

God is... Sovereign

1 Chron 29:11-12, Jer 27:5, Lam 3:37-38

Brothers and Sisters, political events over the past couple of weeks, in Canada and abroad, have provided us with examples of the notion of Sovereignty.

The most obvious has occurred as Russia invaded Ukraine, and regardless of whatever historical context or contemporary pretext is given for this action, it has drawn swift condemnation from Western nations not just because of the obvious destruction and the loss of life that will take place but because it openly violates the **Sovereignty** of the Ukrainian state.

Within the internationally recognized boundaries and borders that make up the country of Ukraine the Ukrainian State is the governing authority, and they alone have the right to determine the laws and policies of that country and bear the responsibility to enforce them. The Ukrainian gov't is sovereign over its territory and those who live in that territory

or would claim rights as Ukrainian citizens. That sovereignty also includes the ability to determine how they will align themselves with other Sovereign states through alliances such as NATO and the European Union.

And while sovereign states seek to negotiate, influence, persuade and pressure each other in accordance with their own interests all the time, outright military invasion literally crosses the line when it comes to respecting the right of another gov't to function as Sovereign within its borders.

And then there is the question of what limitations, if any, there ought to be on what a Sovereign gov't can do within its own country and what powers it may exercise as a Sovereign over its citizens.

This issue came to a head within Canada over this past month as truckers and many others gathered in Ottawa, occupying its downtown core and the streets around Parliament Hill, as well as setting up boarder blockades across the country to protest what they considered to be unnecessary vaccine mandates in

their industry, claiming that such measures and other restrictions were infringing upon the rights and freedoms of Canadian citizens, and that the Gov't was overreaching and claiming too much power for itself.

Then, as if to prove the protesters' point – the current minority Fed gov't invoked the Emergency Powers Act claiming this was a national emergency that required extraordinary powers for the gov't - such as compelling business owners to assist them with tow trucks, being able to freeze bank accounts, issue directives and orders without parliamentary approval, in order to clear out the protestors.

Now we could be forgiven for thinking that this is all just a matter of pandemic related frustrations with public health restrictions and vaccine mandates boiling over... but its actually an object lesson about what sort of limitations, checks and balances are placed upon the Sovereignty of a Gov't and under what circumstances a Gov't is allowed to circumvent them and essentially do what they think is necessary, or if we

are being more cynical – to do whatever it is that they want... like invading another country.

So – if you were not really familiar with the whole notion of Sovereignty and what it means, the events of the past few weeks have demonstrated its implications to us and I want to tap into this common experience this morning as a starting point for considering God's Sovereignty as His right to rule over His creation. That's what we see reflected in 1 Chronicles 29:11-12 *"for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all."* God rules.

Now, most of us would not have an issue with this aspect of God's Sovereignty – it makes sense to us, God being God is the one who rules over everything. He keeps the universe running, the planets in their orbits, earth rotating around the sun, day and night, summer and winter, the rain and the snow – just as He promised Noah He would, after the flood, right??

God is sovereign – thank goodness! He takes care of all the big stuff so that we can go about our **own** daily business as we please. But brothers and sisters we can't overlook the fact that 1 Chronicles 29:11-12 emphasizes that **everything** in heaven and earth is God's, he is exalted as ruler over ALL of it – including **everything** in our daily lives **and** even our very life itself.

You see brothers and sisters, there are no limits on God's sovereignty like there are limits on a government's sovereignty, and no government can tell God that He is somehow violating their borders or interfering with their sovereignty, and none of us can protest that God is overreaching or impinging on our rights and freedoms.

Scripture reveals to us that God is the King of kings, He the Lord of lords (Rev 17:4) and Isaiah 40:22-23 is pretty specific in what this means, it says *"God sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a*

tent to live in. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing."

And Psalm 115:3 builds on this stating *"Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him."* And back to Isaiah again 46:10 God says *"I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please."*

So God's sovereignty means that he can do whatever He wants with His creation and with the people who live in it – as Jer 7:25 which we read this morning, says *"With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please."*

And its not just because God's has great power that he's able to do this, His Sovereignty is His right to do it, and it is right and good that He can. Because He is Sovereign.

So, Brothers and sisters when we state that God is Sovereign, when we confess this and say it is true, we are acknowledging how ALL of who God is; self-existing, eternal, infinite, all

knowing, all present, all powerful, all good, Creator of ALL - establishes His ultimate right to rule His creation, and to determine its ultimate purpose; how history will unfold in order to accomplish that purpose...

AND God determines what parts you and I will play in all of this. God is Sovereign. This is why James 4:15 exhorts us to qualify our future plans by saying *"If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."* And Proverbs 19:21 says *"many are the plans in a man's heart, but the will of the Lord prevails."*

And so brothers and sisters, as we speak about God's sovereignty as His right to rule, to purpose, and bring about that purpose in this world – we will inevitably also end up speaking about God's will, because God's sovereignty would just be an empty claim if God did not have the will to back it up.

Now when the scripture speaks about God's will it can refer to any one of the following aspects of God's being – because

God's will flows out of who He is... so first and foremost God's will is

His own self-determination, as 1 Cor 2:16 says *"For who has known the mind of the Lord, so as to instruct Him?"*

Secondly, God's will is the results of His self-determination, the specific purpose and plans that He has come up with, as Jeremiah 29:11 states *"I know the plans I have for you..."*

Third, God's will is His ability and His power to accomplish His purpose and His plan, we go to Isaiah again in 55:11 where God states that His word *"will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."*

Fourth, God's will also refers to His character, His moral nature such as his goodness, his love, his truth – which we've already learned about, and also His holiness and righteousness which we will be looking at in early April leading up to Easter. We see scripture referencing God's will in this manner in Ez 18:23 where God says *"Do I take any pleasure in the death of*

the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?

And lastly God's will is His revealed Law, His Word spoken in both creation and in scripture which is to govern our lives and calls for a response of obedience. Thus Paul exhorts us in 1 Thessalonians 4:3 *"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality..."*

So, what we've learned about God thus far in this series covers these aspects of God's will in reverse order. Last week we learned about God's truth – which relates to His revealed will in His scripture and in the creation. Prior to that we looked at God's goodness and love... which is relating to God's will as His character, and before that we looked at God's omnipotence and His omniscience... which relate to His will as the ability to implement His plan, and His ability to know which plan and purpose are the best to will into being.

And with looking at God's sovereignty this morning we've working all the way back to the beginning of the list with the foundational aspect of God's will; His own self-determination.

Now its worth repeating that God is self-existent, eternal and uncreatedly infinite, and thus reminding ourselves that there is no external standard by which we determine God to be good, there is no external source from which He draws His knowledge and power... and consequently there is also no external authority that establishes God's Sovereignty, or to which God must seek approval for His plans and purposes and means by which He will achieve them – God is self-determining, He is the ultimate authority over Himself.

Which is good news brothers and sisters – God's sovereign will is not a will like our wills. God can do what He pleases but this does not mean He is reactive, fickle or capricious or arbitrary in what He wills. God's will is free from those sorts of influences... because He answers to His own unchanging goodness, truth and faithfulness.

God being who He is in all His wonderful perfections must necessarily govern His own will in such a way that He lives up to who He is, fully demonstrates and proves that He is who He is – and He does this fully and completely and thus brings the maximum amount of glory to Himself.

So, God's will being necessarily governed by Himself gives Him the ultimate and only free will - free from everything that would hinder it, as it does ours, and free to sovereignly bring about His plans and purposes in the ways that He has determined in His will.

Isn't God just simply amazing brothers and sisters!?

Now, with many of God's perfections we can simply admire them and admire God just for who He is, self existing and infinite for example – but God's Sovereign Will specifically connects God to us because we are those over whom God is Sovereign.

And thus, Jesus taught us to pray... *“Our Father in Heaven, make your name Holy, Your will be done your kingdom come on earth as it is in Heaven.”* (Mat 6:9-10) And in His perfect service as God's human covenant partner, at the crux point in fulfilling God's purposes and plans, Jesus says *“not my will but yours be done”* (Luke 22:42)

So, this implies that we need to ask ourselves if we are onboard with God's will and His purpose and His plan and how He is bringing it about? It struck me that the best way for us to see how Sin holds **power** over our lives is to examine our will to see if is ok with God's Sovereign Will.

Truth be told we're often not ok with it, instead we are battling God's will, just like the example where one of the little boys here at Valleyview learned it was God who made the rules, and he responded with *“Well... then I think I would like to be god!”* We desire what our wills want, we don't want to submit to another will, even if it is divine, that can rightfully override our own – that is the root and the power of sin in all of us.

So, its important for us to learn about God's Sovereign Will, not just to grow in awe of who God is, but because it is in coming to terms with God's Will for our lives, by which the Holy Spirit breaks the **power** that sin holds over us, which is located in our wills. To that end scripture presents God's Sovereign Will as the ultimate cause of ALL things. So let's take a look at that for a moment.

It is the cause of the Creation's, and our own, existence and continued existence; Rev 4:11 *"for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."*

It is the cause of world history with the rise and fall of nations and empires; Acts 17:26 *"From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands."*

It is the cause behind all the natural phenomenon we witness in nature; Nahum 1:3 says *"His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet."*

It is the cause behind our lives and our destinies; In Acts 18:21 Paul left Ephesus but promised to return saying *"I will come back if it is God's will."* It's even in the smallest things in our lives as Jesus teaches us in Mat 10:29-30 when He says *"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered."*

And of course, it is the cause for who is saved and who rejects Christ; Paul spends quite a bit of time in Romans teaching on this, chapter 9:18 he says *"Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden."*

Indeed, every step of our redemption is willed by God and you don't get a more explicit proclamation of this than in Romans 8:28-30 *"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. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son... And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” So from loving us while we were yet sinners to our final state of being like Jesus Christ in the New Creation, it’s all caused by the will of God.

And God’s Will is the cause of Christ’s suffering as He achieved that salvation for us; we noted already that Jesus said *“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours [will] be done.”* (Luke 22:42) And in Acts 2:23 Peter preaches to the Pentecost crowd saying *“[Jesus] was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.”*

And lastly it is the cause of whatever suffering we may encounter as believers; as 1 Peter 3:17 states *“For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing*

evil.” And we are reminded why God wills this for us in Hebrews 12:7, we are to *“Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?”*

Which brings us back to the point of why scripture is confronting with God’s Sovereign Will as the cause for ALL things – it is so that there is no area in our lives where we are not presented with the call to submit our will to God’s Sovereign will, and thus have the Holy Spirit break the whatever power of Sin that is still residing in our will.

Hebrews 12:10-11 puts it this way *“God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”*

Brothers and sisters, when the Holy Spirit breaks the **power** of sin over our wills, our hearts and minds and souls desire God’s will instead - and we thus love the Lord with all our heart soul

mind and strength (Deut 6:5), we seek first the Kingdom of God (Mat 6:33), and will we offer our bodies as living sacrifices in worship of God... and then... as Rom 12:1-2 continues on we will not conform to the pattern of this world – which is to battle against the Sovereign Will of God (you’re not the boss of me!!)

Instead, we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and then *“you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”* This doesn’t mean that we somehow become the standard of judging God’s Sovereign will and He offers it to us for our approval – rather we are able to identify it apart from what we might think is good, pleasing and perfect.

So let me exhort us to cooperate with the Holy Spirit transforming our minds, by choosing to **think** differently in the following ways.

First; let us always remember there is no other standard, no other authority, not even our own wills by which we evaluate

God’s Sovereignty apart from Himself, even when He determines that evil and suffering will be allowed to affect us. As our last reading from Lamentation 3:38 says *“Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?”*

Secondly; when evil and tragedy do strike, when political circumstances are such as they are today which is better to think; to believe that such things are random, arbitrary and pointless, to be saddled with the notion that whatever efforts we have made to insulate and protect ourselves have failed, that immense tragedy has perhaps come about by only a slight mistake or oversight on our part? OR the scriptural truth that everything which occurs does so under God’s Sovereign Will and will be used by God for His purposes and His plans? Which is better for us to believe?

Both scenarios contain incredible tragedy and suffering and hardship for us... but only one contains a comfort and a hope, AND is used by God to break the power of sin in our wills to

further our sanctification, and that is God's Sovereignty is the final cause for all things.

So brothers and sisters – be transformed by the renewing of your mind in thinking this way about God's Sovereignty and what He had purposed and planned for this world and our lives...

If you do – as the scripture says, you will be able to *“test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”* And you will be further along in your sanctification and experience an increasing amount of freedom from the power of sin, as 1 Peter 4:1-2 says *“whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather **for the will of God.**”*

Brothers and sisters, let us all humbly bow before the Lord God Almighty, and submit our wills to Him as our rightful Sovereign who can do with us He pleases – but is pleased to

do what He has already eternally willed for us in Jesus Christ. To Him be ALL glory and power and honor forever! Amen.