

Ephesians 1:3-14

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[0:00] Thank you, Julian. If you have your Bibles, please turn them to Ephesians, open them to Ephesians. While you are turning it there, I'll ask a few questions.

It might seem like strange questions. Why does Jesus appoint some believers to be pastors and teachers?

Why does he do that? For what purpose? Or you could ask it from another perspective, perhaps from your perspective. Why did you come here this morning? What did you come here to hear? What's your purpose for listening each Sunday morning to pastors and teachers? Well, let's read Ephesians 4, verses 11 to 16.

This gives us not just a glimpse, but a very meaty description of Jesus' purpose in these meetings right now.

[1:10] Ephesians 4, verses 11 through 16. It was Jesus who gave some to be apostles and some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is Christ. From him, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

In light of this, my job right now, from up here, is to prepare you for acts of service, for works of service.

This is training ground for Christians to then go out and build each other up in love, to help each other mature in Christ.

[2:52] Okay, so how? How do we do that this morning? How can we be better equipped when we leave here today than we were when we came in? Better equipped to build each other up in love and maturity in Christ.

Well, this letter of Ephesians is basically a sermon. It's a letter that Paul wrote from Rome in chains and he sent to Ephesus, a city a long way away.

It was meant to be read out loud from beginning to end in this gathered congregation of Christians. And the letter, in a sense then, is like a sermon that is trying to train the Ephesian Christians how to build each other up in Christ.

That's the intent of Ephesians. So, if that's what this letter is all about, then I ask the question, how does he start? That might be a very helpful way for us.

How does he start this message that is intended to train the believers how to love each other better? How to glorify God better? How to mature each other?

[4:00] How does he do it? How does he start? So, turn to Ephesians 1. After he opens this letter or sermon with his greetings, he says in verse 3 and 4, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love, he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will.

Or what about in verse 11, which I mentioned with the children? In Jesus, we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.

So, in a letter that's meant to train the believers in works of service, he starts with predestination. And even more generally, God's sovereignty over everything, working everything according to his plan.

That's how he begins. I was a bit shocked when I thought about it in this way. I thought maybe he would begin with something a bit more practical. Although, this is the point.

[5 : 36] God's sovereignty is very practical. Very practical. In fact, you could look at all of life, at various situations that we're in every day, in terms of submission and sovereignty.

Think about it. When you're bothered, even angered by your children or your spouse, or when they're angry with you, you have a choice. Who do I submit to in this? Do I submit to my anger and act on it?

Do I listen to my anger and lash out? Or, is somebody else my sovereign? Or what about with lust? You're sitting in front of the computer. Nobody's around. Or you're going out on a date and you have thoughts. What do you submit to? Who's your sovereign in those moments?

Is it your lust? Or is somebody else your sovereign? Do you submit to somebody else in those moments? What about my bitterness? Somebody's hurt me.

[6 : 39] Somebody in this congregation, perhaps, has hurt you. Is your bitterness your master? Do you obey it? Or is somebody else your sovereign? Perhaps God, whose son died for you, is your sovereign.

And you would submit to him in these very practical, daily situations. In every moment, we must submit to God as our sovereign because he is sovereign over all things.

To repeat that, in every moment, each day, we must submit to God as our sovereign because he is sovereign.

It's not just a one-time decision when we are converted to submit to Christ, to God the Father in Christ. This happens every day for Christians.

We need to live this out. God's sovereignty in our lives. When thinking about this, how practical God's sovereignty really is, I picture Joseph.

[7 : 49] Many of you, most of you, I'm sure, will know about Joseph in Genesis. 3,000 years ago, this young man knew deeply what it meant that God was sovereign.

And he knew that in very difficult situations and in very good situations. Joseph understood God's sovereignty and it impacted him personally and practically.

So, for the next few moments, I want us to actually contemplate Joseph a little bit. How did he understand God as sovereign? How did it affect him? For example, did it affect his choice of virtue when he was tempted?

Did it affect his decision to evangelize even in a very intimidating situation? Did God's sovereignty affect his ability to forgive when he had been attacked and betrayed by his brothers, in his instance?

So, let's think for a little bit about Joseph and his understanding of God's sovereignty, its practical sovereignty. Before getting into his experiences, let me just mention a few things about sovereignty.

[9 : 01] It's a big word and we use it in different ways. Let me say just a few things that we need to keep in mind as we then go on to contemplate the sovereign God.

First, it means that he is the rightful Lord. He is the one to whom we should morally submit.

He is in charge. And we should consciously submit to him. He is the sovereign. That's one thing it means. That he should be submitted to, consciously.

But it means something else with God. It also means that he does whatever he wants. And that is irrespective of whether we or anybody else submits to him, consciously.

People who don't know him, who don't want what he wants. That actually doesn't matter. God is sovereign in that he does whatever he wants. So, there's two aspects to God's sovereignty are important for us to think about as we contemplate Joseph.

[10 : 04] But there are a few other things. A few other qualities of God that we have to keep in mind whenever we think about God being in control. His righteousness.

God always does what is right. He never does what is wrong. So, even when he is in control of something that is painful and confusing, he's not wrong.

He's doing what is right because he is righteous. Also, God's wisdom. We need to keep this in mind. God knows what he's doing.

Even when it doesn't seem like it from our perspective, God is wise and he always knows what he's doing. Another thing is God's goodness.

Even when things hurt, as well as when things are nice, God is good. And when he is in control, he always has a good purpose.

[11:01] And he is going to bring about goodness. So, these things, God's righteousness, his wisdom, and his goodness, we have to keep in mind when we think about God's sovereignty.

So, how did Joseph experience God's control? God's sovereign rule? Think about his experiences in general, just in life.

Let me read a quote from somebody about Joseph. When Joseph woke up that morning, he had absolutely no concept what kind of day he was about to have.

He woke up healthy, strong, richly robed, secure in his father's care. By the time the sun went down that day, he was beaten by his brothers, exhausted, naked, and fatherless.

As he was sold on the cheap and led away in shackles to face an uncertain future, his dreams of future greatness could not have seemed more unlikely or impossible.

[12:07] Now, remember, these dreams of future greatness, these were not just hopes that he wanted to attain, you know, like the American dream or some other dream. These were things that God, visions that God had given him that his brothers and his family would bow down to him as their ruler.

Those were the dreams. As he's led away from his betraying brothers in shackles to an unknown future, that could seem so impossible.

So, from then, from that point, being sold away from age 17, he was that young, a 17-year-old, until he was 30, when things actually, when he was elevated to a very high place.

That 13-year period, Joseph rose as he worked really hard, and he fell low as other people sinned against him.

That was his pattern for 13 years. He worked up to become manager among slaves. He was sold as a slave, but worked hard, and became manager of slaves.

[13:14] But then, because he was falsely accused of sexual misconduct on his boss's wife, he was plummeted into the bottom of the prison.

But, he worked hard, and in the prison, he worked up to become manager of the prison. And then, because God had given dreams to other people, he was ultimately released, and he was, in fact, put in second place charge over all of Egypt.

So, this man, this young man, Joseph, he knew bad times, and he knew good times. And in all of that, he knew that God was sovereign, and this affected him in a number of important ways.

How did he think of God's sovereignty? In what was God sovereign in his life? You don't need to turn to these passages.

I'll say them so you can write them down if you want to go back and explore them in more detail. I'm going to mention a few times when Joseph confessed that God is in control, and we'll see what types of things he's talking about.

[14:25] First, he confesses that God is in control in both blessing and suffering. Pharaoh had a dream, which Joseph interpreted to be, there were going to be seven years of good harvest and then seven years of famine.

And we'll come back to this in a few minutes. But Joseph interpreted both of those to be from God's hand. God will bring seven years of good harvest. That's in God's control.

And God is going to bring seven years of famine. And if you're interested, you can read Psalm 105, verses 16 to 26, which is actually talking about this situation with Joseph and the famine.

For Joseph, it's Genesis 41, verses 25 to 32. God is sovereign in both blessing and in suffering.

Also, Joseph confessed that God is in control of ordinary processes.

When Joseph had children, he said, God has given me these children. Now, most of us know that the process by which children come about is quite natural.

[15:37] But he says God's in control of that. This hopefully will be a comfort even to people who are struggling with their spouse to get pregnant but can't.

This is where we need to remember that God is not only in control but he's wise. I know this is very difficult. But he knows what he's doing. For those who do have children, this is a chance to praise God for his control in blessing you in this way.

That's one way that Joseph knew that God was in control in even ordinary processes. Also, and this is very difficult, also in human evil.

Not meaning that God made people do evil. That's not what it means at all. But even when people are doing evil things, Joseph saw that God was doing something.

Not evil though. Very good. For example, in Genesis 45, verses 4 to 9, Joseph says to his brothers who had betrayed him, he says, it was not you who sent me here, but God.

[16:49] Now that's interesting, isn't it? He says, it was not you who sent me here. It was God. Sometimes we perhaps are too quick to defend the human will and not quick enough to defend God's will.

Now, he did not actually mean that they had no part in this, as he goes on to say. But ultimately, it wasn't the brothers who did this, who sent him into these circumstances.

God's the one who sent them there. Now he elaborates on it. In Genesis 50, verse 20, Joseph again says to his brothers, you meant, you intended, you purposed evil against me.

But, God meant, intended, purposed, it for good. To bring about that many people should be kept alive as they are today.

The brothers put Joseph in a very difficult, painful situation and they meant for that to be an evil thing. They meant that evilly.

[17:55] Joseph confesses that God intended for him to be in these situations too. But God intended it for good, not evilly. He intended it for good.

God is sovereign. even when people are doing evil things. God is doing something very good. Now, when you're in the middle of pain, and a lot of you may be, or at some point in your life you probably will be, when you're confused, you don't know why things are happening the way they're happening, people are doing bad things and it's affecting you and you're confused and frustrated, some of you will realize it doesn't sound very good when somebody comes along who has never experienced anything bad and they say, you know, God has a purpose in this.

Now, that's a true statement. God does have a purpose. But it doesn't feel great when the person has never experienced that. But this is partly why I'm offering Joseph's voice.

Joseph knows. Joseph experienced betrayal and suffering and struggle that a lot of us will not experience. He knows. So when he looks back on his life and these very moments of frustrating difficulty and he says, God intended this for good, that means something.

Or think about what Paul says. Paul is sitting in prison in chains. Paul knows suffering. And Paul writes about the God who works everything according to the counsel of his will.

[19:39] That has power for us practically. What was Joseph's reaction to this sovereign God?

As he's in these different situations in life, how does he act in light of God's sovereignty? I think this is where it gets especially practical.

I'm just going to mention these relatively briefly. In Genesis 39, we see that because God is sovereign in bad times and good times, Joseph works hard no matter the circumstance.

Now some of us think, well if God's sovereign and he's going to do what he wants to do anyway, I'll just sit back and not do anything. That's not a good response to God's sovereignty. Joseph knew that it was because God is there and active in the bad times and the good times, he's going to work hard.

And in fact, it was his hard work that is what God used to elevate him to success. Now we know that hard work doesn't always mean success.

[20:48] That's up to God. Joseph worked hard because God was sovereign. Also, when Joseph was tempted, it was because God was his sovereign that he reacted by resisting temptation.

His boss's wife was trying to have sex with him and he said, no, I'm not going to sin against God in this way. God is his sovereign and that affected him in a moment of temptation.

Not only in that moment, but because God was his sovereign and he submits to God and not to the moment, he stayed away from temptation. He wouldn't even go near her anymore.

He was acting wisely because God is his sovereign. God is the one to whom he submits in the moment of temptation and before it happens.

Evangelism in an intimidating situation. Did you know that Joseph did that? Think about when he was summoned before the Pharaoh. He's a prisoner and the Pharaoh, the king of all of Egypt, brings this prisoner into his palace surrounded by glory and honor and the Pharaoh says, I've had a dream and I hear you can help.

[22 : 06] What does this mean? What an intimidating situation. Now, how easy would it have been for Joseph to have said, simply, your dream means there's going to be seven good years and then seven years of famine.

Full stop. that would have been really easy. But he knew that God was sovereign. Even though the Pharaoh is a pagan who worshipped other gods who didn't care anything about his God, he knew that his God was the sovereign over all things and this motivated him to bring God into it.

And so what did he say to Pharaoh? He brought God's sovereignty in at every point. He said, God gave you these dreams. God, in fact, gave you twice, two dreams that say the same thing to show the fixity of God's purpose.

That God will certainly do this. God is going to bring the good harvest and God is then going to bring seven years of famine. At every point, he mentions God's sovereignty in this very intimidating situation where it would have been easy to be quiet because God is sovereign.

He evangelized even in an intimidating situation. He also forgave his brothers who had attacked him, had betrayed him and I think that God's sovereignty was a large motivation for that.

[23 : 33] To forgive them. In Genesis 45 and 50, we read about his reaction to his brothers and he doesn't let them off the hook.

He says, what you did was evil. But, he didn't hold it against them. He didn't keep demanding that they repay him for this. He forgave them.

And I think it's precisely because he knew that God was active even though they were being evil. God was doing something good in this situation. And I think that has significant impact on him then forgiving them for their part.

God was doing it. And I think that the last thing I'll mention about Joseph is that Joseph had hope for the future because God is sovereign.

God had made promises to bring the people of Israel out of Egypt to their own land. And Joseph knew that God would keep his promise no matter what.

[24 : 33] And this gave him a very practical hope for the future. so practical that he said to his brothers after I die collect my bones because I want you to take them out when God gives you his promise.

Joseph was certain that God would do what he said. And that was very practical for his hope in the future. What about for us?

Can we have faith like this? Does God's sovereign control affect us practically? Does it help us be virtuous when we're tempted?

Does his sovereignty help us forgive people when they attack us? Does it help us evangelize even when we're intimidated by the situation? Does it help us hope in the future?

No matter what the situation looks like now. I would say that Joseph knew how sovereign God was but we should know so much more clearly than Joseph did.

[25 : 45] How much more clearly should we understand God's sovereignty on this side of the cross and resurrection of the Son of God with this much of God's revelation about how faithful and powerful he is that Joseph didn't have.

Joseph had a glimmer a glimpse we have so much more we've seen God's sovereignty in action in so many more rich ways. For these last few moments let me mention a number of ways that in Ephesians Paul applies God's sovereignty.

Remember I said at the beginning his letter his letter is attempting to train us how to serve each other better how to build each other up more effectively how to help each other mature in Christ and he starts with an amazing picture of God's sovereignty.

So I'm going to read that again verses 3 to 14 that I can read I'm going to read that again and then I'm going to mention a few of the practical ways throughout the letter I'm just going to mention them throughout the letter how this affects our lives and this is how I'm going to begin drawing this to a close.

So look in Ephesians 1 verses 3 to 14 again and see how great this picture is of God's sovereignty.

[27 : 18] Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ for he chose us in him before Joseph lived before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight in love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will to the praise of his glorious grace which he lavished on us which he freely gave us in the one he loves in him we

have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding and God made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head

Jesus Christ in him we were chosen having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will in order that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be for the praise of his glory and you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth the gospel of your salvation having believed you were marked in him with the promised Holy Spirit who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession to the praise of his glory our understanding of God's sovereignty is not general this general idea of fate impersonal fate it's incredibly personal it's also not just a hopeful but vague everything happens for a reason at every point it's focused on Jesus Christ and all that he has done for us and will do at every point and that's why

I'm going to say here to you if you are in Christ because you trust Christ if you are in him then you can know the following things for sure about God's sovereignty and how practical it is for you and if you're not in Christ if you don't trust him these are promises that are here for you to accept by accepting Christ but for those of you in Christ listen to how you can be equipped to serve each other better as God's sovereignty gets worked out in these ways first it's incredibly personal God chose us he says God chose us to be holy and blameless God predestined us to become his sons and daughters in Christ it's not only personal but it's incredibly kind in love he predestined us by his glorious grace which he freely gave us when we were dead in our sins by the riches of his grace which he lavished on us by forgiving our sins in his son's blood it's not only personal it's not only kind but it's very practical it's because of God's sovereignty that Paul then prays immediately for this reason

I pray that you would know God better and that you would know the hope to which he has called you God's sovereignty working among us right now is there so that we can submit no longer to hostility it's so that we cannot be discouraged we can live a life worthy of his calling we can be completely humble and gentle be patient we can bear with each other in love and because he's sovereign we can keep unity together and stop dividing his son's body we can know God's sovereignty that's working among us and so stop submitting to corrupt desires sinning in our anger being bitter and slanderous giving in to sexual temptation we can stop submitting to those and submit to the sovereign

God know God's sovereignty that's working among you so that you don't get drunk with alcohol but rather you get filled with the spirit know his sovereignty so that you wives remember I'm working through what he says in Ephesians so that you wives can demonstrate towards your spouse the church's submission to Christ and husbands know God's sovereignty so that you can demonstrate to your spouse Christ's self-sacrificial love for his church this affects our marriages kids know God's sovereignty so that you can obey your parents because that's what God wants parents know his sovereignty so that you can act so that you can not exasperate your children but rather train them to know the

[33 : 36] Lord employees act honorably even when your boss is not looking because the Lord is your sovereign bosses you can treat your employees fairly as men and women of equal worth because that's what they are to your sovereign God know God's sovereignty so that when we are attacked by spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places we can stand and after it's over to be standing why because we're wearing God's armor that he gave to us in Christ and God is sovereign nothing can challenge or beat him this affects us daily and finally know that God's sovereignty is working among you so that every Sunday you can come here and through teaching and preaching through pastoring and teaching you can then be better prepared to love each other to build each other up in

Christ to help each other mature in knowing Christ every day all day in every practical situation this is our goal to say that the God who gave his son for me is my sovereign in this moment because he is sovereign always to him I will submit in good times and in bad times no matter what the temptation is I will submit to him to the praise of his glory which he has lavished on me in Jesus Christ our Lord amen let us pray