

God's Sovereignty

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Date: 22 November 2015

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[0 : 00] From their perception, France is a Christian nation we know much better. Christianity is viewed so often as a political ideology by those in the East.

! And it's important for us to stop and to consider tragedies. So why did we not do it last Sunday? When do we allow current events to interrupt our exposition of the Scripture?

Because, to be quite frank, we could do that on any given Sunday. I could sit around during the week and just pay attention to what's being spoken about in social media.

And pay attention to the current events. And there would always be something that would come in and would interrupt working through the Scripture. It seems to me that we would tend to address these things in the same way again and again and again, as we'll do this morning.

Just to give you some idea of this, and I'm not belittling the tragedy that happened in France by any stretch of the imagination, but just to give you an idea of terrorism.

[1 : 10] What's happened this year? Terrorist attacks just this year. Interestingly, you can access the Global Terrorism Database. Oh, the power of the Internet.

And find that in January 3rd through January 7th of this year, more than 2,000 Nigerians were killed by Boko Haram militants. January 25th, more than 67 in the Philippines were killed by Islamic freedom fighters.

January 30th, another 60 in Pakistan by the Taliban. The total just in January was more than 2,355 people worldwide killed by terrorists.

I've got a whole list of them here. I'll give you a couple of other examples. These are the big numbered ones. February 4th, more than 91 in Cameroon. These are all Islamic terrorist groups.

March 20th, 137 in Yemen. April 1st, more than 147 in Kenya. June 25th, 146 in Syria.

[2 : 17] June 26th, 70 in Somalia. July 1st, 145 in Nigeria. July 17th, 180 in Iraq.

September 20th, 145 in Nigeria. October 10th, 102 in Turkey. October 31st, 224 in Egypt.

And I am skipping over even months. These are the big numbers, the ones that stand out as you scroll down the list. Since the attack on November 13th.

So beginning that next Saturday, November 14th, up until yesterday, an additional 102 people have died from terrorist attacks.

So, what causes us to stop? What bears enough weight to cause us to stop?

[3 : 14] And I think this Sunday is particularly valuable to do so because this particular attack has really stuck. Maybe that's because it's gotten so much media coverage. It's probably gotten so much media coverage because France has been an ally of ours.

Because they're seen as a Western country. Because it was an attack, at very least, on the political ideology that Muslims, radical Muslims, attach to Christianity.

Maybe all these reasons are why. I don't really know why. But it certainly stuck in our consciousness, hasn't it? We stopped and we paid attention. It was on every media outlet.

It was difficult to miss. While you may have missed most or all of the ones that I just mentioned, you would have had to go look for those statistics. So, here we have this one.

And I think it's important and valuable for us to consider it together. Now, just as a brief side note, the Internet is a pretty amazing tool, isn't it?

[4 : 18] And the Internet has given all of us a voice. What an amazing thing that we can put out there on the World Wide Web, what we think about a particular issue.

But it's also to our detriment that it's given us all a voice, isn't it? I read a Gospel Coalition article this week that said that everyone is entitled to their opinion, but not everyone is entitled to their own facts.

And things fly around on social media so very quickly. If you're not on social media, good for you. It can be so distracting.

Beloved, we live in a republic. And let me just say, the place to have political debate is not on Facebook. Have you ever seen a political debate that was beneficial to anybody on Facebook? I haven't. Maybe you're more active than I am in these places. It's not the place to post the article. It's not the place to have the debate. It never ends well. If you want to be an activist, please do so. [5 : 25] Call your senator. Call your congressman. There's a way to do that in a republic. Unless you happen to know a congressman so well that he follows your Facebook feed and keeps up with your opinion on a matter.

Just don't. Use it for what it's made for. Post pictures of your kids or your dog or your vacation. Let's go there and share the happy parts of our lives together.

I just would strongly suggest to you that you not air your opinions in these matters in this way. Have an opinion. Have an informed opinion. But don't get it out there in that way.

I want to ask two questions together as we consider the terrorist attack in Paris. Number one. Number one. Where is God in such tragedies?

Or maybe more rightly, I should ask the question, so we'll ask it this way. How is God in such tragedies? So number one. How is God in such tragedies?

[6 : 27] And number two. What is God working to accomplish by allowing such things to happen? And you hear me correctly. What is God working to accomplish by allowing these things to happen?

God himself has given us answers to these questions in his holy writ. And I will work to show you those answers for your good and for his glory this morning. The quote on the front of your bulletin by my favorite person to quote, Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

He said, Oh, to have the word of Christ always dwelling inside of us. In the memory never forgotten. In the heart always loved.

In the understanding really grasped. With all the powers and passions of the mind fully submitted to its control. We have this access to the absolute authority.

The truth. And we can find the answers to these questions together. I hope to do so today. At least in brief. So firstly, how is God in the terror attacks in Paris?

[7 : 38] Here's my answer. God is providential in the terror attacks in Paris. God is providential. He reigns over.

He is in control as he always is in these times. There is nothing that escapes his attention. There is nothing outside of his grasp. He directs all things for the fulfillment of his purposes.

Nothing is outside of his purview. This is our God. God sustains all things. I'll invite you to try to keep up with me here.

Hebrews 1.3 states that Jesus upholds the universe by the word of his power. God orders all things in creation.

Job 37.6-13. For to the snow, he says, fall on the earth. Likewise to the downpour, his mighty downpour.

[8 : 39] He seals up the hand of every man that all men whom he made may know it. Then the beasts go into their lairs and remain in their dens. From its chamber comes the whirlwind and cold from the scattering winds.

By the breath of God, ice is given, and the broad waters are frozen fast. He loads the thick cloud with moisture.

The clouds scatter his lightning. They turn around and around by his guidance to accomplish all that he commands them on the face of the habitable world. Whether for correction or for his land or for love, he causes it to happen.

And this is not a misunderstanding on the part of the writer. This is God's inspired word. We understand the science behind all of these things, but God still speaks these things and they happen.

Psalms 148.8 says, fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfill his word. God orders all things in creation.

[9 : 50] He orders the affairs of nations. Psalm 22.28. For kingship belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.

Proverbs 21.1. The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord. He turns it wherever he will.

Acts 17.26. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.

God has made all of the nations. God has decided for how long they will persist. God has decided where the boundaries of those nations exist.

He orders the affairs of the nations. He orders the activity of mankind. Jeremiah 10.23. Jeremiah says, I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.

[11 : 00] Proverbs 16.9. The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps. Beloved, this is what the Scripture says about God's providence in this world.

God is providential in the terror attacks in Paris and every other tragedy that we will walk through in this life. Now, some would say of this means that God is providentially in control, that he permitted or that he allowed it to happen.

But I say to you, and I believe that the Scripture says that he ordained it to happen. It's a difficult thing to say.

That God ordained it to happen. And the immediate question that's begged, I hope your mind went there because it means that your mind is rational and it functions.

Doesn't this make God the source of evil? God ordains it to come to pass, then isn't he the very source of it? Doesn't it originate with him? Is this even possible?

[12 : 13] What we know of the character of God, can he ordain evil to come to pass? Things might come to your mind. 1 John 1.5. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

That God is perfect. He is holy. He is righteous. Is it possible that God can sin? There's a resounding no of an answer to that, but it can be very troubling to our minds.

And I can only answer the question for you in this way. But God ordaining sin does not make him the source of it, but rather God directs, gives direction to the evil of men in order to accomplish his purposes.

There's stories of this. Many stories of Joseph being sold into slavery. And Joseph at the end of all of that realizes that all the good that God brought about through his life, he says to his brothers, what you intended for evil, God meant for good.

Let's give another river analogy a try. I think the last one I tried really bombed. The evil of man, it belongs to us.

[13 : 34] The evil of man is a flowing river, and it is on the move. God's providence sets banks on the borders of that river, directs its flow.

He himself is not the source of the river, but he orders it. He channels it so that the river arrives at its appointed destination, so that it accomplishes what God set out for it to accomplish.

And it's challenging to my mind. I'd just be entirely honest to you. I wish that I could figure all things out in the Scripture, all of these apparent paradoxes that appear in the Scripture. I want to wrestle them out to their very, very end.

Every reasonable explanation that I've ever read concerning these types of things still seems to come up a bit short for me. How is it possible that God ordains the evil, but he's not the source of the evil?

So, it's a difficult thing to try to wrap our minds around. The alternatives are heretical. We can't think differently about who God is in this world, and so we must wrestle with these types of things.

[14 : 42] It is terrifying to me to think that 130 people could be killed over a very short period of time on Friday evening, and that God had no part in it, that he was off someplace else, that he wasn't paying attention, that he wasn't there in the midst of what was happening in that place.

That caused me to shudder to think that that could even be possible if we were to ignore the God of Scripture. It's comforting to me to know that he ordained it. I hope it's comforting to you to go, Oh, this tragedy, this thing that we weep over, right?

We mourn with those who mourn. It's something that God intended to have happen. The next question that may come to your mind, if God intends these things to happen, if he ordains them to happen, is man still responsible for his actions?

Are these ISIS terrorists responsible for their actions? Kind of ironically, they're trying to be responsible for their actions. They've come right out and said, we did this because it is jihad, because of our religious ideologies.

We did this. Our president seems to be trying to take that responsibility away from them. They certainly are responsible. God will not take that responsibility from them.

[16:04] They're fully responsible and accountable for their sin. God's providence does not absolve man of his responsibility.

Let me show you an example of this in the Scripture. Turn to the Old Testament book of Habakkuk, chapter 1. I'll give you a second to find it while I drink some water.

Habakkuk, chapter 1.

This is a very fitting text as we consider the tragedy in France. Because the prophet Habakkuk is predicting what's going to come to pass, and that is that Israel is going to be judged by a people, a warring people, the Chaldeans.

Let's see what God has to say, beginning in verse 5. Habakkuk, chapter 1, verse 5. I'll read down through verse 11. This is God speaking. Look among the nations and see.

[17:15] Wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told. This is God saying, I am doing a work. For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation who march through the breadth of the earth to seize dwellings not their own.

They are dreaded and fearsome. Their justice and dignity go forth from themselves, meaning it's not existent in them. Their horses are swifter than leopards, more fierce than the evening wolves. Their horsemen press proudly on. The horsemen come from afar. They fly like an eagle, swift to devour. They all come for violence, all their faces forward.

That is, set on that violence. They gather captives like sand. At kings they scoff, and at rulers they laugh. They laugh at every fortress, for they pile up earth and take it.

They built these big earth ramps to get into fortresses. Then they sweep by like the wind and go on. Now, listen to this little phrase that comes next.

[18:29] Guilty men, whose own might is their God. You see that God says, I'm raising up the Chaldeans, right?

I'm giving them this power that they have, and that might is their God, and they are guilty of this activity. Yet, He ordains, He orchestrates them to accomplish His purpose.

In this case, that's the judgment of Israel. You see it in that text there. Now, as I mentioned previously, the only alternatives to this perspective has been deemed heretical, and we would do well to keep ourselves from thinking in these ways or functioning with these kinds of thoughts fueling us.

There's two. Two I just want to point out to you. The first is called dualism. Dualism states that there's this cosmic war between good and evil, which I say to you is taking place, but that we don't know the outcome of that war.

That the two are battling. Who can know which will win? God or Satan? This is not the case, beloved. God has conquered.

[19:44] Jesus Christ has delivered the death blow to Satan. Satan's not omniscient. He's not omnipotent. He's a created being. God is the creator.

Satan is held on a very tight leash by our Lord. Those things that he is allowed to do are permitted by God. The story of Job.

Job is a righteous man, and Satan wants to tempt him, and he comes and he asks permission of God to do this. Another example of this is found in the temptation, the prediction of Peter's denial. Turn there with me. Luke 22. Beginning in verse 31, Jesus says to Peter, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you that he might sift you like wheat.

There's another request made here. Satan comes to God and he says, give me Peter. I'm going to sift him out like wheat. Verse 32, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.

[21:09] And when you have turned again, right, so he's going to deny Christ, but he's going to turn back to Christ. The prediction's right here. When you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.

Peter said to him, Lord, I'm ready to go with you both to prison and to death. Jesus said, I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day until you deny three times that you know me.

You see it found right there in that text. This is not dualism, right? Jesus himself says, I have prayed and you will turn back to me.

You will not be conquered by Satan. Dualism is a heresy and should not be considered. We should not say, now, was Satan in some way active and participating in these attacks?

I couldn't say. I don't know. Again, he can't be all places at all times. Maybe he was someplace else carrying out some greater atrocity. Was there some spiritual power at play in that activity?

[22 : 09] I would say to you, yes, there was. But it didn't escape God. It didn't conquer him. God wasn't pushed back at bay so that this thing could happen.

God ordained that it would. The second one is called open theism. And there are a lot of people in our day that are open theists, whether they realize it or not.

Open theism. Also, the heresy. Open theism says that we are entirely free agents. Basically, that we can do whatever we want to do.

And I agree that we have free will. It just depends on what you mean by free. It's a whole other conversation for another time or times, perhaps. But it would say that we're totally free and God doesn't know what will necessarily happen, but He knows all possible outcomes and He works in response to man's activity.

That's open theism. That we're directing our own paths. And it's based loosely on some responses in the Scripture, some places that it's recorded as if God changed His mind in the Old Testament.

[23 : 21] It's got very shifting ground to stand on biblically. Most often, it's a work of human logic. Trying to make sense of how it is in this world that God can permit such things to happen.

And that would be to say that these men freely chose and now God steps in and He responds. Oh, what can I redeem out of this situation? Look at my people doing the wrong thing once again. How can I step in to the midst of all of that?

God really goes on trial at times like this. But God has spoken to us from His Word. And the next question that seems to be begged is then, how can a good God permit such things to happen?

Beloved, I would say to you that we just have to be so careful in our understanding of what is good.

The greatest and the highest good that we can possibly have is God Himself.

And how He orchestrates all of these things to that great end is beyond me. Maybe a wiser man, but I don't think so. Paul said in Romans 11, 33-36, all of the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.

[24 : 44] How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable or unknowable, that's what that means, His ways. For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been His counselor or who has given a gift to Him that He might be repaid for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things, including tragedies, terrorist attacks, to Him be glory forever.

Amen. And Paul gets to the higher purpose of all things, does he not? The glory of God. God is firstly and foremostly, that may not be a word, concerned with His glory.

This is what He's seeking out. God is God-centered. It would be horrible for us to be man-centered, but we're not God. God is the greatest thing, the Creator. We're all creation and we should all rightly worship Him.

So He's working these things for that high good in some way. that we may never comprehend on this side of glory. And the problem with both of us is that we don't think of good in the right way.

C.S. Lewis wrote in the book *The Problem of Pain*, We want, in fact, not so much a Father in Heaven as a Grandfather in Heaven, a senile benevolence who, as they say, liked to see young people enjoying themselves, and whose plan for the universe was simply that it might be truly said at the end of each day a good time was had by all.

[26 : 22] This is not the God of Scripture. This God ordains all things and works all things and brings all things underneath His goodness to us that He would give Himself to us.

So secondly, what is God working to accomplish by allowing the terror attacks in Paris? His glory, and I've said that already, primarily, I think that's the single answer to this, and there may be a subset of other answers.

As I've said, I don't even know that I could wrap my mind completely around those things. But He is seeking His glory in this thing specifically by calling all men to repent.

By calling all men to repent. Let me show you another text of Scripture. Luke chapter 13. I love the Gospels.

I love the record of Jesus' conversations. I love reading passages of Scripture where you expect, having some theological education of my own, you would expect He would answer in a particular way.

[27 : 49] Like, oh, I know how Jesus is going to answer this one. And then He answers it in a completely different way, the perfect way. Luke chapter 13, verse 1. There were some present at

that very time who told Him about the Galileans.

these would be Galilean Jews whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And what seems to have happened here, there's not a lot of extra-biblical resources that tell us much about this.

Pilate, the Roman governor over the province, was a cruel man in so many ways. We have a group of Galilean Jews who are making sacrifices, which means this was likely at Passover because there was so much sacrifice being done that the priests couldn't keep up with it.

So, everyone got involved. So, they were actually at the temple in Jerusalem making sacrifice. And what's meant by this idea that Pilate mingled their blood is that they were killed in the temple.

That they were massacred in the temple. We don't know how many, but Galilean Jews were murdered by Pilate as they were there doing the quote-unquote good activity of worship to God, giving sacrifice, to God.

[29 : 03] They were killed. And so, they asked this question, what about this thing that has happened and how does Jesus answer? And he answered them, do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered in this way?

The Jewish understanding of punishment in the world was that they had done something? Necessarily, these Galileans must have sinned if this type of a judgment was brought on them in this world.

They couldn't have been without guilt if they were punished in this way. And Jesus' response to them is to say, of course they were with guilt. Just like you're with guilt. We're all with the same guilt. Pilate. And he goes on and he uses a natural disaster.

So, here's Pilate probably by the hands of soldiers murdering Galilean Jews. And he says, no, I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

Or those 18 on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?

[30 : 22] No. I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. So, events like this that we're discussing this morning, this terrorist attack in Paris, France.

With these events, God makes a cry out into the world, repent. Repent. Repent. I point out four words to you from this passage.

All. No one is exempt. No one is exempt from the just condemnation of God for sin. Romans 3.10, none is righteous.

No, not one. 3.23, for all has sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Apart from repentance, everyone is guilty.

Equally so, those who were murdered in France and those who did the murdering in France under the just condemnation of God if they didn't repent.

[31 : 29] And we can't be too sure of those victims. They're all. No one is exempt. We're all under this condemnation apart from repentance.

Did you use the word likewise? These people didn't expect their end would come in this way and neither will you, but it will come and we will perish.

I don't think here he's talking about a physical death. He's not suggesting that if you repent, you'll have eternal life here in these bodies. Not a physical death, but I think he's referring to a final judgment and the eternal punishment that comes beyond that.

This is what he means by the word perish. There's another place, John 3.16, for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. And this comes to us through repentance. Unless you repent, that is that you turn from your evil and you turn to God and the way that this happens is through the personal work of Jesus Christ.

[32 : 35] Faith in Christ. This will be your end. This will be their end. God cries out to the world, repent.

This life is fleeting. It is short. Evil runs rampant. I have promised to return. repent. In Luke 11.32, Jesus says, the men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it. For they repented at the preaching of Jonah and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. Jesus Christ calls us to repent.

Listen to the repentance of the Ninevites. Jonah 3.5-9, and the people of Nineveh believed God. Remember, Jonah comes and preaches to them and the record is that they believed God.

They called for a fast and put on sackcloth. This was a common sign of repentance in the day. From the greatest of them to the least of them. The word reached the king of Nineveh and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes.

[33 : 45] And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock taste anything.

Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone, this is this picture of repentance, turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.

Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger so that we may not perish. And we know if we read on that he did in fact relent from his punishment to the Ninevites.

So where does that leave us? What does that leave us? God's calling out in these types of activities for repentance. Well, firstly, we need to pray for repentance.

Have you prayed one time since a week ago Friday for the repentance of the world in light of this type of thing? I would encourage you to do so.

[34 : 55] This shock wave that has gone around the world. Don't let it be wasted. Life is short. It is fleeting. It is passing. And those who don't repent will perish.

This should be a very clear reminder to us of that. A bunch of young people enjoying themselves at a rock show and someone opened fires inside. Never safe apart from Christ.

Pray for repentance. Pray for the perpetrators of such acts and those who are going to come behind them. The waves of terror that we're going to experience in this world.

Pray for them as well. And I know that is hard. My mind and my heart immediately goes to pray for vindication. Vindicate your people.

Punish and destroy. Eternal damnation is what they deserve. God has been good to us even though we were his enemy. They are no more his enemy than we were.

[36 : 05] The Ninevites are a wonderful example of this. You know why Jonah didn't want to go to the Ninevites? Because the Ninevites were wickedly evil and had been horrible to Israel.

They were known for cutting off limbs of their captors, for skinning them alive. Horrible, horrible things.

Atrocities had been delivered upon the Israelites. Jonah was afraid that God would actually save them. He can't possibly go to them. pray for ISIS.

Pray for the radical Muslims in the world. God is greater than their upbringing and their ideologies. We ought not only pray for repentance, we should go to the world.

There's so much tragic death. There's so much evil. To keep our analogies together, we call this darkness. And we're meant to be light in those places.

[37 : 08] We're not meant to huddle together as light in a singular spot. Hear me say this, church. The church of Christ is gathered together in order for us to go.

This is the mission of the church. All the good that we do together, all the bringing of our minds together, all the prayers, the shifting of our hearts, all of those things are meant for us to go.

And I will say this to you, I praise God for so much health in this congregation, so many good things, so many evidences of His work, but I will say to you, I cannot say this church is healthy until this church is going.

Let's go. Let's go. Let's go. People are perishing. Let's go to France. Let's go to Syria. Let's go to Iraq and Iran.

Right? These people need the gospel of Jesus Christ. Pray for repentance. Go. Go to your neighbor. Go to your classmate and your workmate.

[38 : 18] Let's go. God is providential in the terror attacks in Paris. He ordained it and other calamity in the world for the sake of His glory, specifically by calling all men to repent.

I appreciated John Piper in an NPR interview after the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004. You recall, that happened the day after Christmas in 2004.

So early January 2005, he was interviewed on NPR and he just did such a wonderful job of honoring God in the way he explained this. But he said, and I just want you to hold this phrase, God is always mingling mercy and judgment.

And this is what God did on behalf of the preacher. Ecclesiastes 4, 1 through 3, again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun and behold the tears of the oppressed and had no one to comfort them.

On the side of their oppressors there was power and there was no one to comfort them. And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are under the sun.
[39 : 35] You hear just the defeat in the writing of the preacher. Oh, meaningless. Meaningless. Look at all of the evil. It would be better not to be alive.

It would be better to be already dead and to witness the evil of this day. But by the time he gets to Ecclesiastes 12 in his summary God has moved his heart and he says the end of the matter all has been heard.

Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of men. Let's pray.