

## **The Sovereignty of God**

A woman named Gayle, in her thirties, had constant pain in her right knee. Her mother had suffered badly from arthritis in her knees so when she saw the doctor he began to treat her for arthritis as well. One night when she and her husband were out with friends, she turned around in the front seat of their Lincoln Continental to talk with their friends in the back seat. She was startled to see through the rear window, the headlights of a semi approaching fast. It smashed into the back of their car. The truck driver had fallen asleep.

Fortunately, because of the size of their car, no one was seriously hurt except this woman whose knee was badly bruised. When the doctor did an x-ray to be sure it wasn't broken, he saw something else. He said, "I don't know how to tell you this, but you have a slow growing tumor in your right knee."

"A tumor?" Gayle asked.

"Yes, but a very slow growing one. It's probably been there for years. The pain you've been experiencing is from the tumor, not arthritis... If you hadn't been in that car accident, we may not have found that tumor until it was too late. You're a very lucky young lady."<sup>i</sup>

Lucky? Is that what it was? Are there such things as coincidences?

Daniel 4:32 says: (NIV 2011)

**...the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth...**

The God of the Bible is the 'sovereign' God. To be sovereign means that God is the supreme power and authority over the universe. He doesn't just have control over godly people, He has control over the ungodly. Even Satan must ask permission before he can act (Ps. 103:19). In short, to be sovereign means that "God is in control."

In Esther 6 we see God exerting His sovereignty. First, this means that...

### **I. God Can Motivate Any Person to Accomplish His Will.**

As Christians, we are well aware of God's promises to lead us, guide us, protect us and even to manipulate the circumstances of our lives to bring about His will. Rom. 8:28 is the classic verse that declares this:

**And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**

But for God to be truly sovereign, to be "in control" of all things, it would also have to be true that He is able to manipulate the circumstances and even direct the actions of ALL people, including those who aren't believers. Is that true? In fact, it is. The verse I quoted from Daniel chapter 4 earlier is actually stating this. The full verse says:

**...the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes. (Dan. 4:32 NIV 2011)**

Esther 6 is a striking example of this. Haman's plan is in place. The decree has been distributed. The date is set and the gallows for Mordecai have been built. But

the night before the hanging, the king can't sleep. Why not? He decides to have the history of his reign read (which would be like reading the minutes of your last committee meeting. Yeah, that would put you to sleep!) But what made him think to do that? The king "ordered" someone to go get one of the chronicle books. What caused the servant to pick this one? The servant opened it to the story of how Mordecai had exposed the two royal guards who were planning to assassinate the king. What a coincidence!! Right?? WRONG!! There are such things as real coincidences, like when you and someone else just happen to wear the same shirt on the same day, but there are also God-caused events. As we saw last week, **Proverbs 21:1** declares:

**The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD;  
he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.**

One commentator calls this, "The invisible hand of God." It's not just kings' hearts that He directs but anyone and anything in this world, so that His will might be accomplished. The theological term for this is the Providence of God – God providing whatever is needed so that His will is accomplished.

Some people, especially pre-Christians (people who haven't yet decided to receive the grace and mercy of God) get nervous when you talk about the sovereignty of God. It makes them think that God is a dictator, a puppet-master who's pulling the strings of each person and "toying" with humanity. They think this means that we are slaves, robots of a self-centered tyrant.

But they only feel this way because they don't know God and they don't know His Word. First of all, God is loving, kind, always good and always incredibly patient. Yes, He is also all-powerful but that's not a negative when He's also always good. Why don't people know this? Because they don't know His Word! While God will use His power to assure that His will be done, His Word also makes it clear that, in the end, He will not overrule our deepest desires. Yes, in some specific event, He might cause you to do what you don't want to do, but in the end, He will allow your will to determine your final destination. Throughout His ministry, Jesus called on people to choose to believe in God. "...*whoever believes in Him, will not perish...*" (John 3:16). But if you choose NOT to believe, if you choose the "...*broad road...*" it will lead you to destruction and He won't stop you from going there. You are free. It's your choice.

We should be greatly comforted though, that at critical places in life, God takes control of events and will not let this world go beyond His will. That's what is happening here in Esther 6. God wouldn't let the king sleep. God caused him to order the chronicle of his reign to be read. God caused the servant to choose the volume that recorded the story of Mordecai saving the life of the king. And God caused the king to ask:

**What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this? (Esther 6:3)**

God can motivate any person to accomplish His will. Secondly...

## **II. God Can Orchestrate Circumstances to Accomplish His Will.**

You know, Hollywood has some great writers who know how to grab your attention and then pull you into a fun, exciting, dramatic story. But here's the deal: Hollywood stories aren't true. Does everybody understand that! Even when they do a story from history, they change it, they re-write it so it's only "based on a true story." In the most recent *Noah* film and even the film, *Son of God*, they changed the

script! It was only “based on a true story.” They just can’t bring themselves to tell a story the way it actually happened. So, if your knowledge of a certain historical event is from watching a Hollywood film, don’t say that you “know that story,” because you don’t. You only know the “Hollywood version” of that story.

With the Bible, it’s just the opposite. Bible stories are painfully true. What I mean by that is that the Bible tells every dirty detail in a story, even if it makes the hero or heroine look bad. Esther is a courageous and godly woman but if she had been perfectly holy, she would have done what Daniel did and refused to eat the king’s food because it wasn’t kosher. Except for Jesus, there are no perfect heroes or heroines in Scripture. But God has no choice but to use imperfect people. Why? Because there are no other kinds.

But God does know how to create a very compelling story. Remember, this isn’t Hollywood. Every detail of this story actually happened! So, when the king finds out that nothing has been done to honor Mordecai for saving his life, he says:

**...Who is in the court? (Esther 6:4)**

It turns out Haman just came in to talk to the king about hanging Mordecai. The king has Haman brought in and he asks him:

**...What should be done for the man the king delights to honor? (Esth. 6:6)**

The king, of course, is thinking of Mordecai, but because Haman is so arrogantly full of pride, he thinks he’s talking about him! So Haman answers:

**...For the man the king delights to honor, have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head. Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king’s most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, “This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!” (Esther 6:7-9)**

And the king then commands Haman:

**“Go at once... Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew... Do not neglect anything you have recommended.” (Esther 6:10)**

Do you see what God did? This isn’t “creative writing.” God manipulated the circumstances so that Haman, whose goal was to disrespect and kill Mordecai, is instead disrespected and forced to shower praise on the object of his hatred. It’s the outworking of Prov. 12:13 which says:

**An evil man is trapped by his sinful talk,  
but a righteous man escapes trouble.**

So, is this a promise? Is this what will always happen? No, the Proverbs are not promises; they’re probabilities. This is what usually happens. But sometimes, for God’s will to be accomplished, God doesn’t rescue the righteous person.

Pastor Bruce Goettsche writes this:

**“God’s definition of ‘good’ isn’t the same as ours... To us ‘good’ is that which makes us happy, satisfied or brings us enjoyment. We see ‘good’ as the absence of any pain. But God’s definition is different. God defines ‘good’ as**

that which leads us to Christlikeness, or that which brings us to trust Him more or which advances His kingdom.”<sup>ii</sup>

Most of you know of Joni Eareckson Tada, who at the age of 17, broke her back diving into a lake. She’s been a quadriplegic ever since. She writes this about what she now calls her “divine coincidence”:

...me going to the beach that day with my sister shouldn’t have happened. I was supposed to play tennis... with a friend. But my friend didn’t show up. And so I happened to be at home when Kathy, on her way out the door to the beach, asked in passing if I wanted to join her. I didn’t have anything else to do, so I quickly ran and got my swimsuit and was in the car... The whole thing was by chance; my sister just happened to catch me when I was around... and it was the day that changed my life forever. Funny thing, I used to regret that spur-of-the-moment decision, but now? ...Oh, I see God’s sovereign hand arranging every detail to further his ends. Now, as I look at the wonderful things God is doing through my wheelchair to help others, well, I now understand that for the Christian, nothing happens by chance...<sup>iii</sup>

God motivates people and He orchestrates circumstances to accomplish His will. But there’s one more truth we need to see in Esther chapter 6, which is that...

### **III. God Intends for the Wicked to Be Saved and the Righteous to Be Blessed.**

Because God is completely and entirely good, this means that He intends for the wicked to be saved, not judged; and the righteous to be blessed, not cursed.

Ezek. 33:11 proves the first half of that statement. It says:

**...“As surely as I live,” declares the Sovereign LORD, “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.”**

As Haman was marching Mordecai through the streets of Susa, it was not pre-determined that he would become depressed. He could have used his freewill to repent of his evil and be saved. That was God’s will for Haman, but Haman resisted God’s will. By the way, do you see how dangerous it is to hang out with other wicked people? Rather than trying to comfort Haman, his wife and friends say:

**Since Mordecai... is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him - you will surely come to ruin! (Esther 6:13)**

Wait a minute! Whose idea was it to hang Mordecai? His WIFE’s!! NOW she tells him he should have known you can’t go after a Jew because their God will bring you to ruin? That’s true, but why didn’t she give him this advice earlier?

God is not capricious like Haman’s wife and friends. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, ever!! He wants all to come to repentance and a restored relationship with Him.

And for all who DO have a restored relationship with Him, His desire is to bless, not curse. When Jesus was talking about Judgment Day, He said that He would say to those who had a restored relationship with Him: (Matt. 25:34)

**...Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.**

But we all know some Christians, who according to this verse are already blessed by God, are suffering from cancer or they have a physical disability like Joni or they’ve lost their job or someone they love dearly. How can we say that they are

“blessed”? This takes us back to our definition of goodness. Eventually, one day in the future, the goodness of God, being blessed by God will mean the complete absence of pain, sorrow, disease or disability of any kind. But that’s not true in this world! Why not? Because this whole world is under the curse of sin. So now, in this world, God’s will MIGHT include pain, sorrow, disease or even disability for the blessed IF He thinks any of those things might-

- lead us to Christlikeness
- bring us to trust Him more
- advance the Kingdom of God

So, what should the “blessed by God” do when a life-changing event like Joni’s strikes? When we turn a corner and suddenly the lights go out, we need to recite to ourselves these three phrases based on the truth of God’s Word:

**God is in control** (Dan. 4:32)

**God loves me** (John 3:16)

**In all things, God works for my good** (Rom. 8:28)

God is in control, even if I’m not. God loves me eternally. God is working for my good, even in this very, very dark place. This is true! This isn’t Hollywood. This isn’t, “When you wish upon a star” territory. This is God’s country. Even if, like Job, you never, ever find out WHY God allowed such a difficult thing to happen, you can count on His final promise being fulfilled. As you cross over the bridge of death, you will hear Jesus Himself say to you:

**...Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you.** (Matt. 25:34)

This world is temporary!!! Write it on your car, your house, your lawn, your \$2,000 cappuccino coffee maker!! Write it...TEMPORARY!!! But on your children, your spouse, your friends, your wicked, wicked enemies; write this: ETERNAL. Now, let’s spend a little less time on what is temporary and more time helping that which is eternal get to the place where, when they die, they will hear Jesus say these words. Let’s pray...

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<sup>i</sup> Sharon Jaynes, *Sharon’s Website*, “God Is Not in The Coincidence Business,” Nov. 13, 2013

<sup>ii</sup> [www.unionchurch.com](http://www.unionchurch.com), Rev. Bruce Goettsche, “The Invisible Hand of Providence,” (4/9/2000)

<sup>iii</sup> [www.joniandfriends.org](http://www.joniandfriends.org), Joni Eareckson Tada, “Divine Coincidences” Oct. 30, 2013