

God is Sovereign in Salvation

Selected Scriptures

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Good morning, I want to continue the summer series that we have begun. We are taking a break from our study of Paul's letter to the Romans this summer to look at some of the truths that used to be important to the church at large, but have largely been forgotten in the professing church of Jesus Christ. I want to begin this morning with an illustration that I have shared with you before, but I want to use it because it speaks to the issue that I want us to address this morning.

Normally, when the average Christian thinks of salvation, when they think of God's spiritual rescue of sinners, this is what they think.

They picture the sinner having accidentally fallen overboard into a vast ocean and finds himself suddenly treading water in the middle of a raging storm. It was just an accident, he happened to stumble overboard, and now he's floating about, flailing about in the water, and his only hope is for somebody to throw him a life preserver. And in their way of thinking about salvation, that's exactly what God does. God, as it were, is standing on the deck of the ship, and He throws the life preserver of the gospel, and it lands somewhere some distance from the sinner as he's flailing about in the water. And he claws and swims his way to the life preserver, fighting the waves, fighting the wind, and finally, having expended his maximum effort to get to the life preserver, he locks his arms around it, and then God from the deck of the ship, graciously pulls in the rope and hauls him to safety.

But the truth of man's salvation is far different from that common misconception. The truth is, the sinner is spiritually dead. He's not fighting and flailing in water. He's dead, and he's not dead by some accident. In the picture of the gospel over the warnings, over the loving gracious warnings of God, the sinner has leaped overboard because he loves his sin. He is dead in his trespasses and sins, Paul describes it. And so, he's there floating lifelessly on the surface of the water. He has no ability to see his rescuer. He cannot fight his way to the life preserver, and once he gets there, he has no strength in his arms to lock onto the truth that will rescue him. Instead, he is sinking hopelessly without the slightest ability to aid in his own rescue. He doesn't even

know he needs rescue. He is completely unaware that he is in danger because he's dead. That's what we were like when God found us, and that is why Scripture teaches that salvation must be a work of God from beginning to end. We were unaware of our need to be rescued. We were uninterested in being rescued, and we were unable to contribute in any way to our own rescue. Sadly, this is a truth that has been largely forgotten in the church of Jesus Christ.

We're in a summer series I've entitled "Hold Fast: The Forgotten Truths We Must Always Remember." That title comes from William Tyndale's translation of the Greek into English in his New Testament, where several times he uses that expression "hold fast". Eventually the English sailors, the great sailing ships of the 17th/18th century would capture that expression as their own and use it for holding tightly onto the ropes of the ship, especially the lifelines when they were in danger of being swept overboard, when the sailors were in fear of their own lives. I've reminded you that there are also lifelines in the Christian faith. There are truths that today's church has largely forgotten, but to which we must always hold fast.

Last week we reminded ourselves that God is sovereign over all things. There's not a stray molecule in the universe. Today I want us to consider a closely related truth that has been forgotten, and that is that God is sovereign specifically in salvation. Now when I say that God is sovereign, as we discovered last week, I mean that God rules, that God reigns. God does whatever He chooses to do. Psalm 135:5 and 6 says,

"I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods." How? Verse 6, "Whatever the LORD pleases, He does."

God is sovereign. And folks, you need to understand that God is still sovereign when it comes to human salvation. God doesn't advocate His sovereignty out of respect for humanity. When we say God is sovereign, we mean He is also sovereign over salvation. Ephesians 1:11 speaking of our salvation says that "according to His purpose, He works all things after the counsel of His will." Turn over to 2 Timothy. Second Timothy 1. Paul makes this point very clearly here. He says in verse 8, 2 Timothy 1:8,

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our LORD or me as prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, according to the power of God, [Now notice what he says about God in verse 9.] ... [God] has saved us"[That is, God has rescued us] and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.

But it's now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus. Paul is saying that God is sovereign in salvation. When we say that, what we mean is that God rules over the rescue of sinners, fulfilling His own divine will and His purpose in every life.

Now why is this important? Why, why does it matter? Why is it necessary to dwell on the fact that God is sovereign in salvation? Because left to ourselves, not one of us would come to God. Do you understand that about yourself? Left to yourself, you would never have chosen God. Ephesians 2:1 says "you were dead", I was as well, we were dead in our trespasses and sins, unable to respond to God. Chapter 2:12 of Ephesians says, "you were ... separate from Christ," listen to this "... having no hope...." Romans 5:6 says when Christ died for us, we were helpless. You were helpless. There was nothing you could do. God had to intervene. That's why sovereignty in salvation is so important. And by the way, let me just say that unbelievers find the truth that we're going to look at this morning absolutely and utterly offensive. Charles Spurgeon said this,

no doctrine is more hated by worldlings, no truth of which they have made such a football, as the great, stupendous but yet most certain doctrine of the sovereignty of the infinite Jehovah. [Listen to this.] Men will allow God to be everywhere except on His throne.

So, unbelievers really hate the truth of God's sovereignty in salvation because it humbles them. Sadly, many believers struggle to understand the truth of God's sovereignty as well, even though this has been one of the greatest foundations of the Christian faith for two thousand years. Go back to the great protestant confessions of the 1600s, whether you're talking about the

Presbyterian Westminster Confession or whether you're talking about the second London Baptist Confession of 1689, you'll find these truths taught. Go back farther to Augustan. And of course, more importantly to the Scripture itself because that's always the ultimate question, isn't it? What does the Bible say? What do the Scriptures teach? That's what I want us to ask and answer this morning.

Scripture makes several key affirmations about God's sovereignty in our salvation, and I want us to examine those affirmations together this morning.

Affirmation number one: God planned our salvation in eternity past. God planned our salvation in eternity past. Turn with me to Ephesians 1. I love the book of Ephesians, as you know, we spent several wonderful years here in this great letter. But Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians with a section of praise beginning in 1:3 running down through 14. Verse 3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ," He wants to recite all of the spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ. Now here, we are going to learn that if you're a Christian, your spiritual biography did not begin the day you confessed faith in Christ. It actually began in eternity past with a divine choice called sovereign election. Look at what Paul says.

The very first spiritual blessing that we have been blessed with, that he recites, comes in verse 4: "just as He..." Stop there a moment. Who is that? Well go back to verse 3. It is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. So, we could say, "just as the Father ..." Now what did the Father do? "Just as ... [the Father] chose." In Greek, as in English, that word is really unequivocal in its meaning. The word "to choose" means to pick, to single out from a group, to select, to choose. It occurs 22 times in the New Testament, 8 times it is used of Christ choosing His disciples, and 7 times or so, it's used of salvation. The related noun form, from which we get the English word elect, occurs 17 times in the New Testament of those God chose for spiritual salvation. You see, this is what God does. God, the Father, chose. For example, 2 Thessalonians 2:13 says, "... God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation...." Now look at how he continues here in verse 4 "just as the Father chose us...." Paul meant by that of course himself and the Ephesian Christians. He chose us.

That's an overwhelming thought. God chose to love us. He chose to save us. As I said before, this is crucial because left to ourselves, we would never seek God. Romans 3:11 says, "... THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS ... GOD." You would never have sought God. You would never have chosen God on your own. God had to come seeking us. If He didn't choose us, we would never have chosen Him. Now notice that it says that He chose us in Him. How could God, the righteous holy God, choose rebels and sinners to be His children? Well, the only way is because of Christ. Because we are in Christ, because of our union with Christ, because Christ operates as our representative. He lived the life that you should have lived, believer. For 33 years, Jesus did everything you should have done, and then He died in your place. He died getting what you deserved. God saw you dying in Christ that day. Salvation is only possible, and election is only possible, because God saw us in Christ.

Paul goes on, He chose us in Him, before the foundation of the world, before He created anything. In eternity past, when there was only God, He chose us. By the way, that implies that God's choice was unconditional. That is, it was not conditioned on anything in us. God didn't look down through the future and see something in you, or something you would do, and say "okay, I'm going to choose him." No, the whole point of His deciding in eternity past before He created you was to say, "it's not conditioned on anything in you." Which is, by the way, a point Paul makes very strongly in Romans 9. For example, let me just give you one sample from Romans 9:15 and 16. [God] ... says to Moses "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." Now here's Paul's interpretation of that passage from the Pentateuch. "So then, election *does* not *depend* on the man who wills...." [It's not based on human choice.] "or the man who runs." [It's not based on human effort, human deeds.] "But [it's based] on God who has mercy."

In other words, if you try to say, "well, why did God choose us?" The only answer to that is because God chose us. It's because God decided to have mercy on us. That's the only answer. Now, we are told in this passage the goals that God had in choosing us. We aren't told why, but we are told the ends to which God chose us. Notice what he says here in verse 4.

“... He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that, [in order that] ...” here’s goal number 1, “... we would be holy and blameless before Him.” Listen Christian, God didn’t choose you in order to give you a life insurance policy out of Hell. He chose you because He ultimately wanted you to be like His Son.

Secondly, He chose you for adoption. Notice verse 5 “He chose us ... in love, ... having predestined us...” that is having pre-determined our destiny. And what was the destiny that He pre-determined? Our adoption. Our adoption as sons. Think about that for a moment. God chose you because He wanted to adopt you as His own child.

There’s a third goal, verse 6, His own glory. “To the praise, He chose us to the praise of the glory of His grace which He has freely bestowed on us in the beloved.” Listen, God is sovereign in salvation and one of the ways that expresses itself is that He planned our salvation in eternity past. He chose us.

There’s a second affirmation in Scripture about God’s sovereignty in salvation, and that is that God accomplished our salvation at the cross. Stay here in Ephesians 1. In verses 4 – 6 we have events that occurred in eternity past, God’s election. But in verses 7 – 12 we’re told of events that occur in human history, during the life of Christ and during our lives. Verses 7 - 12 document the benefits that are ours because of Christ’s role in the eternal plan of redemption.

Notice what verse 7 says, “In Him” [that is in Christ] “we have redemption.” Because of our union with Christ, because Christ is our representative, literally, Paul says we are having redemption. Redemption is a very familiar, biblical word, it’s a word that means the rescue of someone through the payment of a ransom. To rescue someone by paying a ransom. In secular Greek, the word was used most often of the redemption of criminals from the penalty of their charges, or prisoners of war, or even slaves. They were redeemed, a payment was made, they were redeemed from their slavery. Paul’s point is: before Christ saved us, we were prisoners, bound by our own sin, and God accomplished our redemption, our rescue, by paying a ransom. That’s redemption.

But Paul takes us deeper into this rich biblical concept in the three qualifiers that follow in verse 7. Notice first of all he says that our redemption was at an inconceivable cost, "... in Him we have redemption through His blood." There's the means of our redemption, or let's say it this way, there was the ransom payment, through His blood. By the way, that simple phrase is filled with the richness of all of the Old Testament, of the sacrificial system. And at the heart of that sacrificial system was the principle of substitution. If you were in the Old Testament times, and you were going to make a sin offering, you laid your hands on the head of the animal, confessed your sins, in affect transferring your guilt to that innocent animal, and then you were handed the knife and you slit its throat. That innocent animal was dying in the place of you, the guilty sinner. But an animal could never adequately substitute for us.

Hebrews 10:4 says, "... it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." That was never God's intention. Those were just pictures, types. Christ had to come, He had to redeem us through His blood. He had to pour out His life in violent death as a sacrifice in our place. His life was the ransom He paid to redeem us. His death was the cost, His life in exchange for ours.

There's a second qualifier Paul uses about our redemption, and he identifies the incredible result of our redemption. Notice verse 7, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses...." A trespass is a, it's a conscious, deliberate choice to step outside the boundaries. We could translate it "an act of rebellion." But notice it's plural because Paul is making the point that God doesn't just in some sweeping way forgive our guilt, He forgives the guilt of each one of our trespasses.

As you think about your own life, you think about your own sin, those are individual acts, and God forgives each of them. If Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior, for every sinful thought and attitude we have ever harbored, for every sinful word we have ever spoken, for every wicked action we have ever committed, and by the way, that includes past, present, and future, notice what Paul says "we are having." Literally present tense, forgiveness. It's our possession now. God has removed the legal guilt for every one of those sins and He has removed the legal penalty they deserve.

To use another metaphor Scripture uses, God, in an irreversible decision, has declared the believing sinner to be pardoned. Think about a pardon. Usually a pardon doesn't deny the guilt of the person, doesn't deny the penalty is deserved, it is instead over all of that a freeing of that person from what they deserve. That's what God has done in Christ. And notice one other qualifier he adds - we enjoy Christ's redemption and forgiveness in inexhaustible supply. He adds "according to the riches of His grace." Our redemption and forgiveness spring from the heart of God. It's because God has, in His character, a quality we call grace. Don't ever get over that quality. What is grace? It means there is in the person of God a quality that causes Him to find joy and delight in doing good to you even though you deserve exactly the opposite. It's an amazing reality.

But notice God doesn't just grant us forgiveness according to His grace, He grants us forgiveness according to the riches of His grace. He has grace in inexhaustible supply. God is sovereign in salvation. He accomplished our salvation at the cross, through the blood of Jesus, through the suffering and death of His own son, and you didn't do anything to add to it. He accomplished it.

Thirdly, a third affirmation Scripture makes is that God initiated our salvation in time. In your lifetime, God initiated His interaction with you. You didn't initiate the interaction with Him. I want you to turn to 2 Thessalonians 2, 2 Thessalonians 2. In context here, Paul is comforting the Thessalonian believers, who have been unsettled, they've heard rumors that maybe the day of the Lord had already come and all the promises God had made to them weren't going to happen and he's comforting them. In verse 13 he says, "But we should always give thanks to God for your brethren, beloved by the LORD, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation ..." [There's election, there's eternity past.] "... through sanctification by the Spirit in faith and the truth." In other words, God intended to save you through the work of the Spirit and your belief in the truth of the gospel.

Now watch verse 14. "It was for this He called you through our gospel..." [Here's why He called you], that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. [That is, that you may partake of the glory of Christ, that is a reflection of His moral character. But I want you to look again at

verse 14. Notice that expression.] “[The Father] ... called you through our gospel....” Listen, if you’re a Christian today, that’s why.

God chose you in eternity past, and then in time He called you through the gospel. Examine the New Testament, and you will find that there are two kinds of calls God makes to sinners. There is first of all what theologians call the general call, the general call. That happens every time someone hears the gospel. Every time you share the gospel with someone else, every time someone preaches, as I’m doing today, and brings the gospel into their message, there is a general call going on. By that we mean a general invitation. Listen, God is inviting you to embrace the gospel of His son today. There is a general invitation, it’s to every person here. No one is excluded.

But there is also, by the way, before I leave that, let me just give you one biblical text of the general call. It’s in Matthew 22:14. In the parable of the wedding feast, you remember, there were those that refused to come, they were invited to the wedding feast of the son, they refused to come. And Jesus says this “many are called” He’s talking here about that general invitation, “many are called but few are chosen.” So, there’s the general call.

But there’s also a second kind of call in the New Testament, what theologians call the effectual call, or we could say the effective call, the powerful call. This is when God reaches out in grace, through the gospel message, and powerfully, irresistibly, brings people, to salvation. He brings them into the kingdom of his Son. This, by the way, is what the church has always affirmed. If you go back again to the confessions of the sixteen hundreds and you look at both the Westminster Confession, you look at the Baptist confession, this is what you’ll read, identically. Listen, quote,

those whom God has predestinated to life, He is pleased in His appointed and accepted time to effectually call by His word and spirit out of that state of sin and death, which they were in by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ.

He effectually draws them to Jesus Christ, yet in such a way that they come absolutely freely, being made willing by His grace. That's exactly what the scriptures teach. Turns to Romans 8. In Romans 8 we see the golden chain of redemption, as it's sometimes been called, verse 28, one of the most familiar and favorite passages in the New Testament. Paul writes "... we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose."

How do we know that Paul? How do we know that all of life's circumstances God is working for good? Verse 29, because of our theology. For, because, here's how we know "For those whom ... [God] foreknew," by the way if you go back to the OT you follow through that word foreknew, it's not just God knowing something ahead of time, it's God choosing ahead of time to have a relationship with someone. This is the equivalent of election. Those whom God decided ahead of time to have a relationship with, "He ... predestined ... [He predetermined their destiny, that they would] ... [be conformed] to the image of his Son.... [He chose in order that we would be like His Son.]

Verse 30, "and these whom He predestined, He also" [here's our word], "called;" [and notice that] ... these whom He called [in this sense], "He also justified,".... [Nobody misses this. This isn't the general call, this is the effectual call, because everybody who's called here was chosen in eternity past and when God calls, He ends up justifying them, and it says,] "and these whom He justified, He also glorified."

Their future glorification is so certain that He can speak of it in the past tense. It's going to happen. Everyone God calls in this sense is justified and will be glorified. This is the effectual call.

By the way, there's a wonderful illustration of God's effectual call in one of the Greek words that's used to illustrate it. The word is in John 6:44, where Jesus says this "No one can come to me ..." Well stop there a moment, think about that. Jesus says categorically, "no one can." He uses the Greek word "dunami" – means to have the power, the ability. No one has the power or ability to come to Me, and in context He's talking about salvation. Now if the verse ended there,

we'd all be hopeless. But He goes on "No one can come to Me [for salvation] unless the Father ... draws him...."

The Greek word for "draws" is a very interesting word, it's a word that means to compel by irresistible superiority. It's even used in a couple of places of the authorities dragging someone to jail. John's meaning is clear, no human being has the power in himself to come to Jesus for salvation unless the Father draws him. Unless the father irresistibly compels him to come. Now don't misunderstand, this doesn't mean that God drags the sinner to Jesus kicking and screaming against his will. No, God works on his will, changes his desires, and like we saw in those parables we read this morning, make the sinner see the value of Christ and make him want to run to Christ.

Now this is an amazing reality, because normally when the sinner hears the gospel, he just dismisses it, just doesn't matter. But with one whom God has chosen, there comes a moment in time when he listens to the gospel message and as he listens, maybe as he's heard it hundreds of times before, something miraculous happens. Robert Raymond describes it this way,

mysteriously, imperceptibly, he no longer hears simply the voice of the preacher, instead what he now hears is also the voice of God summoning him into fellowship with His Son, and he responds to Christ in faith.

What happened? The Scriptures would say that God had effectually called an elect sinner to Himself.

Now I understand this very personally. Until I was 17 years old, I sat in church week after week, and I heard the truth of the gospel many times, hundreds of times. But in February of 1978, the little country church where my dad was the music director at the time, sponsored a Bible conference. And a speaker by the name of Gary Gilmore came, and he did something that was very unusual in the churches in which I grew up. He read the text of Scripture, explained the text of Scripture in its context, and applied the Scripture. His sermon was about Heaven, taken from Revelation 21 and 22, and he read those verses at the end of Revelation where it talks about who

won't be in Heaven. And I saw myself in the words of that text. For the first time in my life I saw that I would not be in Heaven, I could not be in Heaven because of my sinful and rebellious heart. The truth that I heard over the years came crashing in on my soul, and the seeds that had been planted and watered suddenly sprang into a harvest.

What really happened was that through the gospel that night, the Father called me to Himself. And if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, the same thing happened to you. There was a moment when you really heard the gospel, when the Father drew you, when He called you. He is the one who initiated your salvation, not you. God is sovereign in salvation.

A fourth affirmation Scripture makes is that God accomplished our salvation at conversion. Not only did He accomplish it from a theological standpoint at the cross, but in a personal applicational way He accomplished it at the moment of your salvation. Look at Ephesians 2. And again, God does this. In Ephesians 2, Paul makes it clear that God's sovereign act alone accomplishes our salvation. All human efforts are completely futile. Look at Ephesians 2:8. "For by grace [are] you ... saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God." So, do we make real decisions, do we act? Yes, we do.

Do you want to see what our actions look like? Go back to the first three verses of chapter 2. We were dead in our trespasses and sins. We walked in lock-stop with the mindset of the age, the course of this world, with Satan himself. Verse 3, "we were in lockstep with our lusts." That was when we acted. And every time we acted, we forged another link in the chains that bound us. But beginning with verse 4, God steps in. Notice those two most beautiful words in the English language in verse 4: "but God." And then you have the catalyst that moved God to act. His mercy, His great love with which He loved us.

And then in verses 5 and 6, you have the change that God accomplished. Now, let me put this in context. These ten verses that begin chapter 2 are one long sentence in the Greek text. The subject of the sentence doesn't come until verse 4: God. And then there are three verbs that follow that describe what God has done. But I want you to just look at the first one, verse 5. "But God ... even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ, (by grace you have been saved)..."

When I was a junior, I think it was in college, this text revolutionized my understanding of salvation. Because I realized I was dead. When God found me, I was floating lifeless on that ocean, and God miraculously just gave me life. He resurrected me from the dead. In a miracle of grace, it happens at the very moment you believe. Theologians call this regeneration. It's God at that moment of salvation giving you spiritual life. At one moment you were spiritually dead, at the next moment you were alive to God.

By the way, Scripture gives three illustrations of this change that happens in that moment of time. One of them is here. It's the idea of resurrection. You were dead, God raised you.

Another one is recreation. Second Corinthians 5:17, "... if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creation." It's like God recreated your soul in that moment of time.

The third illustration is the one Jesus uses with Nicodemus in John 3, it's a new birth. God gave you new life and birth. Now what's interesting about all three of those illustrations is the person being acted upon has nothing to do with any one of those. You don't raise yourself from the dead. You don't make yourself a new creation. You don't have anything to do with your birth. And that's intentional. In regeneration, God acts. He gives us a new mind that can understand the things of God, He gives us a new heart that loves God, He gives us a new will that longs to obey God.

So how does God do that? He does it through His word. First Peter 1:23 says you were born again, there's that picture of regeneration, you were born again through the living and enduring Word of God. You say, now wait a minute, you're saying God is sovereign at the moment of my salvation. I thought I repented of my sin. I thought I believed. Yes, you did. But where did those come from? They were gifts of God. Look at verse 8 of Ephesians 2: faith and the whole package of salvation is the gift of God. The only reason you believed is because God gave you faith. The same thing is true in of Acts 11:18 with repentance. We were granted repentance, we read there. So, God is sovereign in salvation. He accomplished our salvation at the moment of our conversion.

A fifth affirmation is that God is working out our salvation throughout this life. God continues the work that He began. Turn to Philippians 2. Philippians 2:12. Paul writes, “So then my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” Here he’s talking about those who are already believers working out the implications of that salvation. He’s talking about sanctification.

In fact, what’s interesting, the expression “work out” is used in the Old Testament to refer to the cultivation of a field. You can’t make a seed contain life. You can’t make that seed grow. You plant the seed. God even supplies the water that you use to water it, and God has to make it grow. We just cultivate the field. So, it’s a beautiful picture of sanctification.

So, we’re supposed to work out. We’re supposed to cultivate that new life that God has placed within us by pursuing holiness, by pursuing likeness to Christ, by obeying. But why? Look at verse 13. Notice at the logical connection. “[You work out your salvation because] ... it is God who is at work in you....” You see what Paul is saying? He’s saying the great incentive to expend maximum effort in your own sanctification is the fact that God is working in you.

God works in us throughout our lives to supply two things, do you see them in verse 13? First of all, the determination to carry out His commands, and secondly the power to carry them out. Look at them with me. First of all, he says “God is at work in you to will”, God is at work in you to will. From the moment of your salvation, God has been working on your will. Does that mean you’re a robot? No, God does this graciously. And, amazingly He changes our desires. That’s how He affects our wills. He persuades our will by changing our desires. But He’s at work on your will. You ever thought about this? Here’s how Lloyd Jones puts it:

“every good desire, every Christian thought and Christian aspiration which I have is something which has been produced in me by God. God controls my willing. It is God who energizes my very desires and hopes and aspirations and thoughts. He

stimulates it all. God is at work in you to will.” And then he adds “God is at work in you to work.”

You see, God not only changes our wills, He also enables us to follow through on those new decisions of our will. God mightily empowers our doing. Think about this, Christian. Every time you desire to pursue spiritual things, it is a work of God. Every time you decide to act on that desire, that decision to act is a work of God. When you actually carry it out, that doing is through the power that God has provided. God is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. And that’s why we ought to expend maximum effort, because God’s already at work in us. God is sovereign in salvation, He’s working out our salvation throughout this life, and only in response to His working do we work out our salvation in pursuing holiness and sanctification.

There’s a sixth and final affirmation. It’s that God will complete our salvation in the future. Turn over to Philippians 1, just back a page, Philippians 1, I love verse 6. Paul says “*For I am confident, I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you....*” He’s talking about God. How did God begin a good work in you? Through the effectual call. You heard the gospel. He called you powerfully, irresistibly to Himself. He gave you regeneration. He gave you new life. He gave you faith. He gave you repentance. “He who began a good work in you,” I love this, “will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ.” The God who started a work in you, who is giving you now the will and the work to accomplish His purpose in your life, will perfect you until the day of Jesus Christ.

You’re not going to get lost in the shuffle. If you’re a true Christian, Jesus is not going to let you. God the Father is not going to let you fall off the wagon. You are going to stay on the path of holiness. You may stray temporarily, but you’ll come back if you’re the real thing because God has insisted that He will complete what He started.

I love the way Jude puts it. Our Lord’s half brother at the end of his little epistle, he says in Jude 24 and 25

“Now to Him who is able ...” [he’s talking about God], “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling ,,,” [that is from, from falling into false teaching and straying from the path of the gospel in this life] “... and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, *be* glory, [and] majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever, amen.”

That’s a celebration of God’s power to finish what He started. God started the work in you, He’s sovereign in what He began. He chose you in eternity past. He initiated your salvation in time. He’s working in you now and He will complete what He began. Don’t worry, Christian. You keep expending the effort, and God will keep accomplishing His purpose, and He will perfect you. God is sovereign in salvation from beginning to end. And it’s a great source of comfort.

Now how do we respond to this truth of God’s sovereignty? Very quickly, three brief points.

Number one: the knowledge of God’s sovereignty and salvation reduces the sinner to a beggar before God. Maybe you’re sitting here this morning and you say “well look, I’m not a Christian. If God is sovereign in salvation, then what in the world can I do?” The answer is God has you exactly where He wants you. He wants to humble your pride. He wants you to see that you’re a beggar before Him, that you have nothing He wants, you can do nothing to please Him, you have nothing that will cause you to be acceptable to Him. That’s why Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount with these words in Matthew 5:3. He says “Blessed are the ... [beggars] in spirit, for ... [them belongs] the kingdom of Heaven.” You have to become a beggar; you have to realize that’s all you can do is cry out to God.

Jesus illustrates in Luke 18:13 where he talks about the tax collector who couldn’t even lift up his eyes to Heaven, but he was so humbled by his sin he just beat on his chest and said what? God, be merciful to me the sinner! He’s begging! And what does Jesus say? This man went down to his house justified. Paul says in Romans 10:13, “whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

There's a second application. For us who are Christians, the knowledge of God's sovereignty in salvation invites and demands our gratitude and praise. I don't understand Christians who don't sing. I don't understand Christians who don't have a heart of praise and worship to God. You don't, either you haven't been saved or you don't understand what God has done. You did nothing. And God in His mercy and grace stepped in and saved you when you were dead and helpless. And so Hebrews says, in Hebrews 13:15 "Through ... [Christ] then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."

Thirdly: the knowledge of God's sovereignty in salvation encourages evangelism and evangelistic praying. Listen, why pray about somebody being saved unless you believe God is sovereign in salvation. Don't bother, if you don't believe God is sovereign. But if you believe He's sovereign, pray for them and share the gospel with them because now you know it's not about your technique, it's not about you manipulating someone. It's not about the brilliance of your argument. You're sowing the seed of the gospel, and perhaps God intends through that simple gospel to draw that sinner to Himself. This is what motivated Paul.

Listen to 2 Timothy 2:10, "For this reason I endure all things," everything he endured in his ministry, "for the sake of those who are chosen," but he's not talking about those who are already saved, he's talking about the chosen, the elect, who've not yet been saved because he says "for this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, and with it eternal glory."

You see, a knowledge of God's sovereignty is what drives evangelism because I know that as I share the gospel, I'm just sowing the seed, and it may be in a miracle of grace God intends to use that simple gospel message I share to draw that sinner to Himself. Beloved, hold fast to the truth that God is sovereign in salvation.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these wonderful realities. No wonder the Scripture calls you a Savior, our savior. Because you are the one who has rescued us alone. Lord, may those of us who are in

Christ, may we embrace these truths. May we praise You, may we live in constant thanksgiving. May we share the gospel with others, knowing that through that gospel message you may call and draw a sinner to yourself.

Father, I pray for those here this morning who may not be in Christ. I pray that You would humble them before you. That like the tax collector in Jesus' story, they would simply beg You, plead with You to be merciful to them.

And thank you, oh God, that You always respond to the contrite of heart, the one that humbles himself before You, with forgiveness. Whoever calls upon Your name like that will be saved. Lord, may this be the day that happens in the life of someone here this morning.

We pray in Jesus name, Amen.