

God Who is Sovereign

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] As I mentioned before, this is the last in our series that we are looking at the character, the attributes of God, the kind of doctrines in many ways of the nature and the character of God. I'm trying to dovetail it today and with the whole idea of the Nativity and I'll come around to that in a little while. But even in the passage that we read, you see that there's glimpses there of who Jesus is and the kind of sovereign Lord that He is.

Verse 33, you know, the angel speaks of this birth and he says, He will reign over the house of Jacob forever. His kingdom will never end. And that is speaking of the sovereignty of God. But I'm going to do something. I'm going to ask something. I don't think I've ever asked this before in church, but I'm going to encourage you to, if you have access for the website, I'm going to encourage you to listen to all these sermons again. Not because I preached them, but to look beyond that and look at the teaching or the scripture and the emphasis on God. Okay, you can miss out bits. But think of the nature and character of God. And if you have time over the holidays or the next week, listen to them again, because it changes your life to think more about the character and the nature of God. You'll begin to think more God thoughts and it will change you. It'll change your perspective on this world and it'll change your perspective on your own life. Absolutely. And I would encourage you to think of these great, great truths about God and His nature. He's so different from us. And we just have such a tendency to just shrink wrap Him down to something really small and manageable. And yet the characteristics that we've seen make Him so glorious and it makes it so much easier to worship Him. We struggle to worship Him so much. And yet as we learn more about Him, that that changes. And it's wonderful to look at some of these characteristics in God from His revelation, from the revelation of Himself in the Bible.

Because the great thing is you would never make that up. You would never make this kind of God up, the kind of God that we've spoken about. You know, a God who's eternal, a God who knows everything, a God who's sovereign, a God who doesn't change. And all the different characteristics we've looked at over the last, you would never make that kind of God up.

You would make, we would kind of make up a God who was, wasn't scary and he wasn't big and massive and glorious. We would make a God who is not threatening, a God who is manageable, a God who we can mould, a God who wouldn't trouble me. There's a great, a great Tom Jones song in one of his newer CDs which he's kind of, he's kind of going back into gospel roots and he sees about the Lord troubling him. You know, Lord coming to trouble him in the word of a song or in the conscience of his mind. And it's a great phrase with the Lord troubling us. And sometimes we wouldn't make up a God who troubled us, who gave us, you know, challenged us, who wouldn't accept our best. If we were making up a God we'd say, well at least we'll have a God who accepts my best efforts. Surely that's a kind of God we would have, who would accept our best efforts in our own strength. But what this series has done for me certainly and I hope it's done for you, it's reminded us of the nature of God. I want to make two quotes, take two quotes from scripture. I'm going to quote a lot from scripture because on the sovereignty of God the Bible says it much better than anything else in its raw, clear form and it's simple. But before I do that, I'm going to quote two texts that remind us of who God is, who God isn't. Sam 50 verse 1 says, when you did these things I kept silent, you thought, this is God speaking, you thought I was exactly like you. And in Isaiah 55 verse 8 says, you know these words, for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your way. We would make up a God that was very different, but God is saying in His own words, look, I'm not, you think I'm like you, I'm not like you. My ways are not like yours and my thoughts are not like yours.

[4 : 47] And so what we're confronted with when we look at this sovereign or this whole attributes of God is a God who's not like us. God is very different than we come to terms with that. He's not a

God in our own image. He's not a God that we make up. He's not just, if that's the kind of God that's good for you, then that's fine. He's the God who is real and who's revealed himself in scripture, who reaches out to us, but at the same time who's completely unique. And the last characteristic that we're looking at today is the sovereignty of God, absolutely mind blowing. And in many ways it's a summary of everything that we've looked at so far. And it kind of, in many ways an overarching characteristic of God.

God in total control. I feel bad using that particular phrase today, total controls. We talk about that heating system that works all the time. But not relating it to a heating system. God is in total control. In other words, he's sovereign. That's what sovereign means. Sovereign really comes from the Old Testament word for king. It's the same kind of root. He's king. He's sovereign. It envelopes everything about him. He has complete and absolute and total authority. He will reign, we're told here, over the house of Jacob forever. His kingdom will never end. And then she goes on Mary to sing in her magnificat.

She sings about the one who has done mighty things, this great Lord and great God who cast down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. Yahweh, the Old Testament, we started our study of the characters of God, looking at this name of God, I am. The God who's always, who's existent, who just is, you know, the I am God. The name that Jesus took before Abraham was born, I am. Well that's translated in the new NIV, 297 times, a sovereign Lord. So we've got that connection between the nature and the character and the existence of God and it's translated as sovereign Lord. The two go together as Lordship, his kingship, his authority, they all go together. He's in absolute control.

You know, we talk about the laws of science and the laws of nature and these are laws that are governed by him and we break into that the law of morality, the laws of our conscience, the rights and wrongs, the order. Everything that we see around us that we speak of as being orderly or lawful or governed or ruled is made by and governed by him. Now I'm going to rattle through some texts here just to remind you of what the Bible says about that in Psalm 45, your throne, O Lord, will last forever and ever. A sceptre of justice will be the sceptre of your kingdom. Psalm 135 says, I know that the Lord is great, that our Lord is greater than all gods. The Lord does whatever pleases him in the heavens and the earth. Now that immediately sets you, your alarm bells rung in. You know, this description of God who does whatever pleases him, we don't like that. We don't like anyone saying I just do whatever I want. But that's the description we have of God. Psalm 115, our God is in the heaven. He does whatever pleases him, whatever pleases him because he's sovereign, because he's perfect, because he's just, because he is absolutely holy.

Daniel 4, tremendous words from the beginning, is dominion is an eternal dominion. His kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth that are regarded as nothing. He does what he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth.

[8 : 44] No one can hold back his hand and say to him, what have you done? No one can do that. We might say that, but we can't ultimately take God under our authority and say, what are you doing God? He is not answerable to anyone. He's not answerable to us today. Job 42, I know that you can do all things. No purpose of yours can be thwarted. No purpose of yours can be thwarted. Nothing that God does can be thwarted. How many things did you try to do yesterday? How many things did you achieve? How many things did you want to do and you couldn't do? Or you tried to do and were thwarted? No purpose of God can be thwarted. For in him, Colossians 1:16, all things were created. Things in heaven and things on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through him and for him. Sovereignty of God, unbelievable truth. And there's two things briefly. Sovereign, I want to mention, sovereign in salvation and also sovereign over allowing sin and evil. I want to mention these two quickly. Sovereign in salvation.

You didn't choose to become a Christian. You didn't decide to become a Christian. God chose you. He responded to his invitation. He chose you before the beginning of the universe.

He elects his people. He's sovereign in salvation and over our lives. Yet within that he grants obviously for his responsibility. What I'm saying is, and what the truth of the Bible is, is that we don't live in a fatalistic world. Okay? So that God has everything decided and there's no place for us other than being puppets. We are morally responsible. The Bible teaches that. The Bible teaches we make choices. You all chose today, maybe we're dragged, but most of you chose today to come to church. And he is sovereign over the mystery of how that can be. That we have choice, that we are

responsible, that we will not stand before God in the last day and say, well, I wasn't elected. It wasn't my fault because we're sovereign and it's sorry because we are responsible and we make choices. But the reminder is we offer nothing in our salvation to God. It is his gift and we are dead spiritually and he must breathe us. He must bring life to us because we're dead. You know, that's natural, isn't it? We're dead spiritually and lost. He must breathe life. It must come from his sovereign choice and will. Then we live. But and within that, and obviously I'm just skimming over this, these are questions that have rattled the minds of theologians and philosophers for centuries and centuries. It's a whistle-stop tour that he's also sovereign in allowing sin and evil in this world. He didn't create evil. He's a good God. It's a perfect God. It's a sovereign king, but no doubt and nonetheless, he allows evil in this world. Now that is a mystery, a cauldron of mystery, which I believe revolves around us being image bearers and being created to worship and serve him and creating us free. But if we're created free, then it's essential within that freedom that we have the choice to rebel and the choice to sin and the choice to usurp that freedom and usurp that lordship and sovereignty of

God and the choice not to worship or the choice to take that place that God has and thus entered in all the mystery and I don't deny the huge mystery within that, but thus entered sin and evil and death into this world through the creation of beings made in the image of God who he looked for to follow and serve him freely and willingly and voluntarily, but who chose to rebel against that. So he's sovereign in allowing that. But remember today that he's sovereign in overruling evil and sin and death. He's sovereign in defeating it and the cross and he's sovereign in ultimately destroying it in the new heavens and the new earth. So we find whatever mystery we have, whatever questions we have about why just now and about how just now and about what's happening just now, the Bible makes clear that God is absolutely sovereign in control, has his purposes, has his plans, is allowing evil. It will end, it will be destroyed, it's been defeated in the cross, it will be destroyed and in the new heavens and the new earth, it will be even more glorious than the very beginning, than the Garden of Eden to his glory. But this truth of God's sovereignty is the one we recoil from most for two reasons. I'm going to go through this quickly. Two reasons we recoil from the sovereignty of God. One is because we can't understand it. Now we've done quite a lot of things in the last number of weeks about the character of God that you are. It's really stretched us, stretched our understanding. We can't understand it. But this one particularly is so hard that he's in control, that he knows everything that's happening and he is all working out according to his great purpose. We don't understand that because it doesn't look like that. You pick up a paper today or tomorrow or yesterday or you watch the news on the internet and say it doesn't look much like God's in control and you think of your own life. Doesn't seem like God's in control. Things don't look like that. It seems that he's distant and far away and that he isn't in control. There's so much evil, so much bitterness, so much blackness. We wonder what's going on. From our point of view, it just seems like such a mess. If he's perfect, if he's glorious, if he's sovereign, why is it such a mess? Why is my life such a mess? Why are there so many difficulties? He's not in control. The only answer really to that is his perspective on ours. It's from where we're looking. It may look like that, but not from where he's looking. The old illustration of the tapestry is the best one I can think of. You have a tapestry and you look at it from the back side of the tapestry, the underside of it, and it's just a complete mess. You see all the young people looking glazed at that because you don't really see or do or look at many tapestries now, maybe. Do you know what a tapestry is? You know what a tapestry is? Yeah, okay. The other side of it is completely messy and there's bits of thread and wool pinging out all over the place. You can never tell what the story is, what the picture is, until you turn it around and see it from a different perspective. Or it's like the old workings of a watch. Not the modern digital stuff, but if you open an old watch and it's just a kind of morass of clogs and clogs, even clogs. That's the Dutch watch. But clogs and different things going on. And it just looks like, what in there's happening here? And then you turn it around and you can see a face and it's telling the time. And we can't understand it from where we're looking at.

You can't know. So many people come with pastoral issues and needs and we can't answer them. We can't see them ourselves, let alone untangle them for themselves. Complicated jumble. And yet it's not like that for him. He says, I'm not like you. He says, that wonderful Sam quote, he says, you thought I was exactly like you, but my thoughts are not. Your thoughts, my ways are not yours. That's where he asked us to hold on. That's where he asked us to trust him in the bleak and the difficult struggles that we face because he sees things, definitely because he's sovereign. Think of the word itself, think of the Bible itself. Written over thousands of years by multiple different authors,

all culturally diverse, different places never met. And yet one unified, clear message coming through it right from the beginning, right to the end of God's purposes, God's plan. Things seem to be askew. Things seem to be just going wrong. Jesus was born and they, they chase him for his life. They rip out the children, young boys from their homes and they slay them in the streets. And he says, well, what is God? How is God involved in that? And yet God clearly is protecting his son as he's taken to Egypt and he's protected so that he can go and grow and go to the cross.

[18 : 27] Things aren't as you see, we can't understand it, but we're asked to trust him. You might be in blackness today. You might be dreading this time of year, maybe all kinds of issues you have. And you say, it doesn't seem like God's in control. It's all very well pontificating for the front from the front is a minister about what God is doing and how God is somebody doesn't seem like that. And all I can say is that I know, I know. And that's the reality.

Is it not? It's the reality for everyone of us. And that's where the truth matters so much. God is sovereign. We can't understand it. The other problem is we reject it. We reject it completely. Luke, if I took down this quote, yeah, Luke chapter 19, there's that story of the king who was sent back to the sun, sent back to rain over the people. But it's a parable of Jesus because we're told that the subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him, and we don't want this man to be our king, to be our sovereign, to be controlling us, to be over us, to be on top of us. And we reject it because the kernel of sin right from the very beginning, right from the beginning from Adam and Eve, right from the beginning was autonomy. To be, we want to be like God. And we might not say it like that. We might not want world domination, but we want to rule our own lives. We want to be in control, independent, powerful, free, perfect. We would love to be knowledgeable. And we hate God because God is everything we're not. In our sinful, rebellious hearts, we hate his authority.

We hate the idea of his control because it makes us feel that we're not at the center. We are not lords. We are not sovereign. He is. We're jealous of who God is. We're jealous.

And we don't like the idea of someone over us, someone who telling us what to do. There's a great irony in all of this. There's a great irony in history. A great irony in democracy, in a sense. I guess maybe people will argue, you know their history and know kind of the pattern of human behavior better than I do. But I think it's fair to say that most democratic rights have kind of come from our Judeo-Christian roots, where we regard the equality of the human being and every person being equal. And we recognize that as a biblical and real thing. And yet we want to take that democracy and we want to apply it in the spiritual realm.

We want to state the great slogan of the American War of Independence, we serve no sovereign here. So we take what is a good reality and we take it into the spiritual realm and make it a bad one. We want democracy with heaven. We want equal rights with God. And that's why we struggle so much with sovereignty because we've not grown up in it, you know, with a, well we've got a monarchy but it's a kind of constitutional monarchy. It's not an absolute monarchy. And so we struggle with the whole idea of sovereign. Because usually because we apply it in human terms and we think of the abuse of it and we think of the abuse of power and the abuse of control and all of these things. And it simply doesn't work like that with God. We don't like power of others. We don't like others' authority.

[22 : 29] We don't like commands. That's because we think God is like us. But He's perfectly good and just and holy. And He is a right to be worshiped. And He is the right to demand your loyalty because He's a sovereign God. You know, we aren't in the position to bargain with Him. We aren't in the position to say, well, you know, quid pro quo, God. I'll do it for you. You do it for me. He is sovereign. We really should just simply fall at our knees before this God. And that we struggle with that so much. He's the right to be worshiped.

The only one who's the right to be worshiped. And not because it's a fearful worship that we saw last when we talked about my God who is, you know, holy and perfect love casts out fear. He's worthy because He's revealed Himself as a loving, gracious sovereign.

And that's what I finish with, taking you back to, you might wonder, when is He ever going to get to the nativity? Get an nativity? That's the amazing thing. God does not like us. Sovereign, powerful, all knowing, all seeing, amazing God. What do we find in the nativity? He's an amanger. The same sovereign over the universe who being in the very nature of God didn't consider equality with God something to be grasped, but rather made Himself nothing, made Himself nothing. You see, the sovereignty of God is a worthless truth unless we see it through the eyes of the cross and of the incarnation and of the nativity. This king of kings becomes a servant, the promised Messiah in the

line of King David is the everlasting King who's worshiped by shepherds, who's announced from heaven, who is attract, attracts the attention of the wise man and also, we'll see a little bit more about this tonight, Herod in a different way, becomes the dependent child, hunted, homeless, anonymous.

But all of it, remember, remember all of it in His perfect plan. Every single, that great word, 1 Peter 1.20, remember this one, He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake through Him, you believe in God who raised Him from the dead and glorified. He was chosen before the beginning of the world, sovereignty, the sovereign God becomes a helpless child. That is mind blowing if we allow ourselves to think about what it actually is saying. And of course we see glimpses, don't we, of this anonymity being burst, sovereignty bursting into the anonymity of this itinerant Jewish preacher. He says, I am. Before Abraham was, I am. And he says to Pilate, you only have the authority because when he tells the winds and the waves, be calm. When he raises the dead, when he sees into people's hearts, when he is authoritative over illness and death, when he speaks words of great weight, this is King Jesus. You know, it's worthy of our worship today. It's worthy, worthy of our worship. It's worthy of walking over cut glass floor. Thankfully, he never asked us to. King of Kings comes our servant. The King of Kings is also our saviour. Now remember how significant that is. We sat at the table last Sunday evening.

It's very personal. You got a saviour who is sovereign and yet is yours. You know, the irony in the Bible of the people's rejection, you know, mirrors the rejection of humanity.

[27 : 04] We have ironic that they would stand and say, we have no King but Caesar. We have no King, but Caesar. And here is the King of Kings, a sovereign Lord before Pilate silenced. Could have just raised his hand and a multitude of the heavenly host could have come down and so he every one of them to a lost eternity by silent. Even in the cross is acknowledged that he is a King of the Jews, but they didn't understand this sovereign Lord of Lords is nailed to a tree. I ask you, would you make that up? Would you ever make that kind of God up? King of Kings, Lord of Lords, all seeing, all knowing, all powerful nailed to a tree. You're having me on. Never. That could never be the case. It's absolutely clear that this sovereign plan of God is the only way that we can be saved. This all powerful

God who is utterly in control is winning the greatest victory that has ever been won on the cross. Do you think today you don't need him? You happy walk out of here and uncommitted, unbelieving, religious person? Are you content to leave it to a deathbed before you come and know this sovereign? Are you willing to stand before him and argue that he didn't need to go to the cross, that it was a crazy plan, that there must have been another way?

Are we willing to do that? Are we willing to spend his afternoon not praying for the people that we hope he longed for to be here tonight, just to hear that kernel of truth might change them for eternity because he's the King of Kings? We're not, we're not singing carols to just to just do whatever else is doing. We long for the opportunity just to share Jesus Christ because he is King of Kings and he's Lord of Lords and there is no one else and we need to recognise and see and know that. Pray for tonight. Pray that you will see the King of Kings in all his glory. Just pray.

Father God we give thanks and we rejoice in who you are. We rejoice that you're a sovereign King and all we can do this day is ask for forgiveness, that we shove you into the gutters of our lives, that we treat you like a pet dog, that we keep you on a leash, that we think we're bigger and better and stronger, that we think we know all about you because we've read a couple of theology books, that we think that we have all the answers. Lord we're growing old and we need Jesus Christ and his power and his glory in our lives.

We need to see him as he is. We need to recognise that the devil would make this life a playground for us, a place of spiritual poverty, a place of ignorance and of arrogance, a place of selfishness and independence and a pleasure seeking world. We ask and pray that we would see our joy in Jesus and our joy in the truth of one who is sovereign over the universe, yet who became that helpless child, who learned obedience, who revealed his glory and who died nailed to a tree, resurrected to assure us of his victory and of the future place that he prepares for us. Lord we confess this morning that we come before you with so many questions, so many doubts, so much awareness that life is not what we would want it to be or even our faith isn't what we would want it to be. So many questions about your sovereignty and the state of this world and the sin in our own hearts, but we do pray and ask that you would give us trust and deeper faith and greater grace and stronger

commitment to the

[32 : 36] Lord Jesus Christ and that we know that things are not as they seem and that you would occasionally pray for us, pull back the curtain to see that unseen spiritual world and the realities of a God who is absolutely good and in control of all that is happening. That would be a comfort to some here this day, not to us all. May you again we pray for tonight as your blessing, not in some kind of strange mystical way, but just that you would be preparing your hearts, that you would be already working in the hearts of many and that you would bless all that we do and all that is done that we would do it for you and for your glory. For Jesus' sake. Amen.