

Title: **SOVEREIGNTY**
AND INSTRUMENTALITY

Text: John 11:39

Subject: The Sphere of Instrumentality

Date: Sunday Evening — February 28, 2010

Tape: John #76

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Introduction:

My subject is **SOVEREIGNTY** **AND**
INSTRUMENTALITY. I want to talk to you, as plainly as
God the Holy Spirit will enable me, about Divine
Sovereignty and Human Responsibility. My text is John
11:39. As you are turning to that passage of Scripture,
listen carefully.

“Salvation is of the Lord!” — With every fiber of my
being I believe that salvation is the work of God’s free and
sovereign grace in Christ. From start to finish, salvation is
by grace alone. This is the message we preach to all men.
You cannot save yourself. You cannot contribute anything
to the work of salvation. And you cannot keep yourself
saved. No preacher can save you. No church can save you.
No religious system can save you. No priest can save you.
No ceremony can save you. God alone can save you.
Salvation is by God’s grace alone.

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- 1. Salvation originates with the sovereign will of God the Father.** — *“It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy”* (Romans 9:16). Salvation, as it is revealed in the Bible, begins with election, predestination and the covenant of grace ordered in all things and sure.
- 2. Salvation was earned and purchased for God’s elect by the obedience and death of God the Son, as the sinner’s Substitute, our covenant Surety.** — *“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree”* (Galatians 3:13).” Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He came to save his people from their sins. Either he did what he came to do, or he is a useless failure. Hear me now, the Son of God has saved his people!
 - He brought in an everlasting righteousness for us.
 - He obtained eternal redemption for us.
 - And he entered into heaven as our Forerunner to claim the prize of eternal glory for us!
- 3. And salvation is effectually applied to the hearts of chosen, redeemed sinners by the irresistible grace, omnipotent mercy and sovereign power of God the Holy Spirit.** — *“It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing”* (John 6:63). The Holy Spirit of God

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calls sinners from death to life, creating in those whom he calls repentance toward God and faith in Christ. He seals to our hearts all the blessings of God's grace and seals us in grace forever, so that those who are born of God can never perish.

Be sure you understand what I am saying. — If today you trust Christ, if you are a child of God, it is not because of your will and work, but because of God's will and work. If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, it is because God the Father chose you, God the Son redeemed you and God the Spirit gave you faith in Christ. — *“Salvation is of the Lord!”*

JOHN 11:39

Having said that, I want you to turn to my text, John 11:39. **There lies Lazarus in the tomb. He is dead, helplessly dead.** It is obvious to any sane man that Lazarus could do nothing to change his condition. He is dead! His sisters, though they loved him dearly, could do nothing to help him. All the disciples standing by could not breathe life into his body, or call back the departed spirit of their friend, Lazarus. Dust had already begun to return to dust again. His body had already begun to decay. **But the Lord Jesus was there.** He was about to perform a great miracle. Soon the voice of God who created Lazarus would be heard,

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speaking with life-giving power, “*Lazarus, come forth!*” And this dead man would begin to live. **But, before our Lord would perform this great miracle, which only he could perform, he required his disciples to do something.** — “*Jesus said, Take ye away the stone.*” Isn’t that strange? No, not really.

Without question, he who by the mere power of his word can cause the dead to live could have removed the stone from the mouth of the tomb with great ease. But he chose to use his disciples. **He gave them a work to do, which was essential to the resurrection of Lazarus, essential because he required it.** Now, listen carefully. **The removal of that stone could not give life to Lazarus. Only God can give life to the dead. But the Lord would not raise Lazarus from the dead until his disciples took the stone away.**

When “Jesus said, Take ye away the stone,” at first the disciples hesitated. Human reason got in the way. Martha said, “*Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days*” (v. 39). **You see, human reason will have either human instrumentality or divine sovereignty, but not both. God’s word teaches both.** Our Lord gently corrected Martha’s unbelief (v. 40). “*Then they took away the stone*” (v. 41). **When they rolled away the stone, those disciples demonstrated three things...**

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1. Submissive obedience to the will and Word of their Lord.
2. Faith in Christ's power to raise the dead (v. 40).
3. An anticipation of Lazarus' resurrection for the glory of God.

Proposition: Now this is what I want you to see — **There are some things that you and I must do for the salvation of God's elect.**

We look to Christ alone as the Giver of Life and the Savior of men. But we do not fold our arms in indifference and say, "God will save his elect no matter what." **That which we can do we must do.** We must look for opportunities to be instruments in the hands of God for the salvation of sinners. Wouldn't you like to have been the one who rolled away that stone from Lazarus' tomb that day?

Well, we cannot go back to Lazarus' tomb. But there are many like Lazarus around us, who are dead in sin. And you and I can do some things to help them. There are some stones for us to take away!

Divisions: My message has four parts. I have a four pronged message. I have...

1. A Word for The Dead.
2. A Word for The Preacher.

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3. A Word for The Believer.
4. A Word for Us All.

A WORD FOR THE DEAD

Here is a word for the dead. Some of you are in the same condition spiritually Lazarus was in physically. You are spiritually dead. But your spiritual death is no excuse for neglect, indifference or even unbelief. You are dead spiritually. And you are dead legally. But you are both physically and morally alive and responsible.

Illustration: A condemned murderer on death row is dead at law, but he is yet alive and morally responsible for all his actions.

Yes, there are some things dead sinners can and must do. I haven't lost my mind. I am speaking to you in both the Spirit and the very language of Holy Scripture. You are dead in sin. You cannot save yourself. You cannot redeem yourself. You cannot put away your sin. And you cannot give yourself life. But there are some things you can do. And what you can do you must do.

Was the **Ethiopian Eunuch** dead in sin? He certainly was. Yet, he did not neglect his soul. He did what he could (Acts 8:26-39).

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(Acts 8:26-39) “And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. ²⁷ And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, ²⁸ Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. ²⁹ Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. ³⁰ And Philip ran thither to *him*, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? ³¹ And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. ³² The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: ³³ In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. ³⁴ And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. ³⁶ And as they went on *their* way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, *here is* water; what doth hinder me to be

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baptized? ³⁷ And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. ³⁹ And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.” (Acts 8:26-39)

That Ethiopian Eunuch bought a Bible and began to read it. You can do that, too. **That African earnestly sought the Lord.** You can do that, too.

- **He went up to the place where the Lord promised to reveal himself** (Matthew. 18:20). It was a long, costly, dangerous journey. But he was in trouble. He was a sinner in need of a Savior. So he made the trip from Ethiopia to Jerusalem.
- **Though he did not find the Savior at first, he was not discouraged.** When he left Jerusalem, he was still seeking the Lord. He was reading Isaiah 53! — He did not seek to know the mysteries of Scripture, or the deep doctrines of the Bible. He was seeking a Person! — I have no question that he **prayed much.**
- **While he was seeking the Lord, God sent him a gospel preacher!** — What mercy! — He heard! — He

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believed! — He was baptized! — “*He went on his way rejoicing!*”

He walked in the light God gave him, did what he knew he could do and had to do; and God gave him more light! Are you listening to me? If you care for your soul, seek the Lord while he may be found and call upon him while he is near. — “*The Lord is good to the soul that seeketh him!*” (Lamentations 3:25). — “*Seek and ye shall find. Knock and the door will open. Ask and it shall be given to you.*” — There are no exceptions. If you seek the Lord, he will save you. If you do not seek him, you will not find him.

It is true, the Lord God declares, “*I am found of them that sought me not*” (Isaiah 65:1). Yes, it is true that the Holy Spirit searches for the lost coin; and the good Shepherd seeks his lost sheep. But that prodigal son must return to his Father’s house. **You must seek the Lord.** — “*Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light*” (Ephesians 5:14). — **Without question, if you seek the Lord, it is because he is seeking you; but seek him you must** (Jeremiah 29:12-13).

(Jeremiah 29:12-13) “Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto

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you. ¹³ And ye shall seek me, and find *me*, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.”

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Saviour true,
No, I was found of thee.

Thou didst reach forth thy hand and mine enfold;
I walked and sank not on the storm-vexed sea,—
‘Twas not so much that I on thee took hold,
As thou, dear Lord, on me.

I find, I walk, I love, but, O the whole
Of love is but my answer, Lord, to thee;
For thou wert long beforehand with my soul,
Always thou lovedst me.

A WORD FOR THE PREACHER

Second, here is a word for the preacher. Let me preach to myself, to you preachers here and to any preacher who may hear this sermon later. **As a gospel preacher, as the servant of God in this world, there are some things I can and must do for the souls of men.**

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I know that whenever God is pleased to save a sinner, he sends a gospel preacher to the sinner he is determined to save to proclaim the gospel of his grace. We do not exalt the ministry of the gospel into a popish priesthood. But we dare not despise it as a needless thing. **The preaching of the gospel is essential to the salvation of God's elect, because, "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe"** (1 Corinthians 1:23; Romans 10:13-17).

(Romans 10:9-17) "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ¹¹ For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. ¹² ¶ For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. ¹³ For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. ¹⁴ **How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?** ¹⁵ And **how shall they preach, except they be sent?** as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good

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things! ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? ¹⁷ So then **faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**”

Spurgeon said, “We cannot turn dry bones into living men, but we can prophesy upon them, and, blessed be God, we can also prophesy to the four winds, and so by our means the dead may live.”

Not everyone can or should preach. God has not called and gifted all of his people to be preachers. But he has called me and gifted me for the work. It is therefore my responsibility to give myself whole-heartedly and conscientiously to the work of preaching the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:16). I must...

- Be diligent in study and preparation.
- Diligently seek God’s message in prayer.
- Avail myself of every means and opportunity to preach the gospel to this generation.

There is a work for me to do for the souls of men before they are converted. Before Lazarus was raised from the dead, our Lord required those who were standing by to take the stone away from his tomb. I have no power to make dead sinners live. But I am responsible to remove the stones which have been laid over their tombs.

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Illustration: The Cities of Refuge – Clear the way!

Some do not come to Christ because the huge stone of ignorance prevents them. There are some things you must know in order to trust Christ. Some things are essential to saving faith. And these essential things must be constantly preached.

- Ruin by The Fall – Total Depravity (Romans 5:12).
- Redemption by The Blood – Effectual Atonement (Galatians 3:13; 1 John 1:9).
- Regeneration by The Holy Spirit – Salvation by Grace Alone (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Many others do not come to Christ because they have been entombed beneath the heavy stone of religious error. They are blinded by false religion and the doctrines of men. A faithful gospel preacher must continually combat and expose religious error.

- Self-righteousness!
- Works Salvation!
- Free-willism!
- Sacramentalism!

Often people are held in the bondage of spiritual death under the stone of religious prejudice.

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- **They think Christianity is a sad, gloomy way of life.** What could be more joyful than the pardon of sin, the peace of God, and the hope of heaven?
- **They imagine that there is something unmanly about faith in Christ.** Faith in and obedience to Christ is manliness in its truest form. It causes men to assume their responsibilities in life. It makes men truthful and ruggedly honest. And it causes men to be bold.
- **Many think that faith is mere emotionalism, good only for children and ignorant people.** Our faith is based upon facts, real, undeniable, historical facts, facts far more solid than those of astronomy, botany and biology. **There is no speculation about gospel truth.** The doctrines of Divine revelation are as clearly evident as any mathematical equation.

It is true Christianity is a matter of heart faith, heart obedience and heart worship. It is not without feeling and emotions. But it is the most reasonable thing in the world. Oh, it is infinite beyond the scope of human reason in its depth! But it is not possible for reasonable men to deny the truths of Holy Scripture.

And some do not come to Christ because Satan holds them under the heavy, black stone of despair. — There is no cause for any sinner to despair of grace. Grace is free

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and unconditional. — “*Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out*” (John 6:37).

There is much to be done for sinners before they believe; **and there is much that must be done by God’s servant for people after they believe.** — Before they are converted, the Lord’s word to his servants is, “*Take ye away the stone.*” Once the dead are given life, he word is, “*Loose him, and let him go*” (v. 44). Do you see that?

Christ’s word to his servant is, “Feed my lambs”
(Jeremiah 3:15; 1 Peter 5:1-3).

(Jeremiah 3:15) “And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.”

(1 Peter 5:1-3) “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: ² Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; ³ Neither as being lords over *God’s* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.”

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Young plants in the vineyard must be tenderly watered and nurtured. **Newborn babes** must be fed the sincere milk of the Word. **The children of God** must be brought into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. And the **men of grace** must be fed with strong meat. — **New converts** must be set free from religious tradition, the grave clothes of legalism and the oppressive care of the world as well as the chains of sin. — **God's children** must be fed and nurtured and cared for, so that they may enjoy the freedom of fellowship with Christ and his people. — **This loosing of God's people is a life-long process.** It requires the constant, faithful, loving and knowledgeable ministry of the gospel. **Gospel preachers are ascension gifts of Christ to his church., given to...**

- Lead sinners to Christ.
- Instruct saints in faith.
- Establish churches in doctrine.
- Guide pilgrims in their sojourn.
- Comfort believers in their troubles.
- Protect God's sheep in their pasture.

A WORD FOR THE BELIEVER

Third, here is a word for the believer. Really, what I have to say is for all of you, collectively, as the members of this congregation. But, I want to speak to you individually, personally, as though no one else were here. I am talking

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now to you who are saved by the grace of God. There are some things you can and must do for the souls of men (See Mark 2:1-5).

(Mark 2:1-5) “And again he entered into Capernaum after *some* days; and it was noised that he was in the house. ² And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive *them*, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them. ³ And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. ⁴ And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken *it* up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. ⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.”

God has not called you to preach. You are not gifted, perhaps, for that work. But **God has given you a sphere of influence with some and gifted you with the ability to do some things that no one else can do.** Now hear me — **That which God has given you the ability to do and the opportunity to do you must do.**

1. You can do for the unbelieving what Mary and Martha did for their dead brother – You can call upon the Master on their behalf.

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Brethren, see poor sinners round you,
Slumbering on the brink of woe.
Death is coming, hell is moving,
Can you bear to let them go?

2. As God gives you opportunity, you can tell what you know (John 9:11). — You can tell your friends, relatives, neighbors, and acquaintances what you have seen, heard, felt, and experienced of the grace of God in Christ. — *“What great things God hath done unto thee!”*
3. You can use what God has given you for the support of the gospel ministry (3 John 5-8).

(3 John 1:5-8) “Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; ⁶ Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: ⁷ Because that for his name’s sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. ⁸ We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth.”

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4. You can make a decided effort to distribute tracts, tapes, CDs, DVDs, bulletins, books and articles to the people you come into contact with.
5. You can work to prepare a place for others to hear the gospel.
6. You can find a way to bring men and women with you to hear the gospel of Christ.
7. And you can exemplify the grace of God in your life before the people of this world.

A WORD FOR US ALL

Fourth, here is a word for us all. I send you home with this solemn word — **That which we can do, before God, we are responsible to do** (Ezekiel 33:7-9).

(Ezekiel 33:7-9) “So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. ⁸ When I say unto the wicked, O wicked *man*, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. ⁹ Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his

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way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.”

Once more, my friend, I tell you, you are responsible for your own soul. I am free of your blood! — Necessity is laid upon me. I must preach the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:16). We are under the constraint of Christ’s grace and love — You must be his witness (John 20:21).

(John 20:21) “Then said Jesus to them again, Peace *be* unto you: as *my* Father hath sent me, even so send I you.”

I ask you, child of God, what are you doing for the glory of Christ and the souls of men? Be your own judge in this matter.

- Men and women are perishing for lack of knowledge.
- I see zeal and enthusiasm for everything in this world, except for the gospel of Christ.
- The time is short. Dedicate yourself to the Master’s work. Throw yourself into it today!

Amen.