

James 4:13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money." ¹⁴ Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.

Matthew 6:9 "Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.

We Believe: The Sovereignty of God

James 4:13-16
Matthew 6:9-13

This sermon series, believe it or not, has a logical order to it. So far we have laid the foundation: *revelation* – by which we know what we know about God, Jesus, and so forth; *the Bible* – the primary source of that revelation; and, *the Trinity* – that unique and wonderful revelation that God is One-Yet-Three. We now begin to build on that foundation, by what we believe about God. And, today, we start with the most basic thing we believe about God. It is something all Christians believe, but Presbyterians have made it foundational, essential. If we have to err in one direction or another, we choose to err in this direction. *We believe in the sovereignty of God.*

If the most basic thing we Americans stand for is freedom, the most basic thing we Presbyterians stand for is the sovereignty of God.

In the same way we Southerners stand for good manners, hospitality, and fried chicken, we Presbyterians stand for the sovereignty of God.

As we here in High Point are known for home furnishings, we Presbyterians stand for...say it with me...*the sovereignty of God.*

What do we mean by “the sovereignty of God?” To answer that, we need to start with a man... on a hillside... tending a flock of sheep, who he spies the strangest thing: a bush that burns, but is not consumed. His name, of course, is Moses. He approaches the bush, and the planet has not been the same since. A voice speaks from the flames telling Moses to go to Egypt and free his people from slavery. Moses asks, “Who should I say sent me?”

The voice in the bush does not give a name; it gives a verb: YAHWEH, which is a form of the verb “to be” that nobody really knows how to translate. It could be “I AM WHO I AM.” It could be “I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE.” It could also be HE CAUSES TO BE. We don’t know, exactly, and that is as it should be, because *the first thing about the sovereignty of God is, it means that God is shrouded in mystery.* We cannot figure God out completely. We can’t even quite make out God’s name, except that it’s a verb – this is a ‘DOING’ God, and the verb that best describes what this God does is the verb for *existence*. We may not be able to make it all out clearly, but this much is clear: *this is the God whose existence cannot be explained, but this God’s existence causes all other things to be.*

And so God’s first act is to bring all things into being. As Isaiah tells us, Yahweh is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, who does not grow weary, and whose understanding is unsearchable.

This sovereign God is, first of all, large. He’s got the whole world in his hands. He is, second of all, in charge. This maker of all is, also, ruler of all. To be sovereign is to be in control, to be in charge. When you are sovereign, you are the final authority. The buck stops there, but so, also does the glory. Nothing else should be worshiped – why worship something created when its Creator is right there?

The third thing God’s sovereignty means is that God is absolutely, completely free. God cannot be bound, cannot be manipulated, cannot be controlled. We cannot predict what God is going to do next, or how he’s going to do it. So God does new things; God makes new covenants; God becomes human – not a predictable move; and then God dies on a criminal’s cross – nobody saw that coming; and then God is raised from the dead, a move that blew the minds of even those who had been told it was going to happen. To be sovereign is to be free; absolutely free – free to act in whatever way one chooses; free to be wherever and however one chooses; free to save whomever one chooses.

God is going to surprise us. Just when we think we have God figured out, he slips out of our theological grasp. Remember the story of Job, the righteous man who lost his wealth, his children, and his health? And remember how his three friends came to him and said, “Look, we know how God works. If you are righteous, he blesses you; if you are unrighteous, he punished you. Since you are suffering, he must be punishing you, so confess your sin, repent from whatever awful thing you’ve been doing, and things will begin to turn around. Job keeps saying, “But I’ve done nothing wrong,” and finally, God scolds the three friends for thinking they have God all figured out.

We will return to visit Job again in two weeks when we talk about suffering, but the point right now is that Job’s friends though they had God down to a formula. God won’t fit into any boxes or formulas or theological systems – including ours. God is free, and he is always going to surprise us.

Which is a wonderful thing because we know that if God has decided to be gracious to us, it was a decision that came out of his freedom – he freely chose to be gracious to us, which means he didn't do it grudgingly or out of a sense of obligation, so there is no danger he will change his mind. He freely chose to love us, and his freedom sets us free...even if we would like to make God a little more controllable.

So God's sovereignty means he is the source of existence itself; he is large and in charge. God created all things, and therefore all things belong to him. It means God is absolutely free – we cannot bind or control or predict or put him in our debt. God can do anything God chooses to do – he's God! But we're not just talking about God's freedom in that statement, but also the fourth thing about God's sovereignty: his power. God can do anything he chooses to do because God is almighty; omnipotent. When Abraham and Sarah are in their 90's, God appears to them and renews his promise that they will be the parents of a great nation. Sarah falls on her face laughing at the idea of a 90-year-old woman giving birth. God hears her laughter and asks, "Why are you laughing? Is anything too wonderful for Yahweh?"

When the angel appears to Mary and says she will be the mother of the Messiah, she asks, how can this be, since I have not been with a man? The angel echoes God's answer to Sarah: "Nothing is impossible with God." God can do anything, for nothing is impossible with God.

Finally, the sovereignty of God means that we are totally, utterly dependent on God. How often we forget the wisdom we read in James this morning, and talk as though we have any control over the future.

"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money.'¹⁴ Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that.'¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil."

Only God knows what tomorrow will bring, and every tomorrow is in God's hands. The wise person acknowledges this even when filling out tomorrow's day planner, or making reservations for your next vacation. Our lives are in God's sovereign hands, and we do not know what tomorrow will bring. Remember the old saying, if you want to make God smile, tell him your plans. One day everything is fine, the next everything has changed. The boss says we're fired; the doctor says we're sick; a distracted driver crashes into us. Or it could be good. The doctor says you're pregnant; the boss gives you a promotion; you win the lottery, and everything changes.

Our lives are not our own, as much as we'd like to pretend they are. Tomorrow is not a sure thing, as much as we'd like to pretend that it is. We are utterly and completely dependent on the one sovereign God, who, alone is the God of today, and tomorrow.

And that's why I conclude with Jesus' teaching the Lord's Prayer to his disciples. Prayer itself is an acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God, but every phrase of the Lord's Prayer reiterates that truth. Listen to each line and consider how it reflects God's lordship of all things – including our lives. Ultimately, the sovereignty of God means that the world and everything in it, including you and me, everything and everyone belongs to God.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name.

Your kingdom come,

Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.

God is large; God is in charge; God is free; God is able; God is God...and we are not. Amen.