


# The Christian and Politics

## The Sovereignty of God

# TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

2020.11.5&8



A publication of , the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

**Talk** together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11  
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- What from this message interested you? ...made sense to you? ...confused you?  
...intrigued you? ...angered you? ...encouraged you? ...and **why**?
- Pastor Dan said: "Although God's sovereignty is **always** at work, it **almost never** is visible. We do our work without any **conscious intent** to carry out the will of God. We act as **we** want to, doing exactly what **we** intend to do, yet in **every** instance, we end up doing what **God** has planned for us." Yet the Bible does not view us as robots (we each do what **we** want to do). How do you explain this?
- Pastor Dan noted that "God's sovereignty is often questioned because we don't understand **what** God is doing. Because God doesn't act as we think he **should**, we conclude that he **cannot** act as we think he **would**." In which events of **your** life do you wonder about God's sovereignty?

Creating "God Space": "God Space" is where cynics, skeptics, and spiritually curious people can safely raise their questions, reservations, & doubts because we have listened well and demonstrated love in practical, authentic ways.

- Think of the non-believer who's closest to you (ie, in your home, neighborhood, or workplace).
- What fears have they expressed during this election season?
- What truth(s) from this sermon do you think would be most reassuring to them?
- Which verse from this sermon do you think they might find most helpful or attractive?



- Last week we discussed the mysterious mechanics of sovereignty—that **[1]** God uses **[2]** our actions **[3]** to sovereignly bring about **[4]** his purposes. (Remember—we applied it to seatbelts?) In light of what we've learned today, what lingering questions do you have?

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## Application-Challenge

- **Trust** God's secret will and **obey** his revealed will.
- **Rest in** God's character when you cannot figure things out. **Worship** God.
- **Read** (or listen to) *Is God Really in Control?* or *Trusting God* by Jerry Bridges.

# Sermon Summary

What is going on? Are things out of control? Or, are they fully under control—by someone else? Are they going exactly to plan—but we simply don't understand that plan? These questions relate to God's character—specifically, his sovereignty, or his rule over all creation. God's sovereignty is often questioned because we don't understand what God is doing. Because God doesn't act as we think he should, we conclude that he cannot act as we think he would. But God is never frustrated. Nebuchadnezzar (the most powerful ruler of the ancient world) said nobody—including he himself—can say to God, "What are you doing?!" (Daniel 4:35). God is sovereign—he absolutely rules all things (including people) (Psalm 135:6a). He doesn't ask anybody's permission—neither angels nor men. God even selects world leaders (Psalm 75:7 & Daniel 2:21). God always casts the decisive vote. So, what do we, the voters, have to do with elections? How does it all work?

Although God's sovereignty is always at work, it almost never is visible. Governmental officials and legislative bodies and we voters do our work without any conscious intent to carry out the will of God. We act as we want to, doing exactly what we intend to do, yet in every instance, we end up doing what God has planned for us. He is sovereign. His purposes are achieved, yet without any visible intervention on his part. On the surface there is nothing to be seen except the human activity. Only rarely are we given the privilege of seeing the invisible hand of God in world affairs—and this occurs only when the Bible discloses it to us. Nebuchadnezzar serves as a "case study" of God's sovereignty over "elections" (Daniel 4:4-37).

One way to wrap our minds around God's sovereignty is to consider "God's will". But it too is mysterious (Deuteronomy 29:29). God's will exists in two categories: "secret things" and "revealed things". Although the Bible has lots of information in it, it contains only a minute fraction of God's plans. The Bible contains what we need to know in order to respond properly to God. But it doesn't contain God's explanation of everything that he's up to and why he causes various things to happen. Psalm 115:3 describes the "secret things" of God. God's revealed will is all the "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" in the Bible. God has revealed to us what he wills for us to do. But now things get fascinating: God wills that we be able to defy his revealed will. God said, "Thou shalt not murder," yet murders occur. (Ditto for lying and lust.) God wants ("wills") obedience to all those things yet he doesn't compel it. So in what sense is God sovereign? Here's how: even though he permits defiance of his revealed will, he does not permit us to escape the consequences of our defiance (Galatians 6:7-8).

God's secret will uses even our disobedience to bring about the outcomes he has decreed to come to pass. Several biblical texts pull back the curtain a bit on this mystery (Acts 2:23). Who killed Jesus? The Romans who drove the nails? The Jews who insisted that Pilate put him to death? God who predetermined the plan of it all? The answer is "yes". In theological terms, God was the ultimate cause, the Jews were the immediate cause, and the Romans were the effective cause. They all were involved. Many people, with a shallow, sentimental faith, insist that God isn't involved in acts of wickedness. He only "allows" them to happen. But that's not the clear teaching of Scripture. Think about the implications of that popular, sentimental view: all of the bad things of life are beyond God's control! That's a scary world to live in. Thankfully that's not how the world really is. The way things actually are provides us with safety and comfort. Truth is, even the most wicked act in the history of the world—the murder of the Son of God—was totally within the predetermined plan of God! Wicked men are not greater than God; he uses their wicked desires to bring about his holy, good, loving plans.

Here's another glimpse into the sovereign involvement of God in the affairs of men (2 Corinthians 8:16-17). Titus went to Corinth "on his own initiative". But Paul appealed to him to do it. And God put concern for the Corinthians in Titus' heart. Even though Titus' concern originated with God, the text makes it clear that Titus himself was concerned. He wasn't dragged to Corinth, kicking and screaming. He wanted to go. And yet Paul played a role in helping him want to. And God put concern in Titus' heart.

God's sovereignty over the affairs of men guarantees "good" for us believers (Romans 8:28). Notice that God is the subject; neither we, "destiny" nor "karma" is the ultimate explanation of events. God causes, he takes responsibility for working behind "all things". "All things" is comprehensive. No detail of your life is too mundane for God's involvement. Nothing's too big. Not even human "free will" overrules God's sovereignty (remember Titus—he did exactly what he wanted, which was exactly according to the earnestness God put into his heart). Not all things are good, but God works them together for good (including the evil actions of people—see Genesis 50:20). There's only one limitation on this promise: only God's born-again children receive this iron-clad promise that God himself will use all of his wisdom, power, and love on our behalf. Non-believers aren't promised this fatherly care.

Believers have God's promise that he's always involved, in every incident, in the lives of all of his children, in order to glorify himself and do good to us. Our proper response to God's sovereignty is worship and trust (Romans 11:33-36). These are complex issues which cannot be answered in a thirty-minute message. We don't know what God will do with America and our political situation, but what we do know is far more important: We know that God is sovereignly in control, for his glory and our good.

## Key Text: Daniel 4

I, Nebuchadnezzar, was living in my palace in comfort and prosperity. But one night I had a dream that frightened me; I saw visions that terrified me as I lay in my bed... So I called in Daniel, chief of the magicians:

*"I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that no mystery is too great for you to solve. Now tell me what my dream means." While I was lying in my bed, this is what I dreamed. I saw a large tree in the middle of the earth. The tree grew very tall and strong, reaching high into the heavens for all the world to see. It had fresh green leaves, and it was loaded with fruit for all to eat. Wild animals lived in its shade, and birds nested in its branches. All the world was fed from this tree. Then as I lay there dreaming, I saw a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven. The messenger shouted, Cut down the tree and lop off its branches! Shake off its leaves and scatter its fruit! Chase the wild animals from its shade and the birds from its branches. But leave the stump and the roots in the ground, bound with a band of iron and bronze and surrounded by tender grass. Now let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the wild animals among the plants of the field. For seven years let him have the mind of a wild animal instead of the mind of a human. For this has been decreed so that everyone may know that the Most High rules over the kingdoms of the world. He gives them to anyone he chooses—even to the lowliest of people.*

*Daniel, that was the dream that I had. Now tell me what it means..."*

Daniel replied,

*"I wish the events foreshadowed in this dream would happen to your enemies, my lord, and not to you! Your Majesty—that tree is you! This is what the dream means; this is what God Most High has decreed will happen to my lord the king. You will be driven from human society, and you will live in the fields with the wild animals. You will eat grass like a cow, and you will be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven years will pass while you live this way, until you learn that the Most High rules over the kingdoms of the world and gives them to anyone he chooses. But the stump and roots of the tree were left in the ground. This means that you will receive your kingdom back again when you have learned that heaven rules.*

*King Nebuchadnezzar, please accept my advice. Stop sinning and do what is right. Break from your wicked past and be merciful to the poor. Perhaps then you will continue to prosper."*

Yet all these things did happen to King Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later he was taking a walk on the flat roof of the royal palace in Babylon. As he looked out across the city, he said,

*"Look at this great city of Babylon! By my own mighty power I have built this beautiful city as my royal residence to display my majestic splendor."*

That same hour the judgment was fulfilled, and Nebuchadnezzar was driven from human society. He ate grass like a cow, and he was drenched with the dew of heaven. He lived this way until his hair was as long as eagles' feathers and his nails were like birds' claws.

Back to Nebuchadnezzar's account:

*"After seven years had passed, I, Nebuchadnezzar, looked up to heaven. My sanity returned, and I praised and worshiped the Most High and honored the one who lives forever. His rule is everlasting, and his kingdom is eternal. All the people of the earth are nothing compared to him. He does as he pleases among the angels of heaven & among the people of earth. No one can stop him or say to him, 'What do you mean by doing these things?'*

*When my sanity returned to me, so did my honor and glory and kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored as head of my kingdom. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and glorify and honor the King of heaven. All his acts are just and true, and he is able to humble the proud."*

## Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

**"Five Question Bible Study"** (see page below) *is a simple way to study any passage.*  
**We can use it to learn about God's sovereignty...**

**Monday**—Read Genesis 18:9-15 & Hebrews 11:11-12. How did Sarah respond to God's sovereignty?

**Tuesday**—Read Jeremiah 32:17-18, 25-30 & 36-42. What two things does God do to Israel?

**Wednesday**—Read Matthew 19:23-30. What can only God do?

**Thursday**—Read Romans 8:28-39. List all of the threats which try, but cannot, thwart God.

**Friday**—Read Romans 11:33-36. Who can explain God? Who can control him?

**Saturday**—***In preparation for worshipping your risen Lord with your church family,***  
study **Proverbs 29:25** and **2 Corinthians 5:9**.

Bible Text: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



What idea particularly strikes me from this text? [Note in which verse(s) it is found.]



What question does this text raise in my mind—and how would **this text** answer it?



What about Jesus Christ—his character and/or his redemption—relates to this text?



What action must I take as a result of this text? Be concrete and specific.



With whom will I share what I learned from this text? [and what was their response?]

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  - Think of the non-believer who's closest to you (ie, in your home, neighborhood, or workplace).
  - What fears have they expressed during this election season?
  - What truth(s) from this sermon do you think would be most reassuring to them?
  - Which verse from this sermon do you think they might find most helpful or attractive?
  - As a Community Group, role play bringing up these ideas. What approach will be most effective?
- Last week we discussed the mysterious mechanics of sovereignty—that [1] God uses [2] our actions [3] to sovereignly bring about [4] his purposes. (Remember—we applied it to seatbelts?)
- 5 In light of what we've learned today, what lingering questions do you have?



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- 1 Start with this “soft-ball” question, just to get people talking. The sovereignty of God is a complex question, so don’t rush them on their reactions. If needed, read the Sermon Summary aloud as a group.
  
- 2 If you didn’t read the Sermon Summary already, you probably should do so now. Then, ask the question. It will probably generate a lot of discussion. Even though it’s an “information” question, don’t let it get too theoretical. Help folks grapple with the interplay of human responsibility and divine direction.
  
- 3 With this question, the discussion turns away from theory. Answers to this question may involve a high degree of emotion, so be prepared to shepherd your group through this question. Listen well. Don’t try to supply answers.
  
- 4 Have a group member read the explanation of “God Space”, and then ask each group member to think of a non-believer with whom they are close. Don’t have them verbalize their answers; just have it in mind. Then, work your way through all the rest of the questions. Non-believers will really have some serious questions on this issue (believers do too!). And don’t skip that final question! As for volunteers. You may generate better answers by having one person play the role of a non-believer and the rest of the group jump in and out with their recommendations on questions or comments. The objective is to create as realistic of a conversation as possible so that folks can envision themselves actually having such a discussion.
  
- 5 In many ways, this question serves both as an answer (of sorts) to 2, as well as a wrap-up of the entire topic. Jot down questions, and if you don’t know the answer, feel free to be in touch with Pastor Dan. Don’t worry about having answers to everything. Instead, use this question to provoke further study of this issue by group members, and as a segue to the points of Application-Challenge. Far from being theoretical, the sovereignty of God is an intensely practical subject once an individual encounters a personal tragedy or deep disappointment.
  
- 6 Especially urge folks to get Bridges’ book. Consider studying it together with one or two others (in addition to your regular Community Group meetings. This is particularly important if someone in your group is struggling with trusting God for a personal tragedy or deep disappointment.