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Day 183 - July 1

Anthropology: The Origin of Sin (The Fall)

Genesis 3:6-9

In many ways, our study of anthropology is coming full circle. Over the past few days, we have discussed the relationship of mankind with the governing authorities. Some people have taken God's instructions in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 as "utopian" or "idealistic". The thinking is that the Bible does not take into account the reality of sin and corruption and, therefore, instructs people to submit in spite of obvious problems. While it is fundamentally true that governments have been predominately corrupt, the logic behind God's instructions to submit are not utopian but painfully realistic.

You see, the whole purpose of the government is not to "fix" evil, instead its entire existence is predicated upon its role in merely suppressing the depravity of our world. As we will see in a few months, God's redemptive plan includes overthrowing every government as He moves towards establishing the only true, good government. Nevertheless, the presence of the governmental sword, which serves to punish and discourage the evil doer, is a confession that mankind is fundamentally messed up. The question is why? The reason for the need for imperfect governments and many other flawed and even cumbersome entities in life, is sin. A few weeks ago, we spoke of the reality of sin in our hearts, over the next several days we will examine the origin of sin and its consequences. While this might not be pleasant, it is ultimately leading us to our next subject of study which is God's plan of redemption.

The text for today shows us two important truths. First, there was a brief time in which God's creation was truly "good". There was no sin, there was no suffering, there was no chasm between God and man. Everything functioned as it should and nothing was in place to frustrate man's relationship with God and man's fulfillment of God's commission to fill the world and exercise dominion over it.

Nevertheless, God's good creation did not last long in its ideal manifestation. Instead, the Bible teaches us that Satan (who had fallen from grace some time in the future... don't worry we will cover this a few months from now) enters the picture and tempts mankind to distrust God all the while endeavoring to be like God. The text teaches us that the foundation of temptation is the belief that man can somehow exalt himself to the level of his Creator. Adam and Eve's sin is rooted in a deep desire to be autonomous. They were led astray by a desire to be equal with God, and therefore free from their responsibility to submit to Him, instead of joyful servants of His.

Putting This Together

Over the next several days we will study the consequences of their actions but for today we will focus on this one note of application. Adam and Eve fell victim to the temptation to believe that God was somehow holding out on them. While they certainly did not understand the consequence of their misdeed, they were very aware that their actions to take and eat the forbidden fruit flew in the face of God's righteous decree. In like manner, you and I are tempted to disbelieve God. Perhaps we think that He is holding out on us or perhaps we are tempted to esteem ourselves too highly. Whatever the cause, may the story of the fall remind us that God's Word is to be trusted even when the temptation to sin is a "delight to the eye". It might seem appealing to be out from under the rule and reign of God but forsaking His stated commands always leads to our destruction.

Day 184 - July 2

Anthropology: The Consequences of the Fall, Fear of God

Genesis 3:8-10

Some of you astute Bible students might have read today's title and thought to yourself "I thought that we were commanded to fear God, how can this be a consequence of sin?" If that was you, I commend you! Indeed, it is true that the Bible commands us to fear God but we must be careful in our distinctions and language. You see, not all fear is the same! We rightly are to fear God but for the right reasons and in the right posture. Let me try to explain...

Theologians have distinguished between two types of fear. The first kind of fear is filial fear. This is the kind of fear that a child has of his godly parents. It is birthed in a spirit of love and admiration for a superior that results in a healthy respect for the person and a fear of doing anything that would bring his superior's disapproval. Of course, the best parents balance love for their children with the reality that they are indeed in authority over the child and, therefore, are to be feared! It is not wrong for a child to be fearful of a parent's correction but it is unhealthy for that fear to be isolated, away from accompanying love and admiration.

Conversely, theologians speak of another kind of fear called servile fear. This is the kind of fear that a prisoner has for his torturer or a slave may experience in relation to an abusive, domineering master. It is the kind of fear that is filled with anxiety and dread in light of real danger and threat of harm.

Whereas filial fear leads us to run to our authority with the desire to please and honor them, servile fear causes us to run in terror at the sight of our superior with no desire whatsoever to be in their presence. This means that the Bible's commands to fear God are not meant to be interpreted in the servile sense, instead they are intended to propel us to a filial fear whereby we love and honor our God while respecting His awesome might and standing in our lives and in all of Creation.

This little exercise in distinction should help us unlock our text for today as one consequence of sin is seen in Adam's reaction to the God that he had previously communed with and loved. The Bible says that the result of Adam's sin was that he "hid in fear" at the voice of the Lord. Whereas Adam once ran to God at the sound of His voice, now he ran in fear because of the introduction of rebellion into the cosmos and in his life.

Putting This Together

The result of sin is fear of God, and rightly so! God's righteous character and His power and might make sin the ultimate wedge between God and man. When sin entered the picture, the relationship between God and man changed in such a way that He went from being a wanted companion to a dreaded authority.

If you think about your own spiritual journey, there is no doubt that you have experienced this phenomenon as well. Even as believers, the presence of unrepentant and habitual sin in our lives causes our posture towards God to change. We are not able to intimately commune with God when we actively rebel against His rightful and expressed authority in our lives.

Day 185 - July 3

Anthropology: Consequences of the Fall, Enmity with God

Romans 5:10

Yesterday we began to unpack the chasm that has developed between God and man as a result of Adam's sin. At its core, sin is an affront to God because it is a rebellion against God's law and, therefore, His very position as the Sovereign King of the Universe. As you can imagine, the consequences of such blatant disobedience against such a matchless Ruler are far reaching and severe. Today's text mentions one such consequence albeit in a passing manner.

Romans 5 is really dealing with the glorious truth of the offer of life in Christ by His sacrifice. Nevertheless, Paul mentions in verse 10 that we "were enemies of God". In order to understand this text, we must do some digging into the context and learn who Paul is specifically including in the word "we".

Some people would claim that this "we" is an all-inclusive, universal word that refers to every person alive. Specifically, many liberal theologians have claimed that it refers to all mankind after Christ's sacrificial death. The thinking is that Jesus has reconciled all men to Himself but this is inaccurate and makes the rest of the biblical teaching on the subject inconsistent and pointless.

Paul is not saying that there are no longer enemies of God, instead he is saying that "we", that is those who have been saved by His grace through faith alone, are no longer enemies. The exclusivity of the "we" gives rise to the conclusion that there are still others who are enemies of the Lord. In fact, ANYONE who is not a true believer in Christ is an enemy of the Lord God.

Putting This Together

The obvious question is why? What has happened that would precipitate all lost men being declared enemies of God? The answer is simply sin. The Bible is clear, in fact it is clear in this very passage, that all of us are born into sin. We will deal with the reason why that is true in a subsequent devotion, nevertheless the truth remains that all of us are guilty of habitual cosmic treason against the God of the Universe. We live our lives in constant rebellion against His rule and reign by virtue of our sin which is an affront to Him and, therefore, we are declared enemies of God.

This is indeed a precarious position to be in but it is one that need not last. By God's grace, Jesus treated us as friends while we were still His enemies by going to the Cross, dying in our place, absorbing God's rightful wrath stored up on account of our sin and offering us peace with God and adoption into His family by virtue of His righteousness credited to our account. Ladies and gentlemen, that is the Gospel! Jesus took our place, dying the death we deserved, suffering the punishment due us, in order to offer us life. Who do you know that treats his enemies this well?

Day 186 - July 4

Anthropology: Consequences of the Fall, Enmity with God

Romans 8:7

Yesterday we discussed the truth that all of us are naturally enemies of God. Today's text states this truth in an even more straightforward manner as Paul tells us that the natural mind is "hostile" towards God. The word hostile is not hard to understand but it might be difficult to swallow! The idea is quite simple, its not just that we are indifferent to God and, therefore, passively violate His authoritative commands, instead sinful men naturally and vociferously rebel against God in all that they say and do.

This is a crucial, if not difficult, truth to understand. Folks, the simple truth is that natural men do not "love" God or even want to know Him. No, they naturally despise the true God which is why mankind is always erecting false idols to attempt to put in His place.

While it is true that we are all God's creation, it is not true that we are all God's children. In fact, it is true that most people on this planet at the moment are, in fact, hostile towards God. A few years ago, this might have been a difficult truth for Americans to swallow but the simple truth is that we live in a world and country which displays this reality clearly every single day. Think about the way that biblical truths and commands are mocked in our day. Think about how even the mention of the God of the Bible draws the ire of many in our day. Think about how things like unflinching moral standards and biblical definitions of marriage, gender, etc. are hated in our current culture. These are the most obvious examples but, even in the hearts of many religious (albeit unsaved) men and women there is true hostility against God. We don't like being told what to do, we don't like being described in unsavory terms, and we don't like submitting to any outside instruction!

Putting This Together

Our natural hostility towards God serves to underline the necessity of God's grace in salvation. The Bible does not describe salvation as a mere changing of the mind, instead the Bible describes salvation as a transformation of the heart. It is only as we are made alive in Christ that our minds are changed and our disposition towards God is altered from hostility to love. This is why we must pray for those who do not know the Lord and it is why God gains all of the glory for salvation, without His supernatural work in our hearts and minds, we are destined to eternity at enmity with Him.

Day 187 - July 5

Anthropology: Consequences of the Fall, Divine Wrath

Romans 1:18

I realize that we've already ventured into some unfamiliar waters for some. The simple truth is that we do not typically hear about our naturally contentious relationship with God. So many people are used to hearing trite phrases like, "we are all God's children" but this phrase is simply untrue (unless of course the person is speaking specifically about the church!). We are naturally enemies of God and one result of our opposition to the Almighty is found in His right wrath against mankind.

Romans 1 is a passage we have examined before. The book is a brilliant summary of Gospel truth and Gospel imperatives but it begins with a rather succinct statement on the natural condition of lost mankind. At the very beginning of Paul's summary of man's sin, he states that the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness. The rest of the chapter details for us how God's wrath is currently revealed. As a side note, it is imperative that we understand God's wrath is not limited to the cataclysmic. Certainly, God can, and will, pour out His wrath upon the earth in awful yet stunning power. Nevertheless, God's wrath is more often manifest in His willingness to simply let mankind wander further and further into sin.

The fundamental way that God shows His wrath today is by simply not intervening in the lives and hearts of men who are bent on sin. While this might seem odd, I would be willing to bet that most of us actually have a frame of reference for this kind of wrath. Think for a moment about a parent who never corrects their child. Can you imagine how hateful it would be for a mother or father to see their child wandering into sin, perhaps a drug habit or an abusive relationship, and never intervene? We would argue that this is the most wrathful thing a parent can do! This is exactly what God has allowed in Creation for those whom He has not redeemed. He is giving men the desires of their evil and blind hearts.

Putting This Together

You will notice the verse says that God's wrath has been revealed from heaven against ALL ungodliness. The word "all" there is important, not because its hard to understand, but because it speaks to the scope of God's anger towards sin. There is no such thing as a harmless or trivial sin committed against God. Instead, every person who is guilty of any sin falls underneath the umbrella of God's wrath. The good news is that Christ absorbed the wrath of the sins of His children, which means that the Gospel truth is that either you or Christ atone for your sins. The Cross was not a mere display of selfless love (although it certainly was an act of love!), the Cross was a moment in history whereby God poured out the wrath due you and I on His totally undeserving and innocent Son. He did this in order to be just, He did this in order to show grace, He did this out of love for His enemies.

Day 188 - July 6

Anthropology: Consequences of the Fall, Eternal Punishment

Matthew 25:46

Thus far, we have established that lost men are enemies of God and that God is (justly) angry or full of wrath towards them on account of their sin or rebellion against His rightful authority. The question we still need to deal with, however, is how long will God be angry? Will He exercise His wrath **ONLY** while mankind is physically alive on earth or will His anger extend for a finite amount of time after our lives are over?

Over the years, there have been many people who have attempted to soften the biblical teaching on the subject of eternal punishment. Some have denied it altogether. This teaching is easily and clearly refuted by the Bible. In fact, Jesus spoke often of the existence of hell. Others have tried to posit a temporal hell. They state that while those who reject the Gospel of Christ will be sent to torment, God will relent, at some point, and either destroy them altogether (put them out of their misery) or He will allow them into His presence after their punishment.

The truth is that neither of these teachings attempt to reconcile clear biblical instruction. In fact, the Bible is crystal clear that hell is real and that those who reject God will be sent there for all eternity. This is the point Christ is making in Matthew 25 when He says that those who have been disobedient to Him will be sent into “eternal punishment”. The phrase is as basic as it is shocking. The penalty for rebellion against God is punishment... forever.

Putting This Together

Some of you might be wondering, why? Why is it that lost men must suffer eternally for their sin? The answer is found in the severity of the transgression. Sometimes we look at sin as if it is trivial but the act of sin is not defined by the short term impact it may or may not have on society, the severity of sin is inextricably tied to the object, or in this case the Person, which we sin against.

Think about it this way, if you were to disobey the command of a co-worker, that might be mildly problematic. Perhaps they would take you to HR or you would have to work through the ramifications of a splintered relationship. Still, you would not expect too much in the way of lasting consequence from your action. Now, let's take that same “sin”, disobedience, and apply it to the owner of the company! What if you decided to just do what you wanted to do even in light of clear and firm directions from the owner that commanded you to do otherwise? Now you would rightly expect a far greater consequence, even perhaps termination!

This same logic exists when it comes to sin. When we refuse to obey God, we are essentially comprehending the commands of the Creator, Sustainer and Owner of everything we see and telling Him “no!” What a grave, foolish and scary action to take! This is why eternal punishment exists, because only eternal torment is punishment that fits the crime.

Day 189 - July 7

Anthropology: Consequences of the Fall, Relational Discord

Genesis 3:16

Admittedly, we have begun with the most severe consequence of the fall and now we are working our way down the list. Even if there were no other ramification of our sin, enmity with God and the wrath that ensues, would be enough to lead us to the conclusion that we are in a world of trouble! Nevertheless, the Bible is crystal clear that sin impacts not only our relationship with God but our relationship with others as well.

Today's verse records God's Words as He is pronouncing the details of the curse that has now befallen Adam and Eve (and every one of their descendants). The wording in this passage needs a bit of explanation as God says to Eve that her "desire will be for your husband". Some have taken this phrase to be a negative statement regarding the man exclusively. The idea they espouse is that God is telling Eve that she will lovingly desire her husband and yet he will rule over her. However, the word "desire" is used in the very next chapter in a context that gives us great insight into what God meant when He unveiled the effect of the curse in Genesis 3.

If you would look at verse 7 of chapter 4 you will find the word "desire" used again. This time, the context is clear that desire is defined as that which aims at overtaking a person. In chapter 4, the term is uttered as a warning to Cain that sin was lurking and desirous of conquering him. In chapter 3, the word is used to express the woman's natural tendency to aspire to overtake Adam's place of headship. This leads to conflict and strife in the marriage relationship as it creates a situation where two people are striving for control.

Putting This Together

God's intention for marriage was beautiful. He created two equal but complimentary pieces in order for the marriage unit to thrive. The goal was not for each party to perform the same tasks, instead the plan was for each person to bring their own giftedness into the relationship for the common good. Unfortunately, sin changed the dynamics of the marriage relationship and it ushered in discord and division.

As we saw in Genesis 3, Adam abdicated his leadership responsibility in allowing Eve to be tempted and overcome by Satan and now, as a result of his lack of leadership, a curse has befallen all married couples in the sense that each party attempts to fill the leadership vacuum. Many men do not naturally lead and many women are overcome with a temptation to take the reins. In both cases, God's intention and design of marriage is thwarted and suffering ensues.

Day 190 - July 8

Anthropology: Consequences of the Fall, Relational Discord

Genesis 4:8, 23

Genesis 4 shows us that relational discord is not limited to marriages. Instead, we have two conflicts and murders recorded in this text. Some have asked why God would choose to place these narratives in Scripture and the answer is quite simple, Genesis 4 shows us that sin is catastrophic in its impact! In order to delve into this topic, we must note the motivation behind each murder. As we can see, the reason for Cain's murder of Abel is different than Lamech's murder of a nameless young man.

Cain's motivation was pure jealousy. Although we do not know exactly why Abel's sacrifice to the Lord was accepted and Cain's wasn't, we do know that Cain did not take kindly to the Lord's favoring Abel's efforts over his own. In light of this experience, Cain is filled with rage to the point that he takes the life of his very own brother. We see here the manifestation of two sins, jealousy and rage, which are clearly the consequence of a fallen heart.

In Lamech's case, we have less detail as to what precipitated the argument with the young man but we do know that violence was involved and it escalated. This young man is said to have wounded Lamech and the obvious implication of the phrase is that some conflict was the reason behind the wound. It wasn't that this man unintentionally hurt Lamech, instead there was some altercation that resulted in physical harm and death.

The point we are trying to make is that murder is not the ONLY sin recorded in Genesis 4, instead it is the result of a mixture of many sins. Jealousy, rage, disagreements, and the like, are all symptoms of the underlying problem which is the sinful heart of mankind.

The comparison between Genesis 1-2 and Genesis 3-4 (and beyond) is stunning. Once sin enters the picture, the idyllic, beautiful, serene and luscious world gives way to a barren, contentious and unhospitable replacement. Whereas, mankind was made for community and assisting one another in a common endeavor to image and glorify God, now, in light of sin, man is living in competition with one another and embody a great threat not just to other men's peace but also to their very lives.

Putting This Together

What this teaches us is that the root problem in society is not man's actions but their hearts. This means that any ultimate solution to societal strife is not grounded in surface level solutions (behavior modification, education, prosperity, etc.), instead it must be rooted in a message that alters the state of our cold, dead, sinful hearts. This is why the Gospel is so crucial! It is the only message that has the potential, by God's grace, to fundamentally fix the problem of sin in our hearts.

Day 191 - July 9

Anthropology: Consequences of the Fall, Creation

Genesis 3:17-19

When I was a kid, my grandfather used to maintain a rather large garden. I learned that fresh grown tomatoes, green beans and corn tasted amazing but I also learned that keeping a garden was hard work! I vividly remember staying with him and hearing him say “its time to go to war with the weeds” as he trudged down the hill to the garden. I’m not sure that he intended anything, theologically speaking, when he uttered those words but, according to Genesis 3, his statement was undoubtedly accurate.

If you remember, God had given Adam and Eve a commission back in Genesis 1. That commission included “subduing” creation. The word means to bring creation into subjection or to exercise authority so that creation does what we desire. Specifically, we subdue creation as we cultivate it in such a way that it yields produce for our consumption.

While it is hard for us to grasp, there was a time that subduing creation was a joy! There was no “fight” whatsoever, instead creation cooperated with man fully as the soil was cultivated and the harvest grown. However, in light of man’s sin, God proclaimed a curse upon the ground which serves as another consequence of the fall.

God’s curse does not preclude us from subduing the land, at least not totally. We are still able to farm and maintain the earth but now it is difficult. The arrival of thorns and thistles and the reality of “sweat” on our face (a term that denotes very hard work) is now a reality for all of us as we seek to exercise dominion over the land. In short, while work is not evil (in fact it is very good), the presence of evil makes work exponentially more difficult!

Putting This Together

Man’s sin impacted literally every portion of life and experience. The Bible speaks of the reality that even creation is groaning for the day of redemption. It is longing for the day that the wrongs that were committed are made right and the effect of sin which was ushered in several thousand years ago are corrected. The reminder of the consequence of the fall is present even in God’s great creation and, as we work and strain in order to provide for our families and obey God’s commission, we are reminded that this world is not what it was or what it will be in light of the sin of man.

Day 192 - July 10

Anthropology: Consequences of the Fall, Physical Death

Genesis 3:19, Genesis 5, Hebrews 9:27

A few weeks ago, we discussed the truth that death is certain for all mankind. If you are born, you will pass away unless the Lord returns first. The end of the rather lengthy statement from God to Adam about the curse from sin details this point saying “for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” This is obviously a rather graphic way of stating the obvious truth that Adam will surely die!

While it is certain that Adam would die, the rest of the Scripture makes it abundantly clear that all men will die as a product of sin. In a few days we will tackle the question of how Adam’s sin necessarily infected all mankind, but for today’s purposes we will see the overwhelming evidence to support the claim that death came through sin.

The above reference to Genesis 3 is clearly enough. We see in chapter 3 the clear connection between Adam’s sin and death. Without sin there is no death but with sin there is necessarily death (Romans 6:23). Genesis 5 teaches us that death spread from Adam to all of his descendants. You will note, over and over again, the pattern that someone was born, they lived a life and then they died. The point of these genealogies is, at least partially, to show us that all men were subject to the same demise as Adam. Hebrews 9 is a text we mentioned a few weeks ago that expresses the same truth. Death is certain and it is because of sin.

Putting This Together

One point of application will suffice for the day. It is common, when loved ones die, to hear people question God. The oft repeated refrain is “why God?” Why would God allow someone to die? While all of us have felt angst and sorrow at the passing of a loved one, I’d like to challenge you to think less in terms of what God allows and more in terms of sin.

The proper response to death is not anger at God, it is anger at sin! We should be repulsed by the presence of that which will ultimately cause our demise in our own lives. Death should be the constant reminder that the sin that so easily entangles and tempts us to go astray is nothing but a killer whose aim is to destroy not to fulfill. Allow the existence of death to be a reminder of the grossness of sin!

Day 193 - July 11

Anthropology: Consequences of the Fall, Spiritual Death

Ephesians 2:1-3

The perceptive Bible student will note that the death promised to Adam by virtue of his fall seems to have been delayed. Physical death is assured, but it is in the future. Nevertheless, there is a more heinous reality that is taking shape underneath the surface of Genesis 3 which texts like Ephesians 2 unveil. You see, the death that came into the world through Adam was not just physical in nature, in fact physical death is far less problematic than spiritual death. Whereas, physical death is certain for each individual in the future, spiritual death is a condition that every lost man and women deals with from the moment of birth until either conversion or their physical demise.

Paul begins verse 1 with a sweeping claim saying “and you were dead in trespasses and sins”. The “you” in this text is clearly the church. This explains why Paul describes their dead condition utilizing the past tense. When we become believers in Christ, we are brought from spiritual death to life. Nevertheless, Paul is clear in verse 3 that the rest of mankind is still marked by this spiritual death. Whereas, believers have been brought from death to life, unbelievers are still very much in a state of spiritual death and that state of death is characteristic of every single person who is not a disciple of Christ’s.

Our devotions for today and tomorrow will deal with attempting to understand what this spiritual death entails. We obviously know that people who are lost, those who are dead spiritually, physically breathe! Paul cannot mean that these people are biologically dead. Instead what the Apostle is teaching is that those who are lost in their sin are totally unresponsive towards the things of God. They do not desire God’s truth and they do not respond to what the spiritual truth of the Word of God in the Gospel on their own.

As the Old Testament clearly teaches, lost man is marked by a stone cold, dead heart that is impervious to the truths of God. There is no understanding of God’s truth and there is no desire to learn more about him. Instead of being marked by a receptiveness to the Gospel, lost men are characterized as averse to Gospel truth as they are totally shut off from the things of God.

Putting This Together

This means that mankind is functionally, spiritually dead. They are not only disconnected from the giver of spiritual vitality; they also have no desire or inclination to seek or to find Him! This explains the biblical teaching that no one seeks God (Romans 3:11) and no one is able to come to the Son unless the Father draws him (John 6:44). What men need is not a more arousing, emotional appeal to believe, what they need is God’s grace in changing their heart and opening their minds to the good news of Jesus Christ.

Salvation is totally a work of the Lord whereby He imparts life to our dead hearts and gives us the desire to know and to seek His presence and truth. This is why God alone gains the glory as salvation is totally a work of God’s grace, a gift that He alone can bestow. This is Paul’s point in verses 8-9 of our chapter for the day!

Day 194 - July 12

Anthropology: Consequence of the Fall, Spiritual Death

2 Corinthians 4:4

Yesterday's passage mentioned a supernatural element to spiritual deadness. You will note that Paul describes those who are walking according to the flesh as following the "prince of the power of the air". The context makes it quite clear that this "prince" is Satan himself.

Today's text deals with spiritual death and once again mentions the existence and impact of the presence of Satan in people's spiritual demise. The Apostle states that the "god of this world" (another phrase to denote Satan) has "blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." What in the world does this mean?

Often times the Bible speaks of salvation in terms of sight. The famous hymn Amazing Grace speaks of a time when we were "blind" but now we "see". The type of sight that is in reference is not physical eye sight. Obviously, lost men can physically see. Instead, the idea of blindness is utilized in reference to spiritual ability to see the truth of God's Word and respond accordingly.

The idea that Paul puts forth here is that people cannot see the truth of God's Word. Even though you and I, as believers, can clearly see the beauty and cogency of God's Word, the lost man cannot make sense of it. This is not because they do not have minds, it is because their minds and hearts are darkened and they simply cannot see the vitality of what is obvious to believers.

Whether spiritual death is described as a lack of sight or as a lack of energy to respond to truth, the fundamental fact remains that those who are in sin are unable to perceive and respond to the truth of God's Word.

Putting This Together

This means that we must pray as well as evangelize! While we certainly are responsible to clearly articulate the Gospel, the fundamental reality is that lost men cannot see or respond to the truth it contains unless God moves to rip off the blinders (2 Corinthians 4:5-6) and replace their despondent, dead hearts with one that is alive.

Day 195 - July 13

Anthropology: Transmission of the Fall

Romans 5:12-21

Some of you might be reading this material on the fall and wonder, why does Adam's sin impact me? After all, you and I weren't present in Eden, why do we have to deal with the consequences? The biblical teaching on the subject has been debated over the years. Many different opinions are out there but the two most popular contemporary views warrant mentioning today. There are some who say that we are not actually held accountable for Adam's sin, instead we are simply given his nature (by virtue of our descension from him) and, therefore we sin and deserve the consequences as well. While this has some truth to it (we were absolutely brought forth in iniquity), it does not accurately interpret texts like Romans 5. Verse 18 clearly states that one trespass "led to condemnation for all". Literally, mankind was condemned in totality by virtue of the one trespass committed by Adam. Condemnation comes not from potential sin but from the actual commission of sin.

So, if mankind stands condemned, how is it possible for us to be condemned for sin before we were actually born? The answer is found in the second prominent view which is articulated in a doctrine called "representative headship" (some of you might know it by its historic name "federal headship"). The idea of representative headship is that Adam represented all of mankind and, therefore, his sin becomes sin accredited to every man from that moment forward. This view makes the most sense of our text for today which, beginning in verse 12, clearly teaches us that death spread to all of us by virtue of one man. While this thought takes a ton of work to unpack in totality, the overarching truth is that Adam stood as our representative before the Lord. His rebellion became our rebellion just as the actions of an ambassador who represents a country or people, are inextricably bound to all those the ambassador is supposed to represent.

Putting This Together

When Adam fell, we all fell and we did so for two reasons. First, we fell into sin because we are all descendants of a sinner. Each person reproduces what they are, when Adam fell into sin he passed on his sinful predisposition to his offspring. You will note that both popular views espouse this truth. Every single person is marked by sin because our parents passed on their sin nature. If we track this process of transmission, we will find it terminates in our common ancestor, Adam. Second, we fell into sin because Adam represented each and every one of us before the Lord. He was not some "loose cannon" whose actions constitute a one off in the overarching narrative of human history. Instead he was the first fruits and the chief representative of all of mankind at the time of his transgression. While we were not physically present, we were represented and, because he was our representative, his sin and subsequent condemnation flows down to all of us.

To summarize we could say that we are both guilty because of our own sin and guilty by our inextricable association with Adam in his first sin. Tomorrow we will deal with an objection to this teaching. We will see that the Bible utilizes this same kind of representative judgment in the Gospel. While it may seem as if you don't want this way of thinking to characterize you in Adam, I can assure you that you desire this same logic in regards to your representation in Christ!

Day 196 - July 14

Anthropology: Transmission of the Fall

1 Corinthians 15:20-22

The truth is that we could utilize Romans 5, once again, to understand the point of today's devotion. In fact, I would encourage you to go back and read yesterday's text as well as our passage for today in order to gain a full appreciation for the doctrine of representative headship. Yesterday we unpacked the "negative" side of representative headship. The reality is that all of mankind was plunged into death and condemnation by virtue of one man's sins. The reason for this judgment lies in Adam's stature as our representative before the Lord. We are judged, even before birth, not solely because of our own sin (even though we all certainly sin, but also because of our standing as descendants of Adam.)

Nevertheless, while it is true that in Adam's sin all men are judged, it is also gloriously true that in Christ all believing men are given grace. You see, the beauty of the Gospel is that this representative head doctrine works both ways. Not only do we suffer death because of the misdeeds of our first representative, Adam, we also enjoy righteousness because of our second representative, Jesus Christ.

The good news of the Bible's teaching on the subject is actually the inverse of what we read and studied yesterday. Just as you and I had no control over Adam's sin yet we bear the consequence. So, we had no role to play in the victory Christ won and yet we enjoy the spoils of His victory. We are made alive in Christ not because of our own efforts but because we are united with the One who has triumphed over sin and death!

When you and I stand before our Lord one day as believers, we will not be counted righteous because of our works, we will be counted righteous because of our representative, Jesus our great Savior! Now, just like the first Adam passed down to us a sinful nature which inevitably leads to sin. So, our second representative changes our nature which should inevitably lead to sanctification. Regardless, the joy of the Gospel is that our place is secure because our representative stands eternally victorious over sin.

Putting This Together

This doctrine is what leads us to joy and security. We are not justified based on our works (even though good works should come as a product of our justification), we are justified based on our relationship with the One who worked on our behalf. When God sees a disciple of Christ's, He does not see our sin and shame, He sees the very righteousness of our representative head and this sight alone is what gains us entrance into His Kingdom.

So, many of you yesterday were probably exclaiming "that's not fair!", but today I pray we recognize that we don't want "fair". Fair would be judgment for our sin and eternity apart from God. Instead, we want grace and we want to be eternally associated with the One who was perfect and whose sacrifice atones for all of our imperfections.

Day 197 - July 15

Soteriology: God's Motivation for Salvation, His Love

John 3:16

Now we turn the page to a subject that will consume a large portion of our year together. The term "soteriology" means the theology of salvation. This topic covers not only God's redemptive actions but also His activity in salvation and the intricacies behind the way salvation is accomplished and applied by our Triune God.

As we begin our journey through the Bible on this topic, we should begin by asking ourselves a simple question, what was God's motivation for salvation? While I fully believe that this will be the most obvious and basic devotion of the entire year, it is still crucial for us to reflect on the truth that one of (emphasize "one" not "only") God's reasons for salvation was His love for mankind.

We see this truth explicitly expressed in the most famous verse in all of the Bible, John 3:16. John reminds us that God's love for mankind was a motivating force behind salvation. Specifically, God's love is expressed in His sending of His Son and in His Son's substitutionary death. These related actions both represent a true sacrifice on God's behalf that brought pain and suffering.

One other truth is worth mentioning today. Not only is God's love expressed for "me", God's love is expressed to the entire "world". Jesus' mission was to redeem people from every tribe, tongue and nation which means His goal in redemption was diversity. There is no room in Christianity for racism as the very plan of God displays His love and concern for people of all nationalities. Any church that does not affirm God's equal concern for all people is a church that denies a fundamental truth of the Bible and, specifically, a fundamental goal of the Gospel of redemption.

Putting This Together

True love is easily identified in sacrifice. The simple truth is that we are only willing to sacrifice things that are most precious to us for ends that are most cherished by us. If we apply this same rubric to salvation, we see the depth of God's love.

As we will see, the Cross is a giant declaration of many characteristics of God but, at the very least, it serves as the ultimate statement of God's love for us. Whenever you are led to doubt or question God's feelings or His loyalty you need to look no further than the cross of Christ to refute whatever erroneous thoughts or feelings that might abound.

Day 198 - July 16

Soteriology: God's Motivation for Salvation, His Glory

Ephesians 1:4-14

When people think about God's motivation in salvation, they generally arrive at the conclusion we drew yesterday; that God redeemed man because He loves us. While we have seen that this is indeed a biblical teaching, we must understand that this is a truncated truth. If we simply view salvation as all about us, we will inevitably fall into a relationship with God that centers on us as well. While this might seem appealing, it does not lead to fulfillment and, even more seriously, it does not end in our faithfulness.

You see, God is ultimately NOT all about us (gasp!). Instead, God is actually chiefly concerned with His glory. In fact, we spoke about this truth several months ago in our section on theology proper. I'd encourage you to go back and read that devotion on God's glory if you need a refresher.

For today's purposes, we will examine a text that shows, unequivocally, that God's ultimate purpose in salvation was His praise and glory. Ephesians 1 is such a text; in fact, it is perhaps the most explicit and succinct summary of the Triune God's work in salvation in all of the Bible.

One helpful Bible interpretation hint is this, whatever God repeats in a passage, He most certainly wants us to understand and embrace. In this text, you will note that Paul repeats God's motivation in salvation three times. Notice in verses 6, 12 and 14 the phrase "to the praise of His glory" is repeated. Paul's desire is for each biblical reader to understand that every aspect of the salvation he describes terminates on the praise of God's glory.

Putting This Together

Why did God save us? Well, He saved us because He loves us but His love for us necessarily dictates our glorifying Him! These two things are not contradictory, in fact, God knows that our glorifying Him is the way we find our true purpose and meaning in life and, therefore, His love for His name is totally consistent with His love for us.

Nevertheless, we must draw the conclusion that salvation is not ultimately about us. God did not save us in order to become our cosmic butler who does our bidding in answering whatever request we may have of Him. No, God saved us in order that we would serve Him. God saved us in order to redeem a remnant of faithful men and women who would bring Him the glory He so richly deserves.

Oddly enough, when we find this true meaning in life, we find fulfillment. As we close, I'm happy to repeat a common refrain that my parents often aimed towards me in childhood, "life isn't about you"! While they may not have meant this in the ultimate theological sense, what they intended with their words was not my frustration or diminishment but my ultimate joy. We know, intuitively, that life cannot be simply about our desires, in the cross of Christ we find that life is defined and ordered around the One who deserves our worship.

See also: 1 John 2:12

Day 199 - July 17

Soteriology: God's Motivation for Salvation, His Glory

Psalm 106:8

Ephesians 1 is so clear that we could have taken its instruction and moved forward in our study. While I certainly affirm that one explicit text is enough, I'd like for us to see today that this theme of God's salvation for His glory is a consistent teaching throughout the Old and New Testaments.

Today's passage is referring back to the salvation of Israel at the Red Sea. You all know this famous account of Israel's preservation through the waters and Egypt's subsequent destruction. The Psalm writer recounts two truths in this passage that are important. First, he reminds us that Israel was saved despite their rebellion (v. 7). The point is that they did not deserve the preservation that they ultimately enjoyed. God's salvation was not given to them based on their merit or outstanding faith. There was another reason for salvation, God saved Israel for the glory of His name.

His glory was manifest both in His power to overcome the mighty foe of Egypt and in the reverberations that the miraculous act of preservation through the sea caused amongst the peoples of the earth. The point that the author is making is that God's salvation was chiefly concerned with His name!

Over and over in the Old Testament you will read the Lord's statements about why He is continuing to preserve Israel. Often, He will say things like, I am not saving you because you deserve it, I am saving you so that my name will not be profaned. God's name was inextricably tied to Israel which meant that Israel's destruction would lead to His own shame. It was because of His desire to keep His own name from ridicule amongst the nations that God continued to save His people.

Putting This Together

My hope is that our continual journey through these various topics will begin to help each of us form connections as we see how all of these truths fit together. Several months ago, we learned that God is unchanging. There is no variation in God which means there is no change in His character from the Old to the New Testament. God is still preserving His people (the church) for His namesake. If the church were to cease to exist, God would suffer shame, and this simply will not happen. God will continue to keep the church in order to establish and protect His name amongst the nations.

Here is one point of application in light of this truth, your preservation in salvation is not ultimately about you or what you do, it is chiefly about God and His power to deliver on His promises. Now, this does not mean that God is unconcerned with your sanctification or that you have no responsibility to grow in holiness. We know that we should be striving towards a more righteous life. Nevertheless, we will ultimately be preserved because if we were not, God would be seen as incompetent to deliver on His promises to protect and guard His flock. Our security is, at least partially, found in His jealousy for the glory of His name.

Day 200 - July 18

Soteriology: The Eternal Decree of God

1 Corinthians 2:1-7

Over the next several days we will be looking at the nature and scope of God's decree. The term "decree" simply means that which God has established or determined to come to pass. We will see that God's decree, or plan, is totally exhaustive, but today let us think about the truth that God's decree or plan has existed for all eternity.

1 Corinthians 2 begins with a brief section on the subject of Christ crucified. The contrast in verse 1-5 is between the "wisdom of man" (which rejects the Cross as foolishness) and the "power of God" (which is manifest in the death and resurrection of Christ). This gives a bit of context to the Apostle's teaching in verse 7 when he says that the hidden "wisdom of God" was decreed before the ages.

We will return to the idea of the wisdom of God in Christ but for today's purposes let's zero in on when this decree took place. The phrase Paul utilizes to describe the time in which God made His decree is "before the ages". The term is a way to refer to before time began. In a real sense, what Paul means is that this wise decree took place in eternity past. There was never a moment in which God's plan was not in existence, instead, for all eternity His wise course of action simply was.

Putting This Together

What this means is that God has never had to "audible". Some people think that the fall took God off guard or, at the very least, cause Him to alter His plan to "plan B". They say that God did not know if Adam and Eve would fall and, therefore, had a contingency in place in case things didn't work out. This might sound noble and even responsible but it flies in the face of the omniscience of God (do you see how we are now making connections between theology proper and salvation?). God knows all things and has always known all things including how every event is going to transpire!

It is certainly true that events and situations take us by surprise but our great God has had a plan from the very beginning the encompasses and incorporates every single action of man. May this truth inspire worship in our hearts today as we reflect on the majesty and wisdom and might of our great God who is always and forever in control without being knocked off course, even for a single moment in time.

Day 201 - July 19

Soteriology: The Eternal Decree of God

2 Timothy 1:9

Yesterday we began to see the enduring and eternal nature of God's decree. Today's text cements the teaching that nothing can thwart God's plan. Think about this for a moment, can you or I guarantee anything before it happens? While our pride might rise up with a resounding "yes!" the truth of the matter is that we encounter various problems and obstacles that can frustrate or even change our plans all of which are outside of our control.

In stark contrast to our feeble plans, our great God is able to accomplish whatever He wants and, therefore, can guarantee events and accomplishments even in the future. Our passage for today is one such example of God's ability to transcend time while guaranteeing things in the future. This text teaches a doctrine called "particular redemption", I want you to remember that phrase as we will return to it in a few days but for today let's focus on what Paul means when he writes "he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began."

This verse is speaking about salvation and the reality that we were given to Christ before time. Now, this presents some obvious problems, does it not? How could Christ have been given each of His children before time if He had not died to redeem them yet? Was it really sure that each and every person who God purposed to receive grace would actually enjoy the grace that comes through faith in Christ?

The answer is a resounding "yes!" and the reason is very simply found in God's eternal decree. While we know that Jesus' death took place in a moment in time, it was assured of both its happening and efficacy long before the world began. After all, God knew all that would come to pass and His plan was undergirded by His power to bring all things together to accomplish His goal. This meant that God could bestow grace upon each of His children with all sincerity and reliability even before they lived and prior to Christ's death on the cross. Our God's Word is as good as the occurrence of whatever event He promises.

Putting This Together

One fundamental Christian belief is that our God is not like us. Obviously, there are many reasons why we believe in God's differentiation from His Creation but, perhaps at the top of the list, lies the truth that God accomplishes everything He desires. His Word is His bond and His Word can be trusted because He knows all that will come to pass and is powerful enough to destroy any obstacle in His way.

Day 202 - July 20

Soteriology: The Unconditional Nature of God's Eternal Decree

Daniel 4:35

Daniel 4 records an interesting and enlightening narrative of the demise and restoration of the ruler Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was a mighty king by any worldly standard and yet, his might was easily overcome by God. The account tells us of God's judgment on Nebuchadnezzar whereby he was rendered temporarily insane. At the end of this experience, Nebuchadnezzar is restored and marvels at the power and glory of God.

Verses 34 and 35 record the words of the restored king. They read as a testimonial of the might of God as experienced in the king's life. There is one phrase that is of particular note today, it is found in verse 35 when the king says "none can stay his (God's) hand or say to him, 'what have you done?'" The point that Nebuchadnezzar is making is that God's decree is unconditional.

His phrase has great credibility to it when we consider the source. If anyone could "stay" the hand of the Lord it would be a mighty king of an empire like Babylon. He represented the very best that the world had to offer and yet he proved to be overwhelmed by the power of God. Not only did Nebuchadnezzar succumb to God's will, he did so without even so much as a fight! God decreed Nebuchadnezzar's demise and it simply happened.

The truth is that Nebuchadnezzar just illustrates the point we have made over these past few days, God will not be overcome. No power, no principality, no disease or calamity will alter God's plan. In fact, all of those things are operating in accordance with His Sovereign purposes. God's decree is unconditional and, believe it or not, this is good news for those who believe!

Putting This Together

I realize that this is a basic concept but I wonder how many of us really grasp it. Do we truly believe that no one can stay His hand? Do we understand and grasp the magnitude and glory of the One who cannot be conquered? If we do, we will progressively learn to rest in His Sovereignty and give Him the praise He deserves as the matchless, all wise King.

Today, as you read Scripture, study and pray. Take heart in knowing that every promise and every prediction you read is authored by the One who will not be overcome. No enemy will prevail over and against God's righteous decree.

Day 203 - July 21

Soteriology: The Unconditional Nature of God's Decree

Numbers 23:19

Yesterday we covered the glorious truth that God's plan cannot be thwarted by anyone or anything. He is more than powerful enough to overcome any potential foe or circumstance and He is all-knowing which means, among other things, that nothing ever takes Him by surprise.

While this is undoubtedly good news, there is still one question we must answer regarding the enduring nature of God's decree. Even though we know God cannot be overcome and therefore He will accomplish all that He desires, is it possible that God could change His mind? Stated differently, could God ordain something and then decide to do something different?

The answer to this question is found in Numbers 23. This text provides us with two helpful reminders. The first is that God cannot lie. Whatever He has said to us is enduring in nature. He will never renege on a promise which means that absolutely everything we read in His Word is totally binding upon Him.

The truth that God cannot lie is what gives us hope when we read further in verse 19 that God is not a man that He should change His mind. One fundamental difference between God and man is that He is dead set on everything that He ordains. There are several reasons for this commitment. First, as noted above, God is not a liar. He cannot and will not default on a promise. However, there are many ordained events within His eternal decree that we simply do not know anything about. God has not given us the names of each person who will be saved. This means that He would not be guilty of dishonesty towards us if He were to change His Sovereign plan in areas in which it hasn't been revealed. We affirm that the secret things belong only to the Lord (Deuteronomy 29:29) and yet we also rest in the promise revealed in this passage that God will not change His mind.

He does not vacillate between one thought or the other. He does not shift based on His current feelings or new information. Instead, God's eternal decree is unchanging because it is concocted by our great and immutable God.

Putting This Together

We have hope because of God's immutability (unchanging nature) and His revealed Word which informs us of His plan. We can rest in knowing that all that God has said will come to pass and nothing will be altered because our God will never modify His great plans.

Day 204 - July 22

Soteriology: The Exhaustive Nature of God's Decree

Romans 8:28

Thus far, we have established that God's plan is eternal in its origin and unchanging in its nature. Now, we will see that it is exhaustive in its scope. Some people would like to believe that God is active only in the "big" things in life. Of course, what constitutes "big" or "important" is an exercise in subjective thinking. What might seem miniscule to me may be gravely important to someone else. Regardless, the Scripture is quite clear that God's decree encompasses all things, large and small.

Romans 8:28 is one of my favorite verses and, from my interaction with many of you, it is a favorite of yours as well! The promise is marvelous in that it is unconditional in nature and exhaustive in its scope. You will note that Paul says that God works "all things" together for the good of those who know Him. The term "all" needs no explanation (I hope!), as it pertains to literally every event, circumstance and interaction that we encounter on this planet.

This text reminds us that God is concerned with literally everything. There is absolutely nothing in the solar system that "randomly occurs". Instead, all things have purpose as all things lead towards the consummation of God's decree.

Putting this Together

Over the next several days, we will drill down on a few of the various arenas that specific some of the aspects of life that God dictates. Today however, I'd like for you just to reflect on the joy of knowing the Lord and contemplating the reality that because He is Sovereign over all things, every event in your life has purpose. If this world were left to chance then we could not be assured that every tragedy and triumph leads to any logical conclusion. Instead, we would simply be floating through life hoping to avoid the negative chance encounters with no real foundation for enduring difficulty and no real reason to experience joy in the happy moments. If this life is all that there is, if there is no Being to bring purpose and reasons for all that we experience, then we might as well do whatever we want as we await the inevitable.

If that idea seems depressing its because it is! No one truly wants to live that way and, by God's grace, we don't have to live without meaning. The exhaustive nature of God's plan means that we can rest in knowing that even the most difficult moments and seasons of life bring purpose and ultimate joy for those who believe. If you are grieving right now, grieve as those with hope (1 Thessalonians 4) because the God who has a good plan for your life has ordained that this come to pass not for your pain alone but for your sanctification and growth. He will see you through because He loves you and has accounted for everything that happens in your life.

Day 205 - July 23

Soteriology: The Exhaustive Nature of God's Decree

Job 37:10-13

Our purpose for the next few days is to take things slowly and linger over the gravity of what we've already learned regarding the exhaustive nature of God's decree. While it would be enough to understand the teaching of Romans 8 and simply move forward, let's take a few days to think about how God's decree encompasses so many aspects of our lives and creation in order to gain a healthy respect for the true incomprehensibility of God.

Today's text speaks specifically about God's design in nature. You will note that Elihu (Job's "friend") lists several different natural weather phenomena (ice, rain, wind) in order to illustrate his point that all of nature serves God's purposes.

Of particular note is verse 13 in which Elihu mentions the fact that these weather patterns constitute both God's care for His creation and His judgment. Sometimes, according to Elihu, God brings about weather for correction. This could be in the form of drought, or natural disasters or even unseasonable temperatures that harm various crops. God is able to use weather for judgment, and has done so many times in human history.

The most obvious example of this is the flood. The Bible is clear that the rain was evidence of God's displeasure towards mankind and yet we also read that rain is a blessing. In fact, one of the most well known verses on the subject of "common grace" (the idea that God shows a measure of kindness to lost and saved men alike) is found in Matthew 5:45 where we learn that God causes rain (in this case representing good, replenishment) on the just and the unjust. The point is that God's stewardship of the weather serves His larger purposes in bringing about His plan of both blessing and curse.

Putting This Together

This devotion is not intended as an appeal to try to discern what God is doing in each and every storm! Instead, it is a reminder that God's purposes extend to things that we consider "natural" and even "trivial". The rain shower that we don't think twice about is accomplishing God's plan of blessing just as the cataclysmic event may well be accomplishing judgment. Whatever the case, our goal is not to discern the "secret things" (remember Deuteronomy 29:29), instead it is to praise our God who is active and purposeful in all things.

Day 206 - July 24

Soteriology: The Exhaustive Nature of God's Decree

Matthew 10:29

Thus far we have seen that God is active and purposeful in all weather events. Today, we will note that God is aware of absolutely every animal and their lifespan. Jesus' words are recorded for us in Matthew 10. In verse 29 He references a sparrow which was a typical, relatively cheap commodity. They were not highly esteemed nor were they really even thought of by the men of the day, save on their grocery list for the week!

The point that Jesus is making is that while mankind lives without much consideration at all for a sparrow, God is intimately aware of every detail of their lives. He knows the moment they are born; He knows what they are doing and what they are on earth to accomplish and He knows when they ultimately pass away.

The sparrow is meant to be representative of all of nature. Christ is most assuredly not teaching that God is ONLY mindful of sparrows while goats, cows, horses and the like slip through the cracks. No, the fact that God cares about a measly sparrow shows that He is abreast of everything that happens in the world. God differentiates Himself from us both in His knowledge of and control over all things, even the seemingly trivial.

The obvious implication that Christ is making in verse 29 is explicitly stated in verse 31 where Jesus says that we are of infinitely more value than the sparrows. If God is mindful of such a relatively inconsequential bird, how much more mindful is He of me and you?

Putting This Together

What is the value in knowing that God is aware of the life and death of all of His creatures? Well, one valuable insight is that God's concern for the least of His Creation is a powerful reminder that He has not forgotten you! It is easy to wonder whether or not God has lost track of us at various times in life. We can wonder if He has let our situations slip or if He still cares about us but Christ helps us by reminding us to merely look outside of our homes and observe the birds. They live because God ordains their life and their existence serves as a reminder that He is mindful of all things. After all, it is only possible for God to work "all things" for our good unless He is indeed working in and through absolutely "all things".

Day 207 - July 25

Soteriology: The Exhaustive Nature of God's Decree

Daniel 2:21

There may be no more divisive and popular discussion in the country than that of politics. It seems like every election and every new cycle brings more fervor to the dialogue with believers right in the middle of the mix! While God's Sovereignty does not preclude our own responsibility (a subject we will cover in time), the fact that God is in fact Sovereign over all things, including elections and administrations is comforting to say the least.

Daniel 2 records a glorious statement about God's activity within the realm of government stating that it is in fact God who removes and sets up Kings. The term "kings" here is obviously in reference to various monarchs, but it can also be applied more generally to anyone in governmental authority.

When we understand this verse in its historical context, we can grow to understand the weight of the words that Daniel utters. You see, the nation of Israel was suffering underneath the hand of the Babylonian Empire at the time of Daniel's teaching. In fact, Daniel is speaking these words to a man named Nebuchadnezzar who was the very archetype of Israel's oppression! These words were not uttered flippantly or in the midst of a utopian existence. Instead, they were shared by a man who was living in a foreign land with an intense desire to return him. In spite of these circumstances, Daniel reminds the King (and us) that God is in complete control of the governing authorities.

The point is quite clear, God accomplishes His purposes through each and every man or woman He raises up for leadership. Obviously, many of these folks are purely evil. This text does not deny that truth, in fact, in a roundabout way it affirms it as God's majesty is even more noticeable in His ability to utilize truly rotten individuals for His good plan. Furthermore, sometimes God's plan includes judgment (remember what we discussed with the weather in Job 37?). Regardless, God is carrying out His decree just as He has ordained in every political season of life.

The larger point of the text and devotion is that we can rest in God's good plan. Remember, we read just a few days ago that "all things work together for the good of those who love Him" (Romans 8:28), all things undoubtedly include politics and elections. This does not deny that evil men rule and rein. Nor does it preclude the possibility of our own suffering for righteousness sake (this is the point of the book of 1 Peter), what it does mean is that we will be victorious and we need not fret or fear that the world is out of the Sovereign's control.

Putting This Together

There are a variety of ways we could go with this devotion but perhaps this one will be most applicable to each of us. Folks, if we really believe this truth then we must act accordingly. I want to challenge you to spend less time fretting about this elected official or that election and spend more time dwelling on the power and presence of the God who has promised to control absolutely everything that takes place. By all means, vote and participate as God's representative in the public square, but remember that our participation is less about earthly political clout and more about the glory of our God who has promised us an eternal kingdom devoid of all of the problems of this world.

Day 208 - July 26

Soteriology: The Exhaustive Nature of God's Decree

Psalm 139:16

We have seen that God's decree includes control over weather, animals, politics and now we will see it encompasses each individual life. Psalm 139 is full of wonderful truths about the nature of man and the life we live. This verse is often used to argue for life at conception as David states that He was seen before He was formed, denoting God's mindfulness of him before David was even living.

For our purposes today, we will concentrate on David's words saying "in your book were written the days that were formed for me". We see a similar theme here as to that which we unpacked in Matthew 10 regarding the sparrows. David acknowledges the truth that God is intimately aware of all of his days on earth. Not only that, but God's decree for those days extends from eternity past. David says that these days were formed "when as yet there were none of them."

God's decree for David as an individual existed before each planned day came into being. David's life fit into the larger plan of God's decree perfectly... and so does yours! Each day that you live has been ordained and known by God for eternity. He knows where you're headed, what you're going to do, what you will say, how you will sin, the ways in which you will bring glory to him and the people you will see along the way. There is literally nothing that will escape His plan otherwise known as His Sovereign decree.

Putting This Together

Tomorrow's text will summarize the overarching truth of the scope of God's decree so today let us pause for a moment and thank God for His plan for our lives. I'll admit this is much more devotional than theological (although they most certainly always intersect) but I'd like to challenge you to think about all of the graces God has placed in your life over the years. Think about the kindness God has shown you in putting wonderful, godly folks in your life.

Almost all of us are the product of years of investment of godly men and women who have served as our examples. Think about the "good fortune", which is really a worldly way of saying God's matchless providence, that you have enjoyed in your time on earth. Think about God's grace and all of the good gifts that He has given. After all, nothing has happened to you by coincidence, all of your days have been formed for you even before you came into being!

Day 209 - July 27

Soteriology: The Exhaustive Nature of God's Decree

Romans 11:36

Well, we have reached the end of our deep dive into the various components or arenas over which God's decree reigns. Obviously, God's decree covers every area of our life. There are a multitude of components of God's decree that we have not covered, still I hope that you have gotten the picture! Today's text teaches us not only the exhaustive nature of God's decree but also the source and goal of God's perfect plan.

Notice three things about this text. First, Paul clearly cites God as the origin of all things. God's decree does not merely incorporate components from outside sources, instead God's plan utilizes only those things which He has created which happens to be everything! All things are "from him".

Second, you will note that all things are "through him". Acts 17 reminds us that it is in him and through him that all humanity lives and moves and has our being. While Paul is undoubtedly correct in stating that God is the originator and sustenance of life for all humanity, his statement could have broadened significantly to include literally everything. There is nothing that exists that does not have God's name stamped on it as Creator.

Third, you will notice that all things are "to him". This means that the entire decree or plan of God is ultimately leading towards God. Specifically, they are leading to His renown and His glory. He alone is the reason for everything and He alone serves as the ultimate goal of all things. His plan does not terminate on the glory of another, His plan terminates on His own recognition as the unmatched God of the universe.

Putting This Together

When we are tempted to ask the question "why?", we should remember this text. There is some way in which all things, which were created by God and are being sustained by God, are moving towards the ultimate glory of God. To be sure, many things will be destroyed, but this will bring glory to God as the world sees His power. Other things will be restored, this will bring glory to God as we see His marvelous ability to redeem. Those who are believers will be saved, this will bring glory to God as we praise His name for our salvation. In short, the decree terminates in one thing, the rightful praise of the Most High God.

Day 210- July 28

Soteriology: God's Decree in Salvation

Ephesians 1:4-5

I will admit that it may seem as if we have belabored the last point of the scope of God's decree. My hope is that you will grow to see that we did so with a specific purpose in mind. As we contemplate the scope and inevitability of God's decree, I hope you can begin to understand that man's salvation must fit into His eternal, purposeful design.

Many of us like to think that salvation somehow transcends the rest of God's plan. As if, somehow, God has purposed all things but man is still in control of his destiny. The reality is that the Gospel should be proclaimed to all men and that all of us are responsible to respond, but we also must realize that God's Sovereignty extends to our salvation.

The simple truth is that the Bible is explicit on the subject. I realize that many are uncomfortable with what the Scriptures say, but this cannot negate the fact that the teaching on the topic of man's redemption is totally consistent. Just as God has purposed and ordained when a bird dies, or what type of weather we will experience, or when a King ascends to the throne, so God has purposed who will know Him and when.

We call this doctrine "particular election". It means that God has ordained for all of His children to come to know Him in salvation. We see this teaching quite clearly in Ephesians 1:4 which says that God "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." Frankly, Paul could not have been more clear or consistent.

Here is what the Apostle is saying as succinctly as I can state it, God's eternal decree includes the salvation of those who will comprise His church. Verse 5 tells us that it is according to the purpose of His will that He has done so and, therefore, we can see that salvation is not haphazard or random, instead it is tied specifically to God's Sovereign design.

Putting This Together

Tomorrow we will look at another passage on the subject but for today I would challenge you to marvel at God's goodness if you are indeed a believer. Before you were born, He had His eyes set on you! He knew the day you would come to meet Him and He knew the instruments He would use to draw you to Himself. If you believe, you were always going to be a disciple of His and, by His grace, He will never leave those He purposes to save.

Day 211 - July 29

Soteriology: God's Decree in Salvation

2 Thessalonians 2:13

Some people have stated that the doctrine of particular election is a purely New Testament teaching but 2 Thessalonians 2 alludes to an Old Testament text which teaches us that God has been in the business of identifying those whom He would redeem from the beginning. You will note the straight forward language Paul employs yet again as he bluntly states that the church was saved by virtue of the fact that God "chose you".

There is very little escaping this kind of vernacular. Over and over again we see the truth that God chooses those who will comprise His redeemed. You will note that Paul utilizes the past tense verb saying God "chose". It means that in eternity past the Lord Sovereignly decreed each person's salvation to come to pass. In other words, who is given salvation is not decided in the moment, its been settled for a long, long time!

One interesting note in regards to this passage is its apparent parallel with the Old Testament text of Deuteronomy 26:18. Deuteronomy 26 records Moses' words to the people of Israel whereby he reminds them that God declared them a people for His own possession. While God could have chosen any nation or any person to begin a nation, God in His Sovereign Wisdom chose Abraham and the descending nation of Israel to redeem and work through.

Why did God do this? The only answer we have is that it pleased Him to do so. It was not that Abraham had any merit before the Lord, in fact he was a pagan like everyone else before God called Him. Concurrently, God did not choose Israel due to their relative might or number, in fact God chose them in spite of their small size and weakness. It was in His Sovereign decree to work in and through Israel and, it is in His Sovereign decree to work through His relatively sparse and weak church for His glory.

Putting This Together

We are not saved because we are smarter or more gifted than the next person. Instead, we are saved by God's grace and for His glory alone. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ today, it is not because of your superior intellect, it isn't because of your natural morality, it is solely because of God's Sovereign decree. May this elicit humility in our hearts and lives and may we rejoice at God's unmerited grace and favor as we live our lives for His glory and honor.

Day 212 - July 30

Soteriology: God's Decree in Salvation

1 Thessalonians 1:4

1 Thessalonians 1 records another instance of Paul's teaching on particular redemption. In this case, the Apostle refers to the quality of each believer's life as evidence that God had indeed chosen them. The chain here is important, we know that we have been saved, particularly redeemed, by God in light of the sanctification that is taking place in our lives. Sanctification (the process of growing in holiness) is the indicator of justification (the moment that God saves a person, declaring them totally righteous in His sight) because it is the testimony of the power and presence of God in our lives which would not be present save regeneration, or the changing of our hearts. Justification happens in a moment, God declares us righteous, sanctification happens over a lifetime as we continue to grow in the holiness that God has bought for us.

Of note in this text is the order. Paul is not saying that sanctification merits, or earns, justification instead he is saying that justification necessarily results in sanctification. Those who are chosen are not selected because they are inherently sanctified, they are chosen in order that they would be sanctified by God.

Putting This Together

I hope that you see the biblical testimony of God's Sovereign decree in salvation that we call particular redemption. The truth is that from start to finish we see God's Sovereignty on display as He chooses whom He will use and to what end. Still, in closing I would like to deal with one objection to this doctrine. Some people, in an effort to resist this teaching, will say that God does not actively choose who will be saved, instead He merely looks down the corridor of time to see who would choose Him and then, subsequently, chooses them alone for salvation.

This idea makes man the one who dictates his salvation and, therefore, is appealing to many in the world today. There are at least two problems with this reasoning, first the Bible does not state this anywhere. At best, this is an inference rather than a direct teaching of the Scripture. Second, and more importantly, this doctrine refutes a truth we learned many months ago about the omniscience of God.

If you remember, we said that God is omniscient, which means He is all-knowing. The doctrine simply means that God has not and will not ever "learn" anything. After all, if He could learn something this means He wouldn't know everything and if He doesn't know everything, He ceases to be God because He is finite in His understanding and He has lied to us in His Word on the subject. May it never be! No, this idea that God has looked down the corridor of time to see who would choose Him absolutely requires God to learn something He didn't already know. After all, if He must gaze into the future to make His judgment as to who would ultimately decide to follow Him then He doesn't inherently know who would be saved until He looks! This refutes biblical teaching even if it makes some feel better.

The biblical teaching on the subject is clear. God is absolutely omniscient and He is totally sovereign. This means that He knows all things and dictates all things, including salvation.

Day 213 - July 31

Soteriology: God's Decree in Salvation

Deuteronomy 7:7-8

We still have a few questions left to answer but perhaps the most pressing question is why? Why would God particularly redeem me? The answer is found in Deuteronomy 7 in which God reminds the people of Israel that His choice of them was not due to their strength or character but to His grace alone.

As we read through the annals of the history of Israel, it is increasingly clear that there was nothing naturally appealing about Israel! They were marked by the same sin as their pagan counterparts, they were not particularly powerful or numerous, they didn't even have a homeland when God rescued them from Israel.

The reason for their election was not in their own qualification, the reason for their relationship with the Lord was simply God's grace. God chose Israel out of pure love and mercy. God decided to set His love on Abraham and His descendants in order to show His power and display His mercy in redemption.

His salvation was initiated by His love and it was sustained by His trustworthiness. Once God promised Israel His protective hand, He would not go back on His Word. Instead, He committed to walk with them through thick and thin and never forsake them, even in times of righteous indignation and judgment. While God would chastise His people, He would never forsake them!

Putting This Together

Likewise, you and I have been redeemed by grace. We do not deserve God's favor but we can trust in His protection. Why? Not because we continue to earn His presence but because He has chosen to promise it to us. The greatest means of assurance for every believer today is in God's Word and His character both of which guarantee His preserving power in our lives.

This means that we need not worry when we fall. God loves us and preserves us anyway! This means that we can walk with confidence that we will be saved. God's righteous character demands His faithfulness to His promise. Finally, it means we have great reason to worship. After all, God has done all that is necessary for us to be with Him. We bring nothing to the table but we benefit from all that God is and does on our behalf.