

## SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Paradoxology | Truth In Contradiction

TITLE: The Salvation Paradox

SCRIPTURE: John 16:16-30; 17:11-12

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Following Jesus is not always easy. Most Christians want their faith journey to be simple and clear—either/or, black/white, yes/no. However, life with God is often found in both/and tensions or paradoxes. The essence of a paradox is bringing together two seemingly contradictory statements, and the Bible is full of them. God is one; God is three. Jesus is God; Jesus is man. To save your life, you should lose it. To be mature, you should become like a child. And following Jesus into tensions like these is where faith is meant to flourish. Embracing seeming contradictions like these leads to doxology—a life of intentional worship.

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Question—*Do we have free will or is every choice we make pre-determined?* This may surprise you, but this is a huge philosophical question that people outside the church are debating about these days. Leading atheists are united in their belief that free will is an illusion. They believe that all our thoughts and actions come from background causes that we're not aware of and over which we have no control. All this actually boils down to saying that things like courage, compassion, love, integrity, even wickedness don't stem from the conscious choices we make, but from outside causes that determine how we act and react. And that means—even though these people are trying hard not to say this—it means, we really can't hold people responsible for their actions. Crazy stuff!

When you bring this question into the church, the conversation revolves around God's sovereignty and human responsibility—Did you choose God or did God choose you? ...The way I understand Scripture, I believe the Bible teaches both without diminishing one or the other. You could call this The Salvation Paradox. The way we are going to come at this paradox is by looking at what the bible says about Judas, the disciple who betrayed Jesus. The question is: *Did Judas freely choose to betray Jesus or did God pre-determine that he would betray Jesus?* The Bible tells us that the betrayal of Jesus had to happen (1 Peter 1:18-21) and Peter tells us in Acts 1:16 that the betrayer's name was Judas. *So, did Judas have a choice in all this or was he pre-programmed to be a kind of robot assassin of the Son of God?*

Read John 13:16-30 and 17:11-12. In both passages, Jesus speaks of prophecy being fulfilled. Later in Acts, Peter says that the Holy Spirit predicted in advance that one of Jesus' friends would betray him and Peter names the betrayer as Judas. *So, does predicted mean pre-programmed? Did Judas have no choice in the matter?* Not according to John Calvin. Calvin says—"I acknowledge that nothing happens but what has been appointed by God, but the question is: Do those things which have been foretold or predicted, lay men under a necessity (to do them)? [No,] Judas fell away, not being compelled by the prophecy, but only by the malice of his own heart. So, Calvin himself didn't believe that Judas was pre-programmed by God to betray Jesus even though God pre-determined that he would be the betrayer. *But how exactly does that work?*

J.I. Packer talks about God's sovereignty over all things and our freedom to make responsible choices as an "antinomy"—a kind of paradox where you have two opposing statements and you can't explain them or make them square with each other.

Scripture teaches that God, as King, orders and controls all things, including what we do and don't do, in accordance with his own eternal purposes (see Psalm 135:6; Proverbs 16:4; Proverbs 21:1; Ephesians 1:11-12). As King, God is sovereign over all things, including our decisions and actions.

Scripture also teaches that God, as Judge, holds everyone responsible for the choices they make and the actions they take. God gave OT laws to Israel and he held them accountable for obeying those laws or disobeying those laws. When talking to Nicodemus, Jesus makes it clear that people who do not believe are condemned because they don't believe. That is, the responsibility for their unbelief is their alone.

Also, God's sovereignty and human responsibility are taught side-by-side in passages like Luke 22:22 and Acts 2:23.

Clearly, God predetermined all things pertaining to the suffering and death of Christ. Certain details of his betrayal, arrest, suffering, and death were predicted in OT Scripture like Psalm 22. But, *pre-determined* and *predicted* do not mean *pre-programmed*.

The Scriptures make it clear that God, the King, is divinely sovereign over all things, and God, the Judge, holds every person responsible for their choices and actions. Both are equally true. However, the temptation is to underemphasize one truth by overemphasizing the other—to stress human responsibility in a way that undercuts God's sovereignty or to stress God's sovereignty in a way that destroys human responsibility.

First, resist emphasizing God's sovereignty over human responsibility.

Second, resist emphasizing human responsibility over God's sovereignty.

God is in control, but he chooses not to exert his control in ways that rob us of our freedom to make responsible choices. Resist emphasizing one side of this great doctrine over the other.

Two Application from this Salvation Paradox

1. Let this paradox lead you to \_\_\_\_\_ a God who is bigger than you understand him to be.
2. Let this paradox lead you to take seriously your \_\_\_\_\_ to make wise, faithful choices.

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*For Discussion —*

1. What stood out to you the most from the message and from the supporting Bible passages?
2. Why do you think that materialistic atheists find it so easy to dismiss the idea that we have free will?
3. Read the Judas story John 13:16-30 and Jesus comments about Judas in John 17:11-12. Where in these verses do you see the outworking of God's predetermined plan and where do you see Judas acting on his own volition? (hint on this last point: What does Jesus' interaction with Judas tell you about the chances he had to not go through with his betrayal plan?)
4. In this whole discussion about divine sovereignty and human responsibility, which side do you tend to put the most emphasis on?
5. Is Packer's "antinomy" view of divine sovereignty and human responsibility helpful to you—why or why not?
6. How might this paradox/antinomy lead you to worship?
7. How does this paradox lead you to take seriously the choices you make?