

In Jesus' name we pray that you would bless every heart to be open, every mind to be open, that we may hear, learn, grow, become the disciples that you want us to be. In Jesus' name, amen. I want to warn you that I don't know where we're going today when preaching. Shocking. But there is one aspect of God's sovereignty shown through Jesus Christ, of course God, that we have not explored and it is perhaps the most hot button touchstone topic regarding God's sovereignty. Is God sovereign over our wills? You can call it predestination if you want, you can call it Reformed theology if you want. Whatever the case may be, is God sovereign over your will? Will you do only those things that He wills you to do? Or do you have some concept of free will? Make your own choices. In Scripture we see examples of both. And what I say, one of the reasons I say that this is one of the most hot button issues since the Reformation, thousands upon thousands of people have died in battles and wars over this very idea. Right there I think is our first clue as to what we may want to consider, is it of God or not, should we be having that sort of argument to the point of killing one another over the answer. Is it more important to be right than it is to know the truth? Often times, regardless of whether it's secular or sacred material we're dealing with, it's way more important that we're right than we actually are true, that we're actually dealing in truth. And that's a matter of pride and that's a matter of our egos. So I have a lot of Scripture picked out for today and I did tell poor Ryan over there, I really don't know where we're going to land and stick and stay and I really don't know if we're going to land and stick and stay one week or after our celebration Sunday and then I have a Sunday off if we'll pick this idea back up. But it's really important, I think, as a Christian to have a proper understanding of God's sovereignty over you. We've talked about nature, the physical realm, we've talked about nature and the laws of physics, we've talked about the spiritual realm and all created spiritual beings, but we have yet to talk about what is most near and dear to our hearts, which is ourselves. We love ourselves and the idea of God being completely sovereign over us is what we fight about. Oh, no, he isn't. Oh, yes, he is. There is nothing that you contribute to your salvation except the sin that makes it necessary. Oh, but you must go and tell and speak the word and allow God's Holy Spirit to warm the heart in returning. You must make a choice. If you make a choice, that means that you have declared sovereignty over yourself and you are responsible for your own salvation. Where do we go with all of this? These are the arguments that have divided people and divided the churches, divided the denominations, all of those different things. But the key, the two key elements that I want you to keep in mind as we move through some of these scriptures is one, this idea has caused division, dissension and death. I don't think that's of God. That's idea no burden. Idea number two is I believe that the answer to these questions is wrapped up in the word sovereignty. So let's begin. Reading out of Exodus in a rather familiar text for us. Chapter seven, beginning with verse 10. So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did what the Lord had commanded them. Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his officials and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh called in his own wise men and sorcerers and these Egyptian magicians did the same thing with their magic. They threw down their staffs which also became serpents. But then Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. Pharaoh's heart, however, remained hard. He still refused to listen just as the Lord had predicted. It can be a little confusing. We do read in Exodus that the Lord himself hardened Pharaoh's heart, controlled his will and controlled his decisions. Here we read that Pharaoh's heart, however, remained hard and he still refused to listen just as the Lord predicted. Okay, so again, I opened up with a scripture that's going to be like, "What? Which is it?" And I have a few more of those as we go along. Which is it? Is he completely controlled by the will of God or not? Sometimes yes, maybe sometimes no. Let's continue. I'm in Jeremiah chapter 25 verses 7 through 9. "But you would not listen to me," says the Lord. "You made me furious by worshiping idols you made with your own hands, bringing on yourselves all the disasters you now suffer." Certainly doesn't sound like the Lord did that to them. It certainly sounds like the Lord is rebuking them for the decisions that they made. They brought on this disaster themselves. And so you can see how debatable, if you will, this particular issue of God's sovereignty over you is. And how all through our scripture that I was talking to Olivia this week, everywhere you look, you can find examples

of this. That's why there's so much in. Believe me, I had maybe 80 and I narrowed it down to just what you see today. And now the Lord of Heaven's armies says, "Because you have not listened to me, I will gather together all the armies of the North under King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who I have appointed as my deputy. I will bring them all against this land and its people and against the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy you and make you an object of horror and contempt and a ruin forever." Certainly sounds like God is now going to intervene, particularly in the heart of Nebuchadnezzar. And he's going to consolidate his armies and he's going to march on Israel and he's going to destroy it. Right before that, he says, "Oh my people, you've brought this on yourselves with the decisions that you've made." So I don't know, maybe this is all like hitting you, like being hit with a fire hose, if you've given much thought to this before. But it is an important issue to consider God, me. I'm made in his image and his likeness, I am made with a will of my own. Where does that, this is a very not very good analogy or picture, where does that end and God's will begin? We are indwelt by the power of God's Holy Spirit. Does that mean that every decision I make is preordained by God? Does that mean that all of the individuals who have never heard the gospel were preordained to never hear the gospel and are condemned to hell as such? Does it mean that everybody who has heard the gospel and rejected the gospel are preordained for hell and have been since the beginning of time? If God is omniscient and omnipresent and all of those things. But we find example after example after example of how this works. If you go to Daniel chapter 2, it says, "And the king never can enter and threw himself down before Daniel and worshipped him and he commanded his people to offer sacrifice and burn sweet incense before him. The king said to Daniel, 'Truly your God is the greatest of gods, the Lord over kings, a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this secret.'" Never can Ezra come to believe in Yahweh and in the power of Yahweh through Daniel. Did he do that on his own? We know that God messed with his will just a little while ago. Was God messing with his will and bringing the armies against to destroy Jerusalem? Was that the cause then? I know that led to a series of events that led to Daniel that led to never can enter saying, "Yes, Yahweh is Lord of lords, God of gods, the God, creator, God of the universe." Now we're going to rest in this as we go along and that's why I said I don't know exactly where we're going to land, but I want to at the very least, I want you to walk away today with some understanding, some baseline theological understanding of God's sovereignty over you so that you can read, think, pray, discuss, and grow in your own faith. Because here's the key issue. If you do not believe that God is sovereign over you, it will lead down a path of lack of faith. It will lead to a path of actual weakness, not personal strength. So you are going to have to land somewhere on this issue. And I'm going to open up the scriptures, reveal what they have to say, and I'm going to preach my theological position to you, but I want you to be able to grow in this. Again, two sides of the coin. One, and they're both dangerous because they're diametrically opposed. God is not sovereign over me. He gives me all the information I need, it's up to me. I can let God into my life, not let God into my life. If God wants to be in my life, if I say I can turn him off, I can turn the Holy Spirit off if I want to, all those things. I am sovereign over me. I will decide whether or not I even believe. Or, and again, we talk about the danger of that aspect, or God is completely sovereign, I make no decision without him, and that in itself is kind of a cop-out as well. Sort of ducking from the responsibilities of your own behaviors and what you're called to do and how you're called to behave as a Christian. We're going to move here into the realm of Jesus and his ministry on earth. Is it December yet? And we'll talk about a different aspect as we see Jesus, well you hate to use the word "manipulating," but being sovereign over people's wills, what they see, what they know, what they think they see and know. John 20, beginning with verse 11, we know this scripture, again, one of my purposes almost every week is to bring scriptures to you, and I know that you have read through them, but perhaps bring something from the scripture that you've not considered before. And today it's God's sovereignty over the people who Jesus is interacting with. Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in, she saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot, of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" the angels asked her. "Because they have taken away my Lord," she replied,

"and I don't know where they have put them." She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. Put a pin in that, because it's Jesus, it's Mary, they know each other very well and have for a while. It was Jesus, but Mary didn't recognize him. Now you can say, "Well, maybe his back was turned, or maybe he was facing away, or maybe the sun was at his back and she couldn't see him clearly." You could, but we have to take into account what happens next. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Again, I don't think his back is turned to her and he's looking off in some distance where she can't recognize him and says, "Oh dear woman, why are you crying?" I don't see that in the scriptures, but I am also assuming at that point in time. "Who are you looking for?" She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you had taken him away, tell me where you have put him and I will go and get him." "Mary," Jesus said. She turned to him and cried out, "Rabboni," which is Hebrew for "teacher." So there's an idea here that two people who are very familiar, Mary did not recognize Jesus until he wanted her to recognize him. And we see other examples of this in scripture. Jesus goes on to say, "Don't cling to me," Jesus said, "I haven't yet ascended to the Father, but go find my brothers and tell them I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, "I have seen the Lord," and she gave them his message. When we talk about that particular type of instance, we see others. One of the most well-known is Jesus' walk to Emmaus when he's walking and he's talking with individuals from Jerusalem and they are telling him about all of the events over the past couple of days. They don't recognize him until verse 28. By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus acted as if he were going on, but they begged him, "Stay the night with us since it is getting late." So he went home with them. As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and he blessed it, then he broke it and gave it to them. Suddenly their eyes were opened and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared. Why? I don't know the answer to that question why he chose to do it that way except for the fact that it's going to live in posterity in our Holy Scriptures for us to be talking about today and asking that very question. He chose to exercise his sovereignty over their wills, over their body, over their being at that time. So when we sit and maybe we'll get to ask Jesus this question, "Why did you choose to do it that way?" The one thing that we know for certain is that he chose to do it that way. And the one thing, the other thing that we know for certain is that those individuals were influenced by him spiritually to not recognize him. They go on to say, "Oh, didn't our hearts burn when we spoke of him?" All of these different things. He went on in the other account to tell them about everything about him in the law of the prophets. So we see that this is a thing. Old Testament, New Testament. And coming to terms with who you are in Christ, I feel, is very important in your spiritual development. Knowing where you land and God's sovereignty over you is very important in your own spiritual growth. And maybe you haven't given it much thought. Or maybe right now you're sitting and being convicted going, "Ooh, I do just kind of pray to God whenever I need something and then all the rest I think I'm doing on my own." That is also a very real reality of Christian life. Not recognizing the fact that he's not just a friend who lives next door that you call on for a cup of sugar whenever you're out. 24/7/365, he indwells you and as God of the universe is sovereign over you. Understanding that, I again believe is very, very important as we will approach the final scriptures after. So to finish our journey in scripture, almost, today, I have two contradictory, seemingly contradictory scriptures from the same book in the same author. So we're going to try to find out, okay, if this is true in Romans 9, then how can that be true in Romans 10? And hopefully by looking at both of those scriptures that in many ways seem to contradict one another, we will arrive at a determination of what God's sovereignty over our lives means. So we've taken sort of the top of the funnel and the idea of what this might look like in your life and we began in the Old Testament reading scriptures that, again, seem to indicate both sides of the coin. You have brought all of this destruction on yourself and I will influence the will of a mighty emperor in order to bring it on. So it'd be a different story. And then we took a look at Jesus having direct influence over individuals to whom he was ministering, to whom he was encountering, to whom he was having conversation with. Directly interfering, if you will, with what they saw and what they did and what they believed. So now

we're going to move to the commentary on this and here we are in Romans 9 verses 10 through 18. His son was our ancestor Isaac. When he married Rebekah, she gave birth to twins. But before they were born, before they had done anything good or bad, she received a message from God. This message shows that God chooses people according to his purpose, purposes. He calls people, but not according to their good or bad works. She was told, "Your older son will serve your younger son." In the words of the scriptures, I loved Jacob, but I rejected Esau. We are saying then that God was unfair. Are we saying then that God was unfair? Of course not. For God said to Moses, "I will show mercy to anyone I choose and I will show compassion to anyone I choose." So it is God who decides to show mercy. We can either choose it or work for it. For the scriptures say that God told Pharaoh, "I have appointed you for the very purpose of displaying my power in you and to spread my fame throughout the earth." And we all know what Pharaoh did. So you see, God chooses to show mercy to some and he chooses to harden the hearts of others so they refuse to listen. There's nothing you can do about it. Before you were born, God has chosen you or not chosen you. Those who would have what we call a "Reformed Theology" point to this scripture as definitive proof that you do not have a say in your salvation. You're chosen before birth, before the foundations of the earth were laid. You're saved or you're not saved. He will show mercy on whomever he chooses and he should not show mercy on whomever he chooses because he is sovereign. And that is all wrapped up then to begin to talk about predestination and free will and things of that nature. Chapter 9 of Romans is the chapter that Reformed theologians will look to and say, "Ha ha! That's the proof. That's the text that shows you have zero say in your own life." Unfortunately or fortunately, there's chapter 10. And we see this in scripture every once in a while where it seems to contradict itself just to say one thing and then another. We talked about that with Paul in Corinthians. Whether or not to speak and all of these things and in a paragraph later he says, "But when they do, which is it?" And we have to come to now say, "Okay, well, okay, you're going, you're getting down into a deep dive here, Pastor. Yeah, maybe. But you're capable of going on that deep dive with me. I know my congregation. I know where we've gone. I know where we are in scripture. I know how dedicated you are to understanding this. I know that you want to be more than Sunday morning, hands in the air, worshiping Christians. I know that you want to be able to answer these questions. I know that you want to understand them for yourselves as well. Because I know you're not happy coming here thinking that you just punched your ticket for the week and now you can go live like hell for the rest of the six days. I know you and I know that we're capable of this because here in Romans 10, listen to this. "Dear brothers and sisters, the longing of my heart and my prayer to God is for the people of Israel to be saved." He's preaching to the now individuals of Israel who will not recognize Jesus as the Messiah. And thus he's preaching to anyone who's not recognizing Jesus as the Messiah then and today. That's why it's still in the book. I know what enthusiasm they have for God, but it is misdirected zeal for they don't understand God's way of making people right with himself. Refusing to accept God's way, they cling to their own way of getting right with God by trying to keep the law. For Christ has already accomplished the purpose for which the law was given. He's the fulfillment of the law. He is the only human being, right? The law is given and if you can fulfill the law, you are actually righteous. Well we know that for the broken human being that's impossible, but what's impossible with man is possible with God and God walks the face of the earth as the only human being ever to walk the face of the earth and didn't deserve to die. And he willingly went to his death forgiving those who condemned him because he did it for all of humanity. That's what it means by God's way of making right. For Christ has already accomplished the purpose for which the law was given. As a result, all who believe in him are made right with God. What? All who believe in him? I thought that it was chosen from before the foundations of the earth were laid, who was saved and who wasn't saved. Now I've got to believe? So you see two sides from the Old Testament to the New of what we're talking about here and this is what goes on. For Moses writes that the law's way of making a person right with God requires obedience to all of its commands. Obedience is a verb that people do. But faith's way of getting right with God says don't say in your heart who will go up to heaven to bring Christ down to earth. Don't say who will go down to the place of the dead to bring

Christ back to life again. In fact it says the message is very close at the end. It is on your lips and in your heart. And that message is the very message about faith that we preach. So just as those reformed preachers will just take chapter 9 and go with it, you will find those who on the other side of the coin will take chapter 10 and go with it. Because here's what it says. And that message is the very message about faith that we preach. If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Those are verbs that human beings do. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. As the scriptures tell us, anyone who trusts in him will never reach this grace. Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord who gives generously to all who call on him. I thought I didn't have to call on him. I thought it was already predetermined. But he will generously give to all who call on him for everyone who calls in the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? Are you hearing what this says? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring the good news." Have I confused you enough? You should be thinking about this because, as I said before, I think the response to these scriptures lies in two concrete elements. One, the disagreement about this idea has caused division, strife, and death. That is not of God. And two, the very response to these scriptures is embedded in the very idea of God's sovereignty. We as human beings seek the simple. We as human beings want to take an idea from a particular part of the text and create a complete theological construct around it that we can step inside and feel safe. It has to be this way. It can't be any other way. It has to be this way. There is no gray area. There's nothing hard to figure out. I really don't have to think about anything. And here are the five proof texts that prove that I am right. We want that as human beings. We want to be as charged on many, many fronts, but as, and this is where I think not being raised, so to speak, as a Christian, not being church-ed, kind of plays into my benefit. Because when I approached any of these subjects, do you know what I had to depend on solely? The Bible. I didn't have any preconceived ideas about subjects such as this. All I had was scripture. And so I was open to reading it and going, chapter nine, what? Chapter, wait, what, what? And working on it and working it out. You will find in the Christian church today entrenched positions about various topics that have nothing to do with the gospel. But those entrenched positions will cause dissension, division, destruction, and death. If you're going to stand at a pulpit and preach that Jesus is not the Christ, I have a problem with you. You are a heretic and I will not listen to you. I will, however, try to teach you what the scriptures do say. If we're going to discuss something about, regarding Reformed theology, as opposed to what is often called Arminian theology, let's talk. Let's open the scriptures and talk. Do you believe that Jesus Christ lived, died, rose again to the salvation of the sin of humanity? If that is at your core, then let's continue to talk. So I want to, before I give you my perspective, I just want to encourage you, as scripture teaches us, not to engage in inane arguments and foolish discussions that lead you away from the truth that Christ lived, Christ died, Christ rose again. If you're off in the weeds, fighting another person over a secondary issue, reel yourself in. Open the scriptures and read. And here's one of the keys to be able to do that. Is God sovereign over your will? Absolutely. What does that mean? It means that if he willows it, he can harden your heart, he can turn you away, he can fill your heart and make you do things in his name as the prophets of old. He can absolutely influence your thinking, influence your prayer, influence your behavior because he is sovereign over all of creation. Does that mean that he exercises that particular sovereignty all the time? No. Why does it have to be either or? When it can easily, because of he is sovereign, both end. If he wants to exercise sovereignty and interfere, if you will, in the life of an individual or group of individuals, we clearly see that he can do that. If he chooses not to do that and leaves individuals to their own devices, making their own choices that will lead them to the cross or away from the cross, he will do that. Why? Because he's in charge. He is sovereign. It doesn't have to be either or. It can be both and. And that, when we look at the depth and the breadth of scripture, is what I see. I see hundreds of examples of human beings throughout the

Old Testament and the New making choices that lead them to God, lead them away from God, that worship God, that blaspheme God. And I see dozens of examples of God influencing the lives and the wills of individuals so that his purposes will be fulfilled as he plans, as he wills. And all of it weaves together for his purposes. He knows when to and when not to. He knows what effect this will have and what effect, no effect this will have. And it's all woven together that history was always pointed to the outcome that he sees. And that will calm him when he's ready by his determination of who his bride is, how his bride is behaving. When ever in his own will he determines that it is time to return and reclaim creation and create heaven, he will do it. Because he's in charge. Does that make sense? It's a confusing, it can be a confusing topic and it can be a very divisive topic. And when you listen to teachers you will hear usually one side of that, Reform, or another side of that, Arminian, as they say. And people are absolutely entrenched and each side has its own proof text from scripture that says, "Look, I'm right and you're wrong." Nope, I'm right and you're wrong when I look at scripture and I see that in fact God is absolutely sovereign and he will manipulate the wills of his created beings if he sees fit to them all. And if he does not see fit to, then we clearly hear that we are all called to preach the word, share the message, so that individuals will come to know the word, be moved by God's Holy Spirit, call on the name of the Lord, and be saved. Alright, there comes a point in time when too many words is a bad thing. My intention today, if you're not fully clear, is to ignite a spark of interest because I believe that it is very important as an individual believer that you know where you land on this particular topic. God's sovereignty over you. Consider it. And, of course, I'm at your fingertips anytime that you wish to talk about it more. But like I said, when we consider one answer or the other, over the course of the centuries we see nothing but division, discord, and death. That's not of God. That chaos and disorder and hatred over this particular topic is not of God. That tells me something. That the answer probably isn't that simple. And that human beings will die over being right as opposed to living in the somewhat more messy truth of it all. And two, that the answer is wrapped up in his sovereignty. Of course he can do whatever he wants. And he has. Scripture is clear of both examples. And that's where I land on it. That's where your pastor lands on it. I recognize God's complete and total sovereignty over creation, including me. And he may have, through the course of my life, done things that have directly influenced me. I mean, Calvin and I can tell you all kinds of miraculous stories as we are being led into ministry and things. That they're definitely of God. Definitely of God's intervention. Right? I told you the story of needing to sell our home on the spur of the moment, moving into the parts of the nation. We had two kids and four dogs and two rabbits and three gerbils. It was a wreck. I mean, it looked like a big family had lived there for 20 years. And the thing wasn't cleaned out. There were holes in the wall. And I said, "This is the number we need." And the real estate agent laughed at me. They said, "Why don't we wait until spring and we'll get this thing cleaned up?" I said, "Please put it on the market. Please put it on the market for this number." And sure enough, six weeks later, in the middle of a snowstorm when you couldn't even get to the house, tree limbs had fallen down, the real estate agent calls and said, "Brian, I just received a phone call from Arizona. This person installed your old farmhouse online, wants a fixer-upper, and has agreed to your asking price." Sure. Coincidence. Random. Maybe. Direct influence of God? Probably. But I don't feel that he's making the decision for what sandwich I'm making tomorrow or today for lunch. Now, if I make a sandwich and dishonor him, he's not ready to go. See, but I need too many words. Mess things up. I gotta stop now.