



**KING'S
CHURCH** (<http://kingschurchedinburgh.org/>)
EDINBURGH

Gospel Story

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-2:2, 2:17-3:13 (Acts 17:1-10a tells the same story).

Paul describes a lot of people doing a lot of things but he frames the whole story as being God's work through his thanksgiving and prayer (1 Thessalonians 1:2-4, 3:9-10). We call this the sovereignty of God – that however free we are and however real our decisions are, God's will is freer and His decisions are more decisive. He rules over all things and He is telling His story through all of us (for more on this see Ephesians 1:4,11, Acts 2:23, 4:27-28, Galatians 1:15, 2 Timothy 1:9, 1 Kings 12:15, Genesis 50:20, Psalm 139:16, Jeremiah 1:5, Matthew 6:26, 10:29, Luke 22:22). From the most obedient to the most awful, everyone finds themselves part of God's story.

What do we do with this when we experience life as being full of free choices, and read in God's Word so many stories people making real choices and being held responsible for them? Let's acknowledge that we are finite creatures trying to understand how the infinite God relates to us – we're unlikely to be able to comprehend Him. But we can see enough to realise that He's never taken off guard, never at a loss for what to do, never worried, never unable to help. He is always working out His plan and no-one changes His script.

1. God's sovereignty confirms that your desire for purpose is real

Christianity shows us that the universe is not cold and impersonal and immoral but the creation of a Creator who made us to know Him and His love and His purposes. It shows us that history is a story with an Author who is involved and almighty. We aren't

floating in a bubble that is soon to burst and be no more, we're not going round and round in circles, we are headed somewhere. That's why we feel these longings for purpose, for meaning, to achieve.

Augustine put it to God like this: "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you." God made us to quest, to pursue, to seek out meaning – so that we would find it in Him who is full of eternal value and meaning. If you're looking for meaning in life, you will only truly find it in Jesus.

2. It should humble us

Thinking the world revolves around you isn't unique to Twenty-First Century Westerners, but we are particularly good at it, from our adverts to even some Christian music and teaching. God's sovereignty shows us that He is on the throne: the place of authority, victory, decision, and glory is His, not ours. When we consider Him in this way – when we train our thinking on His wonderful power and love, sing about His greatness and thank Him for it – we should end up thinking much less about ourselves. Thanksgiving and prayer really helps with this.

3. We can act with confidence

Trusting God's sovereignty means we know that He can work anytime, anywhere; all we have to do is co-operate, obey. When we're facing massive challenges, or when we're experienced disappointments, it's easy to become passive. But if we are God's coworkers, we must believe that He will do amazing things through us.

Sometimes it won't take us long to realise what God has been doing through us and with us. Other plans might not be clear because we're still in the middle of them. And there are things that happen that I don't expect to be resolved or understood this side of eternity. These too are within God's sovereignty because He will bring all things under Jesus's rule, there will be justice done for every wrong thing, and the new creation will outweigh all that was sad and sick in this life.

Elsewhere in Paul's writings, he copies Jesus by using the image of a person sowing seed to explain how He sees God's sovereignty at work in his life, and therefore why he can keep acting confidently (1 Corinthians 3:6). He sowed seed everywhere – that

was the part he had to play. God was responsible for any success he saw. Only by Paul preaching could he discover what God's intentions were, and this was enough for Paul to be confident – because God could always do something through him that way.

Questions for small group discussion:

Luke started by talking about new technology that frightens him – what tech changes are you most apprehensive about?!

How can a deeper understand of God's sovereignty cause us to worship Him more?

How can a deeper understand of God's sovereignty cause us to obey Him with more confidence?

Why does the Bible happily hold together truths that we might think are contradictory, or at least paradoxical? (If you want to think some more about how God's sovereignty and human freedom interact, J.I. Packer's *Evangelism and The Sovereignty of God* is a classic.)

Which of the three application points that Luke made most challenged you:

- God's sovereignty explains the longing of the human heart for purpose – do you need to take the next step in finding this out today?
- God's sovereignty puts us in our proper place – do you need to put God first and at the centre of your life, and repent of living in proud self-centredness?
- God's sovereignty gives us confidence to obey God – do you need to ask for fresh faith to obey and co-labour with Him?

Who are you inviting to the Quiz Night to see what God might do?



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