

“BEDROCK FAITH”
Genesis 1:1-26
September 23, 2018
Holiday Island Presbyterian Church

INTRODUCTION:

One of the most difficult doctrines to wrestle with is the doctrine that God is sovereign.

**The dictionary defines a sovereign being as:
“supreme ruler; possessing absolute and ultimate power.”**

**Biblically, the sovereignty of God means
there is absolutely nothing that happens in the universe
outside of or beyond God’s influence and authority.**

**The only limits to what God is and/or can do
are the limits God places upon Himself.**

Here are some quotes from the Bible to support what I have said:

**“God is above all things and before all things. He is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. He is immortal, and He is present everywhere so that everyone can know Him.”
(Revelation 21:6).**

**“God created all things and holds all things together, both in heaven and on earth, both visible and invisible.
(Colossians 1:16)**

**“God knows all things past, present, and future. There is no limit to God’s knowledge, for God knows everything completely before it even happens.”
(Romans 11:33)**

**“God can do all things and accomplish all things. Nothing is too difficult for God, and God orchestrates and determines everything that is going to happen in your life, in my life, in America, and throughout the world. Whatever He wants to do in the universe, He does, for nothing is impossible with Him.”
(Jeremiah 32:17)**

**“God is in control of all things and rules over all things. He has power and authority over nature, earthly kings, history, angels, and demons. Even Satan himself has to ask God’s permission before he can act.”
(Psalm 103:19)**

**The sovereignty of God is a concept we can know intellectually –
- through faith –
- but it is not a concept we can fully understand.**

**There have been those who have tried;
as far back as creation itself.**

**One of my absolute favorite passages in the Bible
is found in Job 38.**

**Job has just come through a terrible trial and test of his faith.
Now he is questioning God . . .
. . . in essence, questioning the sovereignty of God.**

Here is God’s reply to Job:

“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—while the morning stars sang together, and all the angels shouted for joy?”

The very moment we *think* we fully understand God,

we have limited God by our limited understanding.

And yet . . .

**this sovereign God wants nothing more
than to have a personal relationship with each of us.**

**Even though it is beyond my understanding;
it forms the very bedrock of my faith.**

Here's what all this means.

GOD AND EVIL

**Because we do not fully understand God,
like Job, we often question God.**

**An American philosopher whose work was mainly
in the fields of logic, justification, and philosophy of religion,
wrestled with a theological question called "theodicy."**

The question goes like this:

**If we believe that God is both omnipotent – all powerful
and omnibenevolent – all loving
how do we explain the presence of evil?**

There are three possible answers.

**The first is that God is all loving
but not powerful enough to prevent evil.**

**The second answer is that God is powerful enough to prevent evil
but God does not love us enough to prevent it.**

**The third answer, of course,
is that we simply cannot know the answer
so, we rely upon enough faith to live with the mystery.**

**If we are to truly believe in the sovereignty of God
then we must live with that question unanswered.**

**That can be a very difficult task
when one considers the Holocaust, the atrocities of war,
the ravages of disease
and the existence of poverty and hunger.**

**It is hard to believe in a God
that is both omnipotent and compassionate.**

We would do well to remember what God said to Isaiah:

**⁸“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your
ways my ways,” declares the LORD.**

**⁹“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways
higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.**

Isaiah 55:8-9

**For me, personally, the sovereignty of God
goes far beyond the realm of philosophy
and my faith is strong enough
to live with the mystery the rest of my life.**

**At the end of the day,
I simply shrug my shoulders and know that God loves me
and that God is in control.**

GOD AND LAW:

And then there the little matter of God and Law.

**To fashion us into people of God,
people acceptable to God,
God gave us some laws to live by.**

These are not suggestions; they are *laws*.

Breaking even one of these laws has consequences.

And the consequence of breaking these laws is drastic!

It is not a matter of withholding a reward.

It is not even so much a matter of punishment.

What is at stake is a broken relationship with God!

The first laws were given to Adam and Eve.

**When they broke the law not to eat of the tree of knowledge,
they broke their fellowship with God**

and were cast out of Eden . . . forever!

To God, these laws are immutable,

unchallengeable, indisputable, unalterable,

binding, absolute and fixed.

Our only hope for forgiveness

lies in the willingness of Jesus to take upon Himself

the punishment for our sins and transgressions.

GOD AND PRAYER:

Then we turn our attention to God and prayer.

There is the classic question of *which* prayers God answers?

**A farmer whose crops are languishing because of drought,
fervently prays for rain.**

Three miles away, in town,

a young bride is praying for sunny weather

so her outdoor wedding is not ruined.

Which prayer does God answer?

**No matter which prayer is answered,
someone is going to be disappointed . . .
. . . and they are left to wonder
if God actually *hears* our prayers
and their faith wavers just a bit.**

**Believing in a sovereign God
means that we are free to lift our prayers and concerns to God
and God is free to answer those prayers
in any manner God chooses.**

**Someone once said that all of God's answers to prayers
can be summed up in three words:
"Go." "Slow." And "No."**

**We don't like that part of God . . .
. . . the part that is beyond bribes.**

**We don't like it that we cannot coax God
into answering our prayers with good behavior
or sacrificial acts
or gifts of any kind.**

**A God that is beyond our control is a dangerous God;
a wild and unpredictable God.**

I like the quote from the *Chronicles of Narnia*.

**Mr. Beaver has just explained to Lucy
that Aslan – depicted as a lion - has no equal,
Aslan is sovereign.**

Lucy asks Mr. Beaver if Aslan is safe?

Mr. Beaver responds:

“Who said anything about safe? ’Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”

Again, we are reduced to faith –

faith that God is good

and that God wills only what is best for us.

Even if we do not understand how or why.

GOD AND SALVATION:

And then we come to the subject of salvation.

Before I even begin,

let me assure you that this will be explored more fully

in the sermon for next week.

For a Presbyterian to understand salvation,

we must first fully accept the sovereignty of God.

Remember the laws I spoke about earlier?

The consequence of breaking one of those laws

is to become a sinner –

- and sinner have no place in God’s presence.

Therefore, there is not a single one among us

who *deserves* to be saved.

To *deserve* salvation would depend upon our works;

and salvation cannot, is not, never will be

a function of our works.

It is only by God’s unmerited grace

that we are released from the consequences of our sin.

**There isn't a thing we can do to earn that grace,
it is due to God's love for us
for no reason outside of God Himself.**

**However, because God cannot suspend God's love for us
God has made a way for our salvation.**

**God has chosen those whom God will choose
to be saved.**

**As you begin to rebel against that thought,
keep in mind the *sovereignty* of God.**

“The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.” Psalm 135:6

“I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, ‘My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.’ From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that I will bring about; what I have planned, that I will do.” Isaiah 46:10-11

“Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.” Jeremiah 32:17

It is called *predestination*.

**It is one of the hallmarks of the Reformed Church
and is essential to the Presbyterian belief system.**

**I promise that I will do my very best
to explain *predestination* from a Presbyterian perspective
in next week's sermon.**

CONCLUSION:

**What we must grasp is God is far more than the Unmoved Mover,
but it is God who called all that is into being.**

**God is not someone who can be captured and defined
by our best theology or philosophy.**

**God is the power above all other powers
and God is not answerable to our definitions.
God is not created in *our* image!**

**And is the *same* God who is a personal God,
who loves and cares for each of us individually
and who can be solicited in prayer.**

**It is out of love and grace
that God chooses to hear and answer our prayers.**

**How many times and in how many ways
has Jesus told us not to worry?**

**And yet, trusting a *sovereign* God –
- an *unsafe* God –
- is one of the hardest things we can do.**

**In my own family,
I have taught my children – sometimes my wife –
- and often myself –
not to borrow trouble!**

**Don't try to look into the future
and drag unpleasant outcomes from the future
into the present.**

**Worrying about future events never has any impact
on the eventual outcome.**

**If we can muster the faith to believe that God loves us,
and that God is in control,
we can believe that God will bring what is best for us.**

**The bedrock of my faith
rests upon the belief that God is absolutely sovereign.**

I hope you share that faith with me.