build others up.

You know, God is sovereign, he is completely in control, and it shows us that we are not, and it shows us how much we need his grace and that's why we need Christ, and the fact that you and I are so quick to judge God ought to be an eye-opener to say this is the essential evil in our hearts, in all of our hearts, is that we would stand in judgment of God, we who know nothing, we who were born yesterday and know nothing would stand in judgment of God who from the beginning to the end, from everlasting to everlasting is the Lord, who knows all things and does whatever he chooses. He can do all things. He knows all things. He's good and he's shown his love, his goodness supremely in the cross of Jesus Christ. And can you believe that a God like this that is so great and we are so wicked, he would then send his Son into the world and allow his Son to experience all the punishment that you and I should have experienced at the cross. All of our audacity, all of our wicked pride, Jesus died for that. He was hated, he was rejected, he was despised and on the cross he bore the sins of everyone who would ever believe and in that he made a way for sinners like you and me to come back to God. By his stripes we are healed. His blood pays for our sins and then he gives us a new heart. When we believe his resurrection, we believe his death in our place, the cross, we submit to him as Lord and we trust in him for our righteousness, for our salvation, believing he rose from the dead, then God gives us a new heart and begins to help us to start walking in truth. It's still a battle, though. Every day is a battle to unthink the things that are ungodly and to walk in truth and to trust God no matter what he brings. This is so freeing and so encouraging to know that no matter what happens tomorrow, if the worst thing that you might imagine were to happen tomorrow in your life, how much more wonderful is it to know that God is ordaining that and knows it's gonna happen and has a good purpose for it right now, an eternal good purpose for you and for all who love him. You can rest in that because the God who is sovereign is also a God who is good.

I remember hearing someone say in talking about the book of Job that what happens in Job is the Lord lets Satan destroy Job but it's God's sovereign choice and what he says is when Job first, when Satan first asked God, "The reason he worships You is because You have a hedge around all of his stuff. If You will remove that hedge of protection around all of his stuff, he will curse You. I'll take it away and he'll curse You." And so God removes the hedge and he says, "Anything that he has you can touch but don't touch him." And then, in a sense, after that Satan says, "You've got a hedge around his body. Remove that hedge and I'll attack him and he will curse You." And God says, "Okay," and removes the hedge. Someone said this in thinking about this: when you understand the sovereignty of God and the goodness of God together, what you understand is that the hand that moves the hedge in your life, the hand that allows all hell to break loose in your life, that pulls the hedge back, as it were, the hand that moves the hedge has the print of a nail in it. Jesus Christ has proved his love. He was willing to endure all and so he loves you perfectly and if you don't know him, he's willing to love you perfectly. He invites you to himself. Ask God to give you grace to repent and believe, to humble yourself under him and to know his love.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for who You are. Lord, we praise You for Your greatness, Your sovereign rule but also for Your goodness, Your kindness, Your mercy, that those who humble themselves under Your mighty hand You don't push down, You exalt. You lift us up. You make us stand on high places. You give us great joy and peace and the wonder of Your love, to be called the sons of God, the daughters of God. Lord, help us be people who walk in truth, who think Your thoughts after You. Help us discard ungodly thought processes and belief systems but, Lord, it's difficult to work through all these things. Grant continuing grace that we might understand and know how to walk in a godly way in the midst of a dark world. Make us lights who shine Your light. Help us, Lord, not only to be humble but also show us what it means to be thankful, to be faithful, and Lord, to remember that we're going to stand before Your judgment seat so we need to be fearful. God, have Your way in Your people's hearts. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.