

The Sovereignty of God - Adult SS - Lesson 1: Sovereignty & God

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[0:00] Heavenly Father, we thank you for this Easter holiday that we just had. Thank you for this new turn back. And we pray that as we consider the glorious truths of Scripture, the glorious truths of who you are, would you please help us to understand these weighty, these lofty things.

We need your help with this. We need your spirit. And so please, would you be at work today, giving us, transforming and renewing our minds. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

And welcome to Sunday School, everyone. Welcome back. If you're new to Adult Sunday School, welcome. Or if you're just new in the past few months, welcome. It's great to have you.

Or if you're just a veteran and you've been coming for the past few years, welcome back. Hope you've had a good Easter. And whether you're new to Adult Sunday School or you've been coming for years, maybe decades, before we begin our new series, I just want to kind of lay out what Sunday School is.

Okay, so just stick with me for a few minutes. I want us to think what we're doing here every week and why we're doing this, the purpose of it. So I just want us to think, what is Adult Sunday School?

[1:14] Well, in Adult Sunday School, we're here. The main objective that I love to kind of do here is I want us to learn doctrine. So I want us to see what the Bible teaches about different topics of the Bible, like topics like God, topics like the cross, which we did last term, the church, covenants.

Right. That's what doctrine is. Doctrine just means teaching. It's different topics of the Bible. And I want us to just get a clear and a deep understanding of these things. And so if learning about the Bible is like learning about animals.

All right. There are two ways that you can learn about animals. So one way is you can go on a safari and kind of see the animals as they come. All right. So you kind of you go in your van through the wild and say, OK, well, there's a giraffe.

You learn a bit about giraffes. Oh, there's an elephant. Oh, there's another elephant. Oh, there's a lion. Oh, there's a warhog. Right. And you learn the animals as they come along. Well, that's a bit like preaching.

OK, so you can learn about the Bible just as you can travel through the wild of it. Or you can learn about animals by going to the zoo. Right.

[2:28] And you can gather all the giraffes into one place and learn everything about giraffes and gather all the lions together and learn about lions. Well, the zoo is like Sunday school.

OK, every week we're gathering into one place what the Bible says about the church or the Holy Spirit or this term, the sovereignty of God.

And we're going to learn in that way. OK, and why adult Sunday school? What's the purpose? Well, it's about transforming our minds and our hearts.

So look at Romans 12. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

So as Christians, we are called, do you see, for our minds to be transformed and renewed. So to think in the way that God wants us to think.

[3:28] So to view the world and God and salvation and ourselves and everything in the way that God wants us to. Right. So you can think as a non-Christian and you can think as a Christian.

And this calls us to think as a Christian. And that's what happens when we go to the zoo. Right. Adult Sunday school is there for our minds to be transformed and to help us to think clearly and deeply as Christians.

And that means for our hearts to be transformed, too. So because the more we understand these things, do you see in Romans 12, the more we are able to live well as Christians, to discern what is the will of God, to discern what is good from bad, right from wrong.

And that will lead us to worship and love God in the right way. Right. And so adult Sunday school, in a nutshell, is this. We are going to the zoo to have our minds and hearts transformed.

Right. So welcome to the zoo this morning. Welcome. And this term, the doctrine I want us to think about is the sovereignty of God. So that's the section of the zoo we're going to this half term.

[4:42] And God's sovereignty. You might have heard that word. Maybe you haven't. God's sovereignty means his rule and his power and authority and his plan over all creation.

So the sovereignty of God, it's basically it's the kingship of God over creation. So that's why we use the word sovereign when it comes to king.

So King Charles is sometimes referred to as the sovereign over our nation. Well, look how God is described in the Bible. One Timothy six. He who is the blessed and only sovereign, the king of kings and lord of lords.

Psalms 22 for kingship belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations. So even at just a first glance of who God is, first glance of scripture, before we even get into the details, we can see at the very least, God has something called sovereignty.

He is the sovereign. He rules and has authority and is king. But this half term, I want us to really unpack what that means.

[5:57] What that involves and how that works with things like free will and salvation and predestination and the problem of evil, things like that.

So thinking about the purpose of Sunday school. So the purpose of this term is for our minds to be transformed, to think about God's sovereignty and rule over this world in the right way, in a way that honours him and in a way that I hope will comfort you.

And I want us also during this half time to answer questions that can often trouble or confuse us. Because it's this area of God's sovereignty, this area of the zoo, where we often scratch our heads big time and we just puzzle over, but hold on, God's sovereignty, how can that really be, right? And often we can puzzle about these things, either because we're not thinking about God's sovereignty in the right way, or we're just not realising where there is mystery and kind of humbly acknowledging the mystery.

And so we won't answer everything about God's sovereignty really neatly this half term, but I want us to think about it in the right way and to clear confusion where there can be clarity, but to also acknowledge mystery where there is mystery.

[7:29] So I want our hearts to be transformed in all of this. I want us to, as we just think about God and his sovereignty over this world, I want us to trust even more in God's power, to be comforted by his care and just to be humbled where there is mystery.

Now, we won't get into all the details of free will or election all at once, right? So today I wanted to just do a bit of an introduction to God's sovereignty, and I'm guaranteed that's going to raise questions in your mind like, oh wait, oh hold on, but if that's true, then what about free will and our decisions?

And wait, hold on, how does that work with sin and the fall? And so those questions will come up, all right? Let me just encourage you, just hold on to those questions. We're going to get onto that over the weeks.

I'm going to spend a whole week on free will and God's sovereignty, a whole week on election and predestination, a whole week on the problem of evil. In fact, two weeks on that, all right? All right, so we're going to get onto it.

So just be patient with that. And it's actually best to when we get to those, to deal with those issues, it's best to kind of slowly build up the foundations and then get to that, because you need a lot of things in place and thinking the right way before we get there.

[8:49] But today I want us to think about what it means for God to be sovereign. Okay, he has sovereignty. We've seen that just from those two verses.

He is king. Almost all Christians can agree on that. But the key thing to ask is, okay, but what is God sovereign over? And in what way is he sovereign over those things?

And there are some, and so we might ask, are there some things he isn't sovereign over? Okay, he's king, but like, maybe he's not king of everything.

Things he isn't kind of in control of or doesn't have a plan for. And is he sovereign over some things kind of in a more hands-on way and other things in a bit more kind of a standoffish way?

That's what I want us to see today. So I want us to just jump in, and I'm not trying to answer this question. What is God sovereign over? It's my first point today. And I want you to break out into groups, and I've got you a big table there, 12 different sections.

[9:56] And I want you to look up the verses in this chart. And each kind of section tells us what God is sovereign over. Okay, so let's do the first one together.

So first row, Genesis 1-1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And so the next section, God is sovereign over dot, dot, dot. I'll give you the answer.

God is sovereign over creation, right? There is one creator. God is the one who is in control and has authority over creation.

He is the creator, right? So there you go. You can just write creation in that box. And I'll go for the rest of the 11. I'll give you six minutes for this. Try and work quickly through them.

You don't need to kind of write a big essay in that box. Just if you think, okay, he's sovereign over this thing, boom, write it in. I'll give you six minutes. Go for it. Okay, let's bring it back together.

[10:56] So, minds active. Everyone on standby, because I'm going to be picking on you. So, number two, Psalm 135. Beth, what is God's sovereign over?

What did you write? Yeah, yeah, yeah. Sorry, I caught you off guard. Nature, okay? That's exactly it. So, God is completely in charge over nature.

So, weather patterns and atoms in the sky aren't random. They aren't out of his control. No, he is the one who makes the clouds rise.

He makes lightning strike and brings forth wind. It is not just Mother Nature out there doing its thing. God is in control and in charge and determining all the events of nature.

Right? So, you can write nature in that box. How about number three? David Fels. What do you get for that? I wasn't here, but I'm a guest. Oh, sorry, sorry.

[11:56] No, I'll pick on Lachis. The Lord didn't want you to be here.

Yeah, yeah. Lachis, what do you get for number three? Times and seasons.

Yeah. Yeah, okay. Times and seasons. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And also, kings, setting up kings, removing them, the events of all those times and seasons. I put history, right?

Human history. That might be an easy way to sum it up, right? And also, the boundaries of everyone's dwelling place, where every single person is going to live, right?

Human history. We can put it there. So, history isn't kind of flowing in a kind of a cascade of events. We don't know what's coming next or God doesn't know what's coming next.

No. History is a story and God is writing it or he's written it. Okay? He's sovereign over it. How about number four? So, a lot is like a it's like a dice, basically, right?

[13:00] Grace. What did you get for that? Okay, yeah. There's a bit of a tricky one. I kind of wanted to highlight this. It's randomness or chance, right?

So, a dice is rolled. We think that's random. We would say random, right? But actually, it's every decision is from the Lord.

Right? So, that's why I'm quoting randomness or chance. Because actually, there is no such thing as random or chance. It looks random to us, but God knows even how the roll of a dice is going to go.

Right? It's from the Lord. How about number five? This one's a bit tricky. I was trying to, I'll answer this one. I was just trying to kind of capture all the things that we've seen so far.

So, God not only created everything, but he holds everything together. Moment by moment, Colossians 1. All things hold together in him or in Christ.

[14:01] And Matthew 10, even down to the, even down to the life of a sparrow, God is in control of that.

Right? What I've said in that box is providence. Right? The term for this is providence. God's control and care and kind of hands-on sovereignty over every single moment in creation.

So, it's not just he creates and kind of creation is set loose and just he's kind of steps back and it runs on its own. No, he is upholding every moment.

How about number six? Psalm 139. Jeremiah, James, Harry, what do you get for that? Life. Right. Yeah. So, not just human history in the grand sense, which that is true, but also down to individual lives.

Good fist bump. You deserve a fist bump. No, there you go. Individual human lives, right? So, you formed, your eyes saw my unformed substance.

[15:09] You created me in the womb. all the days of my life were written before they even happened. We see that with Jeremiah. Jeremiah is an example of that.

So, it's not just prophets. He's an example of that. But that goes for all of us. And so, all our lives depend on the Lord's will. If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that, right?

He's sovereign over every single life and the direction of it. And number seven, how about number seven? Yeah, Katia?

It's about the heart and the willingness of that heart. Oh, excellent, right? Human hearts and their willingness, their decisions. I put human decisions, right?

But that, of course, that's all connected to the heart. And now, this is where, I know, this can kind of be a bit controversial. This is where the questions start arising.

[16:09] We will get there, but I just want to see what the Bible says, right? So, the king's heart. And it's interesting that, so if you look at Proverbs 21, it's interesting it shows, it highlights the king here because the king of the land is kind of the person with the most freedom.

Like, the most choices of anyone, right? It's kind of, he's the pinnacle of humanity, but even the king, the king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord and the Lord directs his heart wherever he will.

And so, we may have plans and decisions, but it is the Lord who establishes them. And we see, even with someone like Pharaoh, a king, the Lord is in control of his heart and what he does, right? God is sovereign over human decisions. And John, and look at number eight, I'll give you this one. God is sovereign over salvation, right?

No one can come to the Father, can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. God has mercy on whom he has mercy. God saves us not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace.

[17:29] God is completely in control, in charge, and determines all matters to do with faith and salvation. And how about number nine?

Lamentations, 1 Samuel 2. Lucy? We've said blessings and curses and sort of the world of fortunes and fortunes.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, that's good. I didn't get a neat word for this. I kind of just thought in my head, it's the whole spectrum of events of life, whether it's the good and the bad, life and death, plenty and poverty.

Think of a neat word for that, but you can write that in the box. I've kind of written six words there. Right? It's the whole spectrum from good events to bad events. The Lord is in control of all of them. Right? They're not chaos to him. Which includes row 10. I'll give you this one. This includes sin and evil and Satan himself.

[18:41] Evil is not in control of God. God is in control of evil. And it all unfolds, even sin itself, it all unfolds under his sovereign control.

He's the one in charge of it. And we're going to see in a few weeks that does not mean God is the author of sin. It does not mean God commits evil.

No, God is pure and good. God is in charge of evil. But at the same time, he is sovereign over it. And so, it's either evil is in charge of God or God is in charge of evil.

And it's the latter. God is in charge of... And even Satan, right? Satan has to ask permission from God to do something.

And God is the one who allows it. Now, I know more questions will arise in your head. We will get on to that. But I want us to see this is what the Bible says. Right?

[19:41] And so, he's sovereign over sin and even, 11, even the greatest sin, the greatest evil that has ever been committed, the crucifixion of the Son of God.

Right? So, Acts 2, Peter says, this Jesus, you crucified the crowd, the Jews.

You crucified. You're responsible. But look, it all happened. He was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. Right?

God was even in control over the worst evil ever committed. It was the will of the Lord to crush Jesus. And so, 12, what is God's sovereign over?

Just have a look with me. I am God and there is none like me declaring the end from the beginning. So, before history even starts, God has declared all that will happen.

[20:44] And Romans 11, he has no counsellor to tell him what to do or how that unfolds. But what's that? Just look at the last line.

For from him and through him and to him are all things. What is God sovereign over? All things.

Okay? He's in charge, in control and determines all things.

and so, it is from creation, all of human history, all the way to the end, to the new heavens and the new earth.

And everything in between from human life, kings rising and falling, birth, death, tombstone, nature, everything, everything, everything, all things.

So, can you see what this means for God to be sovereign? He controls and has authority and determines and is powerful over and has planned all things.

[22:00] There aren't some things he's sovereign over, but some things he can't really touch. No, every single thing in creation, down to the last electron, it is all under God's sovereign control, all things.

And I know questions will come from this. How can God be good but also sovereign over evil? How can God be in control of human decisions without us just being robots?

And we will get on to that, but this is just a fundamental thing we first need to establish and must see that the Bible clearly teaches God is sovereign over all things.

And there's something else we need to see about that. I want us to see God is sovereign over all these things because he has planned and declared it from all eternity.

And this is the next thing I want to see. We'll try and do questions at the end or I'll try to avoid questions at the end and try to overrun. But this is the second point. God has an eternal decree. God has an eternal decree.

[23:12] So look at Isaiah 46 again in box 12. So do you see that language in Isaiah 46? God declares the end from the beginning.

Do you see he has a counsel and a purpose for all things. And this is what is often called God's eternal decree or eternal will.

right? We see it in Ephesians 1 as well. This kind of has a focus on salvation with it and we're going to look at that next week. But just look at this eternal decree. Ephesians 1.

He chose us in him before the foundation of the world. Before creation. He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will.

Having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will. So look what the Bible teaches. Before time or creation even came to be in eternity past in God's divine mind God had thought and planned and purposed and willed all that will happen in creation.

[24:25] And it will all happen according to the counsel of his will. What he wants what he says. And the Westminster Confession of Faith which is kind of our guide in Sunday school our guide through the zoo.

It says this look at chapter 3 verse 1 article 1 God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.

Ordain is decree declare state kind of pre-plan whatsoever comes to pass. So it's like before God said let there be light before he said that he already kind of had a blueprint and a comprehensive plan for the entire universe.

He kind of had all the history books written already and then when he said let there be light it all just started happening according to that blueprint.

And as our lives happen and each moment passes each moment is unfolding exactly as God has planned and declared it to be.

[25:42] The history books are already written and now it's unfolding. And this is expressing the teaching of you may have heard this word predestination. This is the biblical teaching that God has pre-planned or predestined all things in creation in history.

And as soon as you hear predestination you might get shudders down your spine might strike terror in your heart you may not like this word you might think it's all just kind of a bit philosophical but actually I want us to see predestination and God's eternal decree and God's sovereignty over all things this is all just fundamental to God being God.

Okay. So I want you to think of it like this. God what is God?

God is the creator of all things. All things.

right? And this means all things are dependent on him. I want to extend that line making sure you see it's all dependent on God hanging on him.

[27:11] Right? Nothing can exist without God. There is nothing independent from him. Nothing that doesn't need him for life or existence. There's nothing out here exists floating but I don't need God exist on my own.

No. All things are dependent on God and God is dependent on nothing. God is the source of all things. He has no source.

And so all that happens, it happens because God says so. because in eternity God decreed and declares all that we're being.

He declares the end from the beginning. So everything, all things, hang on God's word and his plan. Nothing can happen outside of God's plan.

And so that includes all that we've seen in the timeline. So that timeline on the back, right? It's all things. Creation, new heavens, new earth, human history, kings, life and death, cross, everything.

[28:28] And this, this is simply what it means for God to be God and Lord. This is what it means to be eternal and all knowing.

He knows all things and knows the future and knows the past and knows all things that are happening right now and is in control of all of it because he has decreed and predestined all of it before the foundation of the world.

And what does God use or rely on to do that, to make that plan? what's above him? Nothing. It is all, it's his language of Ephesians 1, according to the counsel of his will.

It's all based on what God in his perfect wisdom has decided. Look at Romans 11, who does he consult? Who's his counselor? No one. Which means when God decreed all things, he didn't look into the future and see what creation and humans might choose to do and then base his plan on that.

As if God makes this thing called creation, this concoction and it's let loose and it's a bit out of God's hands, he doesn't know what's coming next and he doesn't intervene too much out of love.

[29:57] And so he looks through the corridor of time of what that creation is going to do, kind of looks ahead and he sees the choices and the decisions and the preferences of that creation he's just made.

As if he looks into the future and sees Andrew Quay in 2026 and oh that's what Andrew likes to choose and oh that's what he wants there and oh he wants to live in Ealing, okay, okay I like that, I see that.

And then so he starts writing his decree according to that and then somehow that's the plan that happens. That's not the case.

That is a wrong teaching called, do it in, do it in, that's a wrong teaching called open theism. You don't need to remember this, I'm just giving you the term just in case I come across it, open theism.

And this teaching basically says there's kind of a back and forth between creation. creation. And so God creates fine, God creates all things, all things.

[31:18] But, but also creation is free in a way that God doesn't kind of sovereignly declare anything to be.

It kind of just, it happens because it's its own thing. And so that means God learns from his creation. Creation provides him knowledge of what it's going to do.

And so God plans history with that in mind. And now just think about that. What is the issue with that? Really, that makes God dependent on creation.

Creation is now this thing that feeds God knowledge that he didn't have before. And in that case, what does that mean for all that we've just seen?

All things aren't from God. God doesn't really declare the end from the beginning. God can't predestine us for adoption.

[32:37] In fact, there's no guarantee God can do anything in the future because he's dependent on creation and our choices to plan the future. And now, open theists wouldn't admit that.

God does have a plan and he's going to bring it all to completion and there is going to be a new heavens and new earth. But they can't account for that, for this way of thinking about God because he's dependent on us for the future.

And that ultimately leaves God powerless over this world. He isn't really the sovereign. And in this model, God ceases to be God.

there is something supreme over God and something that he actually learns from and needs. But look what the confession says, article 2, chapter 3.

Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, he can look through the corridor of time, so to speak, yet he has not decreed anything because he foresaw it as future.

[33:47] God is sovereign over all things because he has declared it. It's all happening according to his perfect and holy will.

And it's here we might ask, but doesn't God will things that don't happen? So 1 Timothy 2, God desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth.

2 Peter 3, the Lord is not willing that any should perish. But what might we ask? So does God will things that don't come to pass?

How do we square all of this with things like this? God commanding things to happen? Well, it's here that we need to make a distinction between God's hidden will and God's revealed will.

We'll finish in one minute. The difference between God's decretive will and his prescriptive will or his sovereign will and his moral will. That's in the little chart on your sheet.

[34:44] So God's sovereign will is what he has planned for all things from eternity. And that's secret to us. That's in God's mind. We can't know what he's planned.

That's his decretive will. But God has also revealed what he wants from us, our duty. He wants everyone to believe in Christ and be saved. That's why we preach to everyone.

That is God's will. Come to Christ, repent and believe. he wants that from everyone. It's the simple call to the gospel. And that's his moral command to us.

It's just like you shall not murder. His will is everyone on earth should not murder. That's his will. But it's his moral will.

It's his revealed will. But that doesn't mean everyone's going to obey that revealed will. And when they don't, when there is murder or someone doesn't believe in Christ, that doesn't mean God isn't in control of those things.

[35:48] He's not like, I want everyone to be saved. That's my will.

That's my plan. But I just can't do it. Right? I've revealed it, but I can't really do it. No.

This is just a distinction of how we speak about God's will. It's revealed and it's hidden. There are two aspects to it.

And so God is sovereign over all these things because in eternity past, he decreed all things that will come to pass. And it's all according to the purpose of his hidden decretive sovereign will.

And why is all this important? Let me leave you with this. This is important because this makes God, God. If we are to have a lower view of God's sovereignty than this, it makes God dependent on us.

He's not the source of all life and knowledge and therefore he's not God. And so this way of thinking honours who God really is. But also God's sovereignty is important because this means nothing in your life is out of control.

[36:59] God is in complete control of all of it. He's upholding you every moment with every step you take. And when you belong to Christ, everything in your life has a good and wise purpose.

Look at Romans 8 28. And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose. For those in Christ, God has planned and purposed all things in your life for what is good for you.

Nothing is in action. Nothing is out of control. No problem you are facing is too great for God to deal with because he is the king of heaven and earth.

He's not dependent. And so we don't need to fear the future. We don't need to worry about God's plan for our lives because nothing ahead of us is random, even that roll of the dice.

And we know this because of a fundamental truth about God. God is sovereign.