

The Sovereignty of God - Adult SS - Lesson 3: Sovereignty, Sin & Suffering

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[0 : 00] Let's record this. Welcome everyone. Come take a seat. If this is your first time this half term, welcome. We're looking at the sovereignty of God this half term. We've seen so far that God is sovereign over all things.

And by sovereign, we mean God's kingly rule. So you think of the word sovereign, think of kings ruling. Well, God's sovereignty is his kingly rule and power and control and authority and plan over all things.

And we've seen that really does cover all things. Right. It is creation, history, all the events of this world, even down to the roll of a dice.

What we would say is random or chance is no such thing. God knows even down to those details, sovereign over them, control, controlling those things. He's sovereign over where we live, over life and death, good and bad, poverty and wealth, the whole spectrum, every single detail of the universe.

And what is the reason behind why he is sovereign over all of this? Because he has decreed, declared all things to happen from eternity.

[1 : 23] So look at confession 3.1. Remember, this is our guide for Sunday school. God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordained whatsoever comes to pass.

Everything. And this is what we often call predestination. God predestines, pre-declares all that will come to pass.

And that includes, as we saw last week, whom God saves. We saw last week God has elected and predestined everyone he's going to save.

You could say in the history books were all the events of history. And in those history books, there's also a list of every single person he's going to save. If you're in Christ, your name is there. And a key reason why this is such an important truth is because if God didn't elect us, no one would be saved.

Our sin is so bad. We're so spiritually dead. We would never willingly choose God. And so God graciously elects and predestines undeserving sinners.

[2 : 41] And we can have thought about it like this, right? So it's not so much, oh, well, we're neutral going along and then God chooses either heaven or hell. No, we are by nature, undeserving, already kind of by people going to hell.

But God, in his grace, elects sinners to eternal life, right? And so we saw that sin, grace and election are all connected.

Because we're dead in our sin, we can't do anything. Therefore, salvation must be by grace, all from God. And if it's all from God, then he must be choosing.

It's by his will that he saves. So therefore, it must mean election. And they're all interconnected. You take one out, it all crumbles. Now, there is mystery to this.

We're dealing with eternal things here. But the big thing I want us to remember from this is predestination, it's all about grace. This is a glorious doctrine.

[3 : 50] It may be a mysterious doctrine. There's lots of mystery to it. But it is a glorious doctrine because it highlights God's grace. We are entirely undeserving. And God, out of his grace, elects us, calls us out of sin.

But today, I want us to focus on another big topic. I want us to think about God's sovereignty over evil and over sin and over suffering.

As we saw, so God is sovereign over all things. And that must include and does include sovereign over sin and evil and suffering.

God is in control and has planned and has purposed all of that. But of course, that raises questions, doesn't it?

How exactly is God sovereign over these things? If God has decreed it, doesn't that make him the author of evil? How can he be good and sovereign over these things at the same time?

[4 : 59] Well, we'll try to get into all of that. And let me say that there will be mystery to this. And by mystery, we just mean something that we can't get our heads around. And we won't fully wrap our heads around it and be perfectly satisfied with the answer.

And so we need to just humbly acknowledge there will be mystery. And also, we won't cover all questions this week. There'll be questions about the fall, which we'll get on to next week. Questions about free will. We'll get on to that in two weeks' time. But I want us just to see today that God is sovereign over sin and evil.

And actually, this is a really good and comforting truth. Because if God isn't sovereign over these things, then that means evil is in control.

Which is a terrifying thought. And if God isn't sovereign, then there's also no guarantee that this world can even be fixed or will be fixed.

[6 : 06] But thankfully, we will see today that God is truly sovereign over evil. And to begin with, we need to just establish some truths.

Okay? Three pillars is what I'm calling them. Three pillars that hold up these doctrines. Three things that we just need to have firmly in place. And then we can kind of build everything on top of it. And so we're going to look at three pillars.

And there are also three Ps in our points today. So the first P is pillars. So this is the first point. So remember, Sunday school is a zoo. And we're gathering all the animals of biblical truth together.

And we're going to see what the Bible has to say. That's how we're going to learn about the Bible.

And so today, before we go any further, we need to gather the right animals into the zoo.

Into this area of sovereignty and sin. Otherwise, we just might think about this in the wrong way.

And so I want us to gather three key animals.

[7 : 06] These are the three pillars. And so I want you to break out into groups. Answer these questions about these three key truths. Three pillars. So break out in groups. I'll give you four minutes for this.

So work quite quickly. Let's see what we have. Okay. First question. What do these verses say about God's ability to sin and do evil?

Pratik. Perfect. Perfect. Perfect. Right. Okay. God cannot commit evil.

He cannot sin. Right. He's completely opposed to it. So he does. He doesn't even tempt. Right. So God is never morally responsible for evil.

He never can have sin on his hands. You could say he's too pure and holy for that. Right. And this is a pillar number one. Right. You can even write that next pillar number one.

[8 : 06] God cannot commit evil. Right. God cannot commit evil. Now question number two. What do these verses say about man's responsibility in sin?

David Fels. There you go. Yeah. Man is responsible for his own sin. Right. We are responsible for the evil we cause.

When we sin. We sin. Right. So justice. True justice. And God's ways of punishment says it is our fault when we sin.

Right. How about. So that's pillar number two. Man is responsible for his evil. Right. And when I say evil.

That includes that. I mean sin as well. Right. Man is responsible for his evil. Right. Now. Question number three. What do these verses say about God's control over evil?

[9 : 12] Katya. Okay. Um. That even if you do evil or sin. God can try and surround you to good. So it's always his purpose. His plan. Okay.

Okay. Yes. So there are. There are a few things there. Right. So. Sin and evil. It's all within God's plan. Right. He has purposed it.

We saw. You can see that in Genesis 50. It's meant. It's intended. By God. Right. It's all within his plan. Um. Oh no.

So that. That's not. That's not a different. That's question four. But anyway. Genesis 50. It's all intended. A purpose by God. Nothing. No. No sin or evil can happen outside of God's control. He's completely sovereign over evil and suffering. Right. It can only happen by his command. And he's more powerful than evil. Right.

[10:07] Because one day. He will end it. So the way reality is. It's not like yin and yang. You know yin and yang. Chinese philosophy. Like you know the.

Like the two. Black and white. Shapes coming together. Right. As if. That saying. Well. Good and evil are kind of like. Equal and opposite forces in the world. Or like.

Sith and Jedi. Right. Some of you Star Wars nerds. Well no. They're not equal and opposite. You know what I mean. Okay. That. Sin and evil. Aren't like that. Sorry. Good and evil.

God and sin. Aren't like that. God. God is completely. Sovereign over those things. Right. He's utterly powerful over them.

And this is the third pillar. You can write down. God. Is sovereign. Over evil and suffering. God is sovereign. Over evil and suffering.

[11:02] And what kinds of evil. Is God's sovereign over. Shout out. Isaiah 10. The nations.

Right. What the nations do. And plan. And actually in particular. Because Assyria is the focus here. Even the enemy nations. Right. The enemies of God.

God actually sends them. And commands them. To achieve his purposes. Look at some of the language. So their staff. A serious staff. Their kind of weapons. Their staff.

Is actually my fury. God says. I'm using them. To achieve my purposes. Yes. It's their anger. And their war. And their sin. But I'm using it.

Right. For my purposes. And 1 Peter 4. What is God's sovereign over. Shout out. Suffering. Right.

[11:58] This is in particular. Persecution. Suffering. Right. It's all a part of God's will. And plan. Jonah 1. What is God's sovereign over.

The sea. Nature. Natural disaster. Right. Yeah. Storms. Earthquakes. Tornadoes. God is sovereign over all of that. It's all a part of his plan and decree.

2 Samuel 24. We don't often use the word pestilence. Disease. Right. Even disease. The Lord is sovereign over it.

It's a part of his intention and plan. And what about Job 1? Satan. Right. It's interesting if you read Job 1.

The dynamic between God and Satan. Satan has to come to God. And ask for permission. And God. In his sovereignty.

[12:57] Allows what happens to Job. Allows Satan. To do these things. Not that Satan's just let loose. And God's just like. Well he's out of the cage now. I can't really do anything. No. God is sovereign over all these events.

In fact we're going to see that in Job next week. We're going to. Kind of think about Job a bit more. But. Martin Luther. The reformer. He has a helpful. A couple of. A couple of phrases about the devil. He calls the devil. God's devil. Right. Or God's ape. He's. He's on a leash. But Satan is not this. Equal and opposite force to God.

He is under God's control. And sovereignty. And how about Genesis 50. What is God sovereign over? Got to think about the story of Joseph here.

Yeah. Noah. Sorry. Rulers. Rulers. Okay. So you're thinking about Egypt. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. So again. Even the nations. Pharaoh. Rulers. Who's the you here?

[13:57] What you intended? Brothers. Right. Joseph's brothers. Their sin. Their sin of murder. Or attempted murder. Right.

God's purpose. Is sovereign. Over. Even over the evil purposes. Of Joseph's brothers. Right. Yes. They intended it.

But really. God was intending. Superintending. The whole thing. Right. How about Exodus 9. What is God sovereign over? Say again. Pharaoh.

And what about Pharaoh? His heart. Right. Well think about this a bit more in a bit. But he's sovereign. It says.

God. Harden Pharaoh's heart. He's sovereign. Over Pharaoh's heart. And his decisions. And he controls it. Again. We'll think a bit more.

[14:52] Exactly how he does that. But we can see it here. And how about Job 1 again? You've got to again. Think about the story of Job. Wealth.

Possessions. And all the loss of it. Job is. Job loses everything. Family. Wealth. Possessions. His own health. Right. This kind of sums up what we've looked at. God is sovereign over death.

And suffering. And all of it. All of it. And how about Acts 2. Who? Crucifixion. God planned the crucifixion.

He intended it. And controlled. Controlled it. And purposed. The greatest sin. That was ever committed. And now. This is where we need to begin.

[15:52] And what we must. Hold firmly to. But hold very carefully as well. It's these three pillars. Okay. God cannot commit evil.

We are responsible. For the evil that we commit. And God is completely sovereign over all evil. Right. It's all a part of his eternal plan and decree.

And before we kind of get into how these things fit together. How this can be. We must simply just hold these facts first of all.

Okay. All these three things are true. And we must never lose these truths. Right. And the confession kind of sums up what we see here.

Yeah. It's on the back. 3.1. This is the rest of this article. God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.

[16:54] Yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures. Okay. Do you see what it's saying? God is sovereign. Yet God is not the author of sin.

But that does leave us with a mystery, doesn't it? Truths that seem to contradict. God is sovereign over evil. But at the same time, he's not the author of evil.

And this is the great mystery we encounter when we think about sovereignty and sin. This is where I'd have to say I don't have any neat answers to these things.

But these three pillars are just simply the three key truths of the Bible that we must hold. Right.

They are all true and we must always hold them together at the same time.

But how exactly they fit, that is where the mystery is. Okay. And so you don't need to think, oh, well, there's this huge kind of complicated answer out there about God's sovereignty and sin.

[18:01] It's basic. I don't want to kind of oversimplify it. But it is basically these three pillars, these three biblical teachings that are all true. We hold them together.

But it is a mystery to exactly how they fit together. And so if you want to just leave now, you could. That basically sums up sin and suffering and God's sovereignty.

Okay. It's holding these three pillars. But a little bit more can be said. Right. Particularly, we can say more about what these pillars do and don't mean.

And so I want us to dive a little deeper. And I want us to look at another P. Right. And this P sheds some light on how these pillars fit together. Right. How God can ordain evil things but not be the author of sin and still be good.

Okay. And the answer is found in the purpose of why evil happens. Okay. It's my second P and my second point. Purpose. God's good intention behind evil.

[19:08] So we will stop for questions in a bit. One thing I want us to see when we say God is sovereign over evil is not. Okay. It's not that God is just good at cleaning up the mess after evil happens.

Okay. And then God is just sovereign over evil because he's really good at making good come out of it. He's not sovereign kind of when the mess is happening. But he's good at kind of making something good come out of it.

It's not that. Right. His sovereignty is more than that. God is sovereign over evil by having a good and holy purpose and intention and control in sin and evil.

And the best way to see that is the cross. So look again at Acts 2. Acts 2.23. This Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.

You crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. So we're faced here with the greatest sin ever committed.

[20:20] The worst evil to ever happen. The crucifixion of the son of God. And can you see all three pillars come together in this verse? So God does not commit this evil.

In fact, he condemns it through Peter's preaching. It was a lawless act. Yet at the same time, man is responsible for this sin.

Do you see the language? You crucified. You killed Jesus. So man is responsible. Yet the crucifixion was according to the eternal plan of God. He was sovereign over it all. It was foreknown and intended and purposed and controlled by God. Think about all the prophecies of the Old Testament, right? It was planned, intended by God. Three pillars seemingly contradictory. But the Bible holds them together all in one verse. And what holds them together? [21 : 24] It's God's good purpose. It was the greatest sin. The Romans and the Jews intended it for evil reasons.

But God planned and purposed and designed it for an incredibly good reason. The salvation of lost sinners. The crucifixion in itself, that was an evil, abhorrent act. Crucifying the Son of God, that is a great evil to commit. Evil human purposes were a part of it. They were all in that act. But something bigger was going on. God ordained and decreed and had a greater purpose in and over it all. And so those who flogged him were still guilty that they wanted to do it. It was their sin. It was their desire. Yet God sovereignly ordained it for a good purpose. And it's the exact same principle as Joseph and his brothers. [22 : 33] You could say Genesis 50, before the crucifixion. As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. You could say, as for you Pharisees, you meant evil against Jesus, but God meant it for good the whole time.

The salvation of his whole church. And this is as close as we can get as how these pillars hold together. And this is a general principle for evil and suffering in this world. The Lord has ordained and decreed and has it all a part of his plan. And he's done it for a good purpose. And not just making it turn out right in the end, but it was kind of chaos and not really in control when it was happening. No. He's purposed and intended it from the very beginning in his grand plan. That there's a good purpose running throughout. And you might think, well, okay, figures like Christ or Joseph, they're kind of a bit unique. But I want us to see that this happens in all sorts of ways, at all levels of suffering for God's holy purposes. And I want you to just think and see about what some of them are. [23 : 55] So break out into groups again. What are some of the purposes God intends sin and suffering for? Okay. Again, shout out.

So what are some of the purposes God intends sin and suffering for? Deuteronomy 28. Any thoughts? Punishment. Judgment. Exactly, right? On account of your evil deeds, because you have forsaken me, therefore God will send this suffering. Curses, right? It's not nice, but it is good. This is God's good judgment on sin. How about Luke 13? This might be a bit trickier to think about. Right. Exactly. Calling people to repentance. God uses suffering in this world as a pointer to final judgment.

[24 : 58] Do you see Jesus' language here? People ask him, well, what about that suffering over there? Why did that happen? And he said, well, unless you repent, you all will likewise perish.

Jesus uses that as a pointer to final judgment, saying, okay, the suffering in this world, it's there. You must look at it and realize a greater suffering is coming.

So you must repent. It's used as a pointer. How about Hebrews 12? Yeah, Katya? Well, that discipline is painful, yet the practice I think that we get from the right in our heart, and we'll be at peace.

Right, yeah. So this is talking about suffering that happens within the Christian life. Right. It's actually, it can be, Christian won't turn that off.

It can actually be God's good, fatherly, loving discipline towards us. Right. Discipline, when you discipline a child, it's never pleasant in the moment, is it, for them?

[26 : 04] But it's actually good for us. It's discipline to grow us in the faith. Maybe keep us from sin. Right. How about 1 Peter 1?

Yeah. We might go through trials. Again, this is the suffering of persecution. But this is to refine our faith, Peter says.

How about Romans 8? Romans 8. Romans 8. This kind of, this sums it all up, doesn't it? For all God's people, all things work together for our good.

Our Heavenly Father has intended and designed all things in our lives for a good reason. Whether that be discipline or refining our faith, right?

It might mean our sanctification. It might be protecting us from something. It might be for the sake of our spiritual growth. Whether that be pleasant things or difficult things or unexpected things.

[27 : 14] All of it is for our good. It's all a part of God bringing us to the finish line. And what those exact reasons can be, that's just a great unknown to us.

Why is God bringing this painful experience of all things in my life? We don't know exactly why that. But we do know it is for our good.

Because God is our loving Heavenly Father. And He's sovereignly intending all things for our good. And we're going to get more onto that next week. But I want us just to see here.

Nothing is random. No sin or evil or unexpected suffering is random. Nothing in your life is pointless or out of control.

No, there is a good purpose. And we can humbly trust in God in it. Now that isn't always easy. It is a great test of faith. But we can humbly trust in Him.

[28 : 20] Because He is sovereign. And the Confession has a helpful article on this. It's about God's providence. It's a bit longer. But I think it's helpful to reflect on.

5.4. The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom and infinite goodness of God so far manifest themselves in His providence. Remember His control over all things every step of the way. That it extends itself even to the first fall. Think about that next week. And all other sins of angels and men. And that not by a bare permission. He's not just kind of stepping back and allowing it to happen.

And it's kind of the cages unleashed. And He has no control other than that. No. Not by a bare permission. But such as has joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding and otherwise ordering and governing of them.

In a manifold dispensation to His own holy ends. His own holy purposes. Yet so as the sinfulness thereof proceeds only from the creature and not from God. Who being most holy and righteous neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.

[29 : 28] Right. God is completely sovereign and is intended all evil in this world. But for His own holy purposes.

And there's one thing, final thing I want to address. It's the idea of God hardening people's hearts. I think I'll get on to that next week. We'll stop for questions.

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