

Sermon note – *This was John-Michael's first prepared and written sermon... this was spoken at a Friday night prayer meeting when New Philadelphia Church was known as JSEM...*

God is Sovereign (Supreme, Absolute)

When I prayed about what to share tonight, I felt the Lord place this on my heart, "I am Sovereign." "I am the Sovereign God." So I felt the Lord wanted me to preach on His sovereignty. "Sovereign" basically means "supreme" or "absolute." To say our God is sovereign is to say He is above all, that He is the true God.

Revelation 19:16 says, "On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: 'King of kings and Lord of lords.'"

2Samuel 7:22 says, "How great you are, O Sovereign Lord! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears."

Please say to the person next to you, "We worship the Sovereign God"

Blameless Job's Story

God knows what He is doing. God's sovereignty was something that troubled Job in the Bible. We know Job was a good man. Even God Himself said before the angels in heaven, "Job is blameless and upright." So when God allowed Job to be attacked by Satan, which included losing his wealth, his possessions, his sons and his daughters, and even his health... Job struggled with what was happening. He begins to analyze everything he has done and begins to feel that he is in the right and that God messed up.

Lets turn to Job 31:35-37

During this long speech Job confesses his innocence and believes he is clean. He wants to know **how God could allow** such horrible things to him. Perhaps God doesn't know what He is doing?

You guys know the story, I think. God shows up and speaks to Job amidst a powerful storm. God basically says, "I am the Creator. I made everything." That's about it. And what is Job's response? Lets read Job 42:1-6.

What does Job repent of here? Before God allowed Satan to attack Job, **God Himself said Job was blameless.** So what sin has Job done? Job has questioned God's Sovereignty. Job, amidst examining his heart and his actions sees that he is clean. So he begins to question God. What are you doing God? What are you doing God? What are you doing? He began to question his maker. And soon he began to think that he was righteous. But Job, in the face of God, realizes his place. He realizes that NOTHING can compare to God. He realizes that God is above all and Job, "spoke of things he did not understand, things too wonderful for him to know."

This is the sovereignty that I felt led to share about tonight.

Questions Living in a Children's Home

Honestly, this is one of the issues that I have had to tackle hard in my life. As most of you guys know, I live in a children's home. We have 80 kids at my home. Not one of them has a happy background. Their parents included drug addicts, alcoholics, some were sexually abusive, physically abusive, others had their children out of wedlock and were too ashamed of them so they put the kids in a home.

One of our girls was abused by her father so much to the point that when she would see a picture of him she would cry. Another girl's father abused her mother and perhaps her as well (we don't know) to the point of the mother running away from him with her. Her mother turned to alcohol for comfort and drank herself into the hospital where she is never expected to recover. The girl's aunt hid her in our home so that her abusive father will never find her. Another boy's mother and father divorced young and his mom left for good. His dad forced him to work at the age of 7 and would take the money from his piggy bank. His father then got into a bad motorcycle accident and the boy watched as his father died in the hospital. All of these kids came here between 2nd and 4th grade.

Before I became a Christian I had a hard time understanding how God could allow such things to happen. I think that is true for most people. Like Job, we ask, "Why God!? How could you?! You are a loving God!" We ask the God of love, the creator of love, how could He be so... unloving?

pause

You kill by yourself

It is human nature for us to blame others rather than ourselves. I used to do electrical work at a construction site with two guys, Freddie and Jean. Freddie is Latino and has a thick Spanish accent. Jean is from Africa and then France and so his first languages are French and I think a native African language. Whenever Jean or I would do something wrong, Freddie would get all upset and say, "Why you kill me like that Jean!? Why you kill me like that man!?" Sometimes when we would be working together Freddie himself would make a mistake. Jokingly, he would still say, "Why you kill me like that Jean?" Jean would shake his head and say, "You kill by yourself Freddie. You kill by yourself."

We look at God and we say, "Why is there so much sin this world God." We kill by ourself. Adam and Eve brought sin, not God. We look at God and say, "Why all the murder and abuse?" Cain brought murder, not God. Why are all the sexual perversion and alcoholism? That is Genesis chapter 6, the whole world but Noah. How can we blame God when it is us that have willingly chosen sin, all of us? Our first ancestors chose the way of death and so all their offspring inherited that. Are we to point the finger at God for our own downfall?

2Samuel 14:14 – Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But God does not take away life; instead, he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him.

My uncle's story

Who are we to question God's Sovereignty? We are the fallen man. We are the sinners. We are the ones without hope. My uncle has gone through three divorces. He has fathered five kids with two different women. Four of his five kids have had children out of wedlock. One of them was recently abused by her boyfriend and father of her two boys to the point of her losing some of her vision. Her boyfriend is in jail now. My uncle is poor and works construction and is trying to raise her two boys. Yet he still says he doesn't need God. He says, "God is a crutch. I am fine without God." You hear this story though and you know my uncle doesn't have hope on his own. Instead he has a trail of kids not raised in good love who have in turn had their own children out of wedlock and the cycle of sin and hurt only continues. We know that if my uncle's spiritual eyes were open he would see just how much he really does need God. But my uncle refuses to believe, so he cannot understand God's Sovereignty.

I believe, so I understand

You see, it is not, "I understand, so I believe." God and His Sovereignty is not some formula to be figured out. He isn't some textbook that if you study it well, you will be able to ace the test and get into heaven. No, it is, "I believe, so I understand." God is a God of faith. And with faith, there will always be room for doubt. Because, without doubt, you can't have faith. If you are doing something that offers no doubt, you are doing something that requires no faith.

Luke 10:21 – At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure."

Jesus sees his rag-tag group of disciples return from their little mission trips and his disciples are overjoyed because they were able to heal people and cast out demons. These disciples aren't like the Pharisees. They haven't memorized the Old Testament. They don't sit around and talk and debate about religious matters. Rather, they went out in faith, obeying Jesus' commission to them to prepare His way. And God chose these fishermen, tax collectors, and other "little children" to do great miracles. These men chose to believe first, and God then gradually opens their eyes to understanding His heart. They believed first, then understanding came.

How we face struggles (2 choices)

We are faced with struggles all the time. Jesus Himself says in our lives we will have struggles. But with each struggle we are faced with a decision. Do we trust in God's Sovereignty, that He is control? And do we look to His promises and pray and exercise our faith trusting in who He is? Or do we doubt and question and say, "God, why have You allowed this?" And in doing so do we analyze the struggle using our own understanding and allow doubt, fear, anxiety, anger, or other unhealthy emotions to come in?

Let me share with you a story about God's Sovereignty. He is in control of all.

During my last year of college at Virginia Tech I was driving back home from college on night, a four and a half hour drive, and it started to snow. Not only was it becoming a bit harder to drive, but I was also tired and a bit sleepy. I prayed for a bit and felt God put it on my heart to call someone and talk. I tried to think of who to call and I felt God put my friend Tim Petersen on my heart. Tim was my Bible study leader when I was a 1st year in college. He graduated during my 3rd year and I hadn't talked to him since for nearly two years. I still happened to have his number though. I gave him a call and he said he was busy at the moment but would call me back shortly. I stopped by a gas station and filled up, and then right as I got back on the road he called me back. We had a really good talk. He had become the worship minister at a church in Virginia Beach and had just met a really nice girl and they were beginning a relationship. As we talked though Tim's voice turned serious and he asked me for advice with a certain situation at his church. He shared with me that one of the girls on his worship team is named Amy. She is married to a guy named Brad. Brad works for the US special forces. Recently he got top-secret orders to leave the country. Before he left Brad and Amy spent a lot of time together. He couldn't tell her where he was going and she also would have no contact number for him. After he left Amy was living alone in her house. Now, in their area in Virginia Beach there lives a strange homeless guy. He talks to himself a lot and wanders from place to place. He usually doesn't bother people though and so they don't bother him. One thing about him though, it had become known around the area that this strange man has a history of predicting people's deaths, and being right about it. Well, a few days after Brad left Amy was at home in the afternoon. There was a knock at the door and she opened to find this man standing there, smiling at her. He told her, "Amy, I just want to encourage you and prepare you. I want you to treasure your memories with Brad, especially the time you spent with him before he left. I have to tell you, you aren't going to see Brad again. Please don't be upset, Brad is going to die an honorable death. He is going to die for the country. You need to be proud of him. Treasure your memories with him, okay?" After he said these things she shut the door on him. She tried to shake it off and just thought to herself, "He is just crazy." Well, that evening she was on the phone with her mom while cleaning up the house and starting to make a late dinner. She told her mom on the phone, "I'm so hungry. I'm really in the mood for a pizza. I wish I had just ordered a pizza for dinner." Right as she said this to her mom, there was a knock at the door. She set down the phone and went and opened the door. And there stood that same man... holding a pizza. He gave her the pizza and told her, "Just so you know I'm telling the truth," and then walked away. Amy freaked out. She began crying hard and immediately called her pastor and called Tim. They rushed over to the house and as she explained what had happened, they were at a loss for words. But then a verse came on Tim's heart. Luke 11:23. It says... **"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters."** He who is not for us is against us. Tim told her that they know this man is not a Christian. And if this man is not working for God, he is working for the enemy. If his knowledge is not from God, his knowledge is from the enemy. Tim told her that they just have to trust that God is in control. That is supreme. That God is the true authority. So they must pray, and trust in God. As Tim finished telling me the story I felt in total agreement with what he said. I told him, "That's right, all we can do is pray. There is no contact number for Brad, there is no human thing we

can do. All we can do is pray and trust in God. I told Tim I would be in prayer for Amy and Brad. We talked some more for a while before finally hanging up. Six months passed after that conversation. Then one night while I was having some prayer time God started to reveal some things to me about prayer. And then He put it on my heart to call Tim and ask about Amy and Brad. So after I finished my prayer time I called up Tim. We had a good talk for a bit and then I asked him, "Whatever happened to Amy and Brad? How are they?" Tim responded, "John-Michael, thank you so much for your prayers. They are okay. Brad is back." And then he explained to me... some time after that man had come to talk to Amy, Brad got orders to return to Virginia Beach for a training course he needed to take before continuing his missions. Brad then came back to Virginia Beach and his best friend took his place on his special forces team. In the next mission, his best friend, in Brad's position, was killed in battle. When Brad got home in Virginia Beach and took his papers the nearby base, they realized there was an error in the papers. Brad wasn't supposed to take this course. He wasn't even supposed to leave where he was fighting. But because of this "error" in his papers, Brad was spared from the mission where he would have died. Instead, his friend died in his place. And I remember as Tim was telling me this, a verse immediately came on my heart. **John 15:13, which says, "Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends."** Tim told me Brad is now safe at home with Amy and they are doing great. That man's prophecy turned out to be wrong. Amy did see Brad again and he is still alive and well today. After Tim finished sharing with me, I then shared with him what God had been putting on my heart that night in prayer. God was telling me that Satan is in fact the prince of this world. Scripture says this. Jesus even says this about Satan. Because of our sin, we are slaves to sin and thus slaves to Satan. But God, in His great love, sent His Son Jesus to die for us, overcome death, and become hope for the world. When we surrender our lives to God, He forgives us of our sin and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. And because we are no longer slaves to sin, we become aliens and strangers in this world.

1Peter 2:11 says, "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul."

Jesus himself says in John 17:14-16, "I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it."

We are no longer of this world, because we have Christ living in us. Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27).

1John 4:4 states, "You dear children are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."

You see the Spirit of that same Jesus that overcame death and sin and all that Satan could throw against Him, the Spirit this same victorious Jesus, is the Spirit who lives in us. Now this does not change the fact that Satan is the prince of this world. Satan can still do

his tricks and his evil. He lives to war against us. But as Christian preached last Friday night, our battle is not with flesh and blood. It is not by human effort that we overcome. The battle is God's. And it is through prayer that we enable God to work.

Ephesians 6:18 – (wrapping up the armor of God) And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests, with this in mind be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Prayer is exercising your faith.

Prayer is putting your trust in God's Sovereignty rather than in anything of this world. And by this God is able to work miracles. Satan, by his tricks and knowledge, was able to know that Brad's life would be in danger. And for some reason Satan was able to know about the pizza. Satan does have access to the throne room of God. He can receive some knowledge that is dead on. But only some. It is God who is in control. Satan tried to put fear in Amy. He tried to make himself seem all big and bad. But we trusted in God's Supremacy and prayed, putting our hope and faith in God. And God delivered Brad. He showed Satan to be who he truly is, a liar. God is supreme. God is sovereign. Amen?

The skeptic

Now a skeptic might hear that story and immediately question, "Why did the friend have to die? Why couldn't God have spared him as well? What was God thinking?"

After Jane Kim went back to America to be with her ailing father, a fellow JSEMer asked me, "What if we pray for him really hard and he still doesn't believe and passes away? What if...?"

Are we to give up in prayer? Did we fail? Did God fail? What are we to think or say? This is the verse that came on my heart...

Isaiah 55:8-9 – "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

This is a fallen world.

We aren't perfect yet. Mistakes and consequences will come. Not all will believe. But that doesn't mean that we are to ever hang our head in shame and give up. Elijah (1Kings 18) had to pray seven times before the rains came. Elisha (2Kings 4) had to pray three times for the dead boy before he came to life. They could have questioned God, "Where are you?" after their first and second failures. **Instead, they were convinced God is real and knew they just had to keep praying.** So we have to keep praying and let God arise within us. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He knows what He is doing.

For the Scripture reading tonight, I had Erin read Jeremiah 15. That chapter sums up Jeremiah's life. Jeremiah lived during the last years of Judah and through the exile to

Babylon. He prophesies to the people despite already being told multiple times from God not to pray for them (Jeremiah 7:16, Jeremiah 11:14, Jeremiah 14:11-12), that the people are not going to believe. Jeremiah prophesies boldly amidst the false prophets and excessive idol worship.

Jeremiah Suffers

He is imprisoned, put in the stockades, thrown into a deep muddy well, and rejected by all the people. He continually receives the wrath of God directed to the people and must prophesy about it. He has to live through the 2 years of siege against Jerusalem where the people starve, literally eat their crap, eat their children, and waste away. He has to live through this despite knowing that if the people would just repent they could be saved. Jeremiah knew sorrows. He knew suffering. He knew hopelessness.

Jeremiah 39 tells the story of how the Babylonians finally overtake Jerusalem, slaughter the rulers, burn down the city, and take the people as prisoners in chains and with hooks. During this time poor Jeremiah is grabbed as just another Israelite and put into chains. He had every right to say, "Where are you God? What have you done? You have abandoned me. You have messed up."

Now let's turn to Jeremiah 40. Please put yourself in Jeremiah's shoes... standing there in chains, seeing all that you prophesy come true, but feeling so alone... **Jeremiah 40:1-6.** Jeremiah could have given up along the way. Instead he trusted that he was truly worshipping the God of creation. He was worshipping the true God, and despite all the trouble and hardship and unbelief he faced, he continued to prophesy and obey the word of God. And now as all the prophecies of his finally come true, a foreign man, the general of the army of Babylon, comes to him knowing exactly who he is. He speaks to Jeremiah and to the people confirming that Jeremiah was right in all he prophesied. God reveals His hand.

Jeremiah's faith was confirmed. God is Sovereign!