

The Sovereign God

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[0 : 0 0] well good morning St Silas I'm really glad that you could join us can I add my word of welcome whether you've been going to St Silas coming to St Silas for many years or you just dropped in for the first time watching us on YouTube today we're continuing in our series on knowing the living God it's a great thing to be looking at together so let's ask for God's help as we do that let's pray together know that the Lord is God it is he who made us Heavenly Father we acknowledge that you are the one true God that you are the Holy One pure and glorious that you are compassionate to help in our need that you are the good father who sent the Lord Jesus for us Father we ask you to speak to us now to renew our minds to amaze us with who you are and to help us to have hearts willing to accept your truth for we ask in Jesus name Amen Amen great well one of the things that we've been going through as an issue in the last few months is whose word can we really trust in Scotland in our society in my family we had a summer family holiday booked we were flying Ryanair to a campsite in France so we were writing that off with the coronavirus and then about a month ago Michael O'Leary in charge of Ryanair said that they'd be restarting their flights in July and he said that with face masks on and having to ask if you want to go to the loo and temperature checks it was going to work and so I was hopeful again of a summer holiday the problem is Michael O'Leary isn't in charge of the coronavirus he's just not in charge it's not that he's not well-meaning it's just the situation is way out of his control it's above his pay grade politicians are finding the same kind of thing going on aren't they maybe you can think I can think of examples of things that politicians have said over the last few months as they perhaps given dates when things might happen but then they've had to roll back as they've realized that they're not in control of this and it's not that they've been dishonest but just that the projections they've made haven't haven't worked out so sometimes you can't trust people's word not because they're being dishonest but because there are just too many things they can't control just imagine if God was like that if his plans could be thwarted that if people reject him it would spoil heaven there'd be this tinge of sadness in heaven that God hadn't got quite the people there he wanted there or that the schemes of the devil could get in the way of what God really wanted to do where would that leave us today we're thinking about the sovereignty of God the sovereignty of God is that God is in charge he is absolutely in control of everything everywhere all the time that is hard this is a hard thing for us to come to terms with but it's also a very good truth it humbles us it leaves us in awe really at who God really is and it reassures us as well that we can really trust him he he can he will do what he said because he can do what he said so it is massively important that God's in control and that's our first point this morning the sovereign God is powerful to reign over us we heard in our first Bible reading from Ephesians chapter 1 where Paul says if you're a Christian

you've got every spiritual blessing in Christ and then in verse 10 of Ephesians 1 Paul describes how those blessings have come to us as part of God's sweeping plan to bring all things in the whole universe together under Jesus Christ now why is that God's plan well look at how God is described in verse 11 in him in Christ we were also chosen having been predestined according to the plan of here it is here it is the plan of him who works everything works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will bit of a mouthful there but in other words God works everything out how he wants it to be God does whatever he wants or Psalm 115 verse 3 our God is in heaven he does whatever pleases him that reality of God's total control governs everything in our universe and it even includes human choices so in Proverbs 16 9 we hear this in their hearts humans plan their course but the Lord establishes their steps there is this tension we've got to think about this morning it runs right through the Bible and it's it's this as humans we make free choices and we're responsible for the choices we make for the things we think and say and do we're responsible for the choices so when we sin we can't blame God for that we make a choice we're responsible at the same time in

tension with that God is in control of everything the Bible clearly teaches both of those realities so even though we can't work out how they fit together we have to hold them in tension and it means that God is at work for his good purposes in everything without exception there's this great example of this in the Bible when you look at the place Dothan I don't know whether you've seen this before how much you know about Dothan but it comes up twice in Bible history and it teaches us something very profound actually for our own day-to-day lives as we're wondering where God is and how he's at work in Dothan when the prophet Elisha is there a foreign king brings an army to try and kill Elisha the prophet of God and Elisha prays and God dramatically intervenes and he sends chariots of fire an army from heaven to deliver Elisha from the danger but the first time we hear about Dothan is it's where Joseph the guy with the special court

Jacob's son who is in the midst of a very chaotic dysfunctional family is preferred over his brothers and given the court his jealous brothers throw him down into a cistern in Dothan and presumably down there in the cistern Joseph prays fervently for his deliverance and it doesn't come he's sold to slave traders he's taken to Egypt and endures years literally years of suffering suffering but then God pulls Joseph through that suffering in Egypt to have him exalted to a position in the government in Egypt from which when there was a famine in Egypt at that time and in the nations around Joseph's wisdom saved hundreds of thousands of lives and it brought Joseph's family Jacob's family God's people together they were reconciled because the brothers come for famine relief and Joseph meets with them and though they're scared to see him after what they've done he says to them you intended to harm me but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done the saving of many lives that's Genesis 50 20 you intended it to harm me God intended it for good now you see what Dothan teaches us there God was just as much at work in Dothan for Joseph and in his life as he was for Elisha when he sent the chariots of fire in the apparent silence and the apparent slowness of God's work in

Joseph's life God was powerfully at work he is that big a God so there's not a great struggle in our universe between equal forces of good and evil you know like in Star Wars you've got the Jedi and you've got the Sith and there's the good side and the dark side and the great struggle and who knows who will win in the end except that it's Disney but sometimes we can fall into that mindset in reality of thinking God is good he's on your side so when stuff happens that you just wish hadn't happened in your life we think to ourselves you know what God just couldn't stop it it's just part of the struggle between good and evil the Bible emphatically says no to that view sometimes it's called cosmic dualism of equal forces of good and evil in their spiritual realm rather nothing in the spiritual realm or the physical realm can threaten the sovereignty of God the devil is an enemy but God has him on a leash God can even use the devil despite the devil's intentions to achieve good things through what the devil does in a similar way when people sin God is never responsible for that we are the moral agents for the choices we make but God does allow it he even he ordains it and he works through it to achieve ultimate good often in ways that we will never see in this life and folks we need to hear this for difficult times there's a kind of theology understanding of God that would say God is not in control of this it sounds easier to accept because it's it might make feel easier to deal with the the hard questions that this raises of well why did this happen if God is in control but in fact for God not to be in control leaves us very insecure we don't need a God who can get caught caught off guard but God reveals to us that he never takes his eye off the ball in your life nothing in your life will take God by surprise and more than that because of what we've seen in recent weeks about his character as well as seeing that he's in control he is holy enough and compassionate compassionate enough and wise enough and good enough to take the worst that can happen to us and work through it for greater good that's our first point the sovereign God is powerful to reign over us but what about our faith what about being a Christian that's our second point the sovereign God is powerful to save us if we go back to that tension again we make choices we're responsible God is sovereign fully in control Jesus brings that tension together in when he teaches about how he is the bread of life he describes the people who will be saved by him and given eternal life by him life knowing

God now and that lasts forever in two very different ways John chapter 6 verse 37 all that the father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me I will never drive away so if you want eternal life if you would like eternal life from God you come to Jesus he says whoever comes to me I will never drive away whoever you are whatever you've done here is a public offer to the world but who actually comes to Jesus the people that the father gives to the son all the father gives me will come to me here it is again same section of teaching from Jesus verse 47 very truly I tell you hear the

words of Jesus very truly I tell you the one who believes has eternal life I am the bread of life you just have to believe to trust and you get eternal life from Jesus if you're listening to this and you would like to have eternal life the joy and assurance of knowing God the hope for the future don't don't sit back and worry about whether or not you're chosen by God that's not how it works just trust him and come to Jesus he's the bread of life for you to come to him and you could do that today if you do that it's because God has drawn you he is at work in your life to have brought you to this place to this decision for who who does that who comes to to Jesus

[13:15] John 6 44 on our own we reject God every one of us our hearts are determined to reject God every one of us has said to God in our hearts get out leave me alone and if God had left every one of us like that we would have had nothing to complain about that would have been just of God we've rejected God he gives and he he gives us what we want if that's how he leaves us that means none of us on our own given the choice would come to Jesus and trust him that's the situation but because God is rich in love before the foundation of the world he was determined to save people so he has chosen a multitude of people and the Holy Spirit gives them new life so that when they hear the call of Jesus to you know the kingdom of heaven is near repent and believe the good news be forgiven repent when they hear that the Holy Spirit has given them a new heart to accept that to be moved to repentance repentance so it's a bit like if you imagine life as walking along a road and you come to a path you could choose and you see on this pathway an arch above it and there's an inscription on the arch and it says come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest it's the words of Jesus his offer to us and you think about that offer and you decide to respond so you go down that path as you go through the archway you turn back around and you look at the the other side of the arch and it says to you having come through

I chose you before the foundation of the world John 15 16 you did not choose me I chose you it's an encouragement and it means there's no place for the Christian to be proud you can never think the reason I'm a Christian and the people around me at school or at uni or in the pub or in my workplace are not is because of something to my credit no what we all have to say is the reason I'm a Christian is not that I'm more spiritual than other people it's not that I'm more courageous or better at spotting the truth no it's that God saved me from beginning to end that's my story the spirit of God breathed life into these dry bones so that my heart was moved when I heard about his love for me to turn back to him there is no boasting for us in anything except God and his grace it's free grace it's sovereign grace it's even irresistible grace

I know lots of us find this hard I find it hard we immediately we immediately start to think of the people who around us who aren't responding we don't know why it has to be like this but the real mystery in this is not that God doesn't choose everyone it's that God would choose anyone and that he would even have chosen me a sinner to save me that's the real mystery and this truth is only ever used in the Bible as a deep encouragement for us as God's people that God has been at work like that in our lives he had a plan for your life he's drawn you to him and it opens our eyes a bit more to see how awesome God really is the whole universe all of reality really does revolve around him he really is in control of this the sovereign God is powerful to save us and that means he can finish what he starts that's our third point the sovereign God is powerful to keep us folks there is a joy to be had here there is something that can lift your heart every day it's something so profound it means you can face anything in this life without sinking or crumbling and the joy is in a reassurance the reassurance that God doesn't just love you now today he always will love you and nothing will get in the way of that we looked at Romans 8 just after lockdown began

I think our second Sunday as a church streaming on YouTube because it speaks so relevantly and directly Romans chapter 8 to what we're going through right now it talks about how the normal pattern of life in this world is one of suffering that is not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed for God's people but nonetheless the world is broken it's frustrated and there is sickness and there's death and there's coronavirus but great hope of glory now because God is sovereign because he's in control we are reassured then that there is an unbreakable chain in our lives that will take Christians from where we are now in this brokenness to that glorious future so verse 28 look at the unbreakable chain we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purpose for those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son that he might be the firstborn among many brothers or sisters so that means from the day you first become a Christian this reassurance is yours that God chose you before the foundation of the world he foreknew you he predestined you he set his love on you

and decided your ultimate destiny would be with him forever so then he called you with a call to turn to him and had done that work in your heart so that you would be justified at the cross and he also glorified you it's all planned out here's why this is so reassuring it means that no matter what happens within you on the inside if you demonstrate you're a real Christian by continuing in your faith

God will always love you and he will take you to be with him and no matter what happens to you on the outside no matter what anyone else does around you no matter what anyone else does to you whatever sin gets thrown at you whatever calamity Christian God will always love you and he will take you to be with him if God isn't sovereign it's tempting to think of God as though his hands reaching down from heaven and we we're kind of we've got hold of it and we're just clinging on and we're not quite sure today if we'll we'll stay hold keep hold of him but actually when we grasp that God is sovereign we realise that actually he's holding on to us like this and he will not let go and when we doubt that we must look back to the cross where God shows that he loved us he shows how committed he is to saving us and he demonstrated that he is wise enough to ordain and allow the worst evil to be done and to take it up and use it in his plan for the greatest good that could ever have been done wicked men who planned it who planned the cross wicked men planned it they planned the death of Jesus Christ but God planned it as well it's just like with Joseph

[21 : 11] Genesis 50 20 you intended it to harm God used it for good to save us and that leaves us able to trust so much of what Jesus says when Jesus says he's the good shepherd in John 10 and he says this of his sheep I give them eternal life and they shall never perish no one can snatch them out of my hand let me ask you if you would trust that this week will you trust this week that God has got hold of you and because he is sovereign no one can snatch you out of his hand trust him he earned the right to be trusted at the cross let's pray together we praise you God that you are the mighty Lord that nothing can thwart your plans we've seen so much of your character in recent weeks to recognise that it is a good thing that you are in control that you are in heaven and you do whatever pleases you help us we pray to cast all our cares on you knowing that you are immensely powerful and immensely loving that you can and you will keep your promises help us to trust that to commit ourselves into your hands for Jesus name's sake for our good and for your glory

Amen