

Chosen before the Foundation of the World

God's Plan of Redemption

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Bible Text: 1 Peter 1:1-9; 17-2:12

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Back when our daughter Bethany was small I was having a conversation with my grandmother about the whole issue of child rearing and somehow the discussion turned to the topic of corporal punishment. And she asked me if I had ever spanked our daughter Bethany. And I explained that we believe that any form of child abuse was wrong and that we were committed to raising Bethany in the nurture and the admonition of Christ, so what that meant for us is we did a lot of teaching. We did a lot of playing and a lot praying and a lot of loving. But we also believed in limits, meaning we imposed discipline in all sorts of ways to help her understand how she fit into God's world and how she fit into our family. And hopefully, just like discipline is intended to impact all of us, hopefully as a result of the limits revealing the rebellious nature of her own heart, someday she might see her need and place her faith and trust in Christ.

And then after going through all of that I explained to my dear granny that on rare occasions when Bethany did not respond to the other methods we were using that in a controlled way we would spank her. That was one of our tools in our parenting tool bag.

I thought I had done a fairly good job of laying all of that out until she said, "But you don't spank her, do you?"

So at that point I appealed to Scripture. And my grandmother claimed to be a follower of Christ and presumably wanted the Bible to be her guide. So I gently said, "But, granny, you know that the Bible tells parents that sometimes it is best to spank our children and it is actually unloving for a parent to choose not to."

I can still remember her response. She said, "I know, but you don't spank Bethany, do you?"

Now before any of us including myself become too hard on my grandmother, don't we all take that position before God's word from time to time? I know it says that, but. So we go through life at least on that particular point, whatever it is, with our fingers in our ears, essentially saying, "I won't listen to you, God. At least not on that particular issue. I don't like what you are saying. I don't agree with what you are saying so I am not going to listen to what you are saying. I know, but you don't spank Bethany, do you?"

That is one of the challenges that pastors face. Should I only talk about things that I believe men and women are going to like, are going to agree with, are going to appreciate? Paul instructed Timothy like this. He said:

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.¹

It wouldn't be hard at all to give all sorts of examples of people in churches who have chosen that exact path that Paul is describing, not being willing to endure sound doctrine and gathering for themselves teachers who the Bible says will tickle their ears instead of tell them what they need to know. Which is why Paul's clear direction to pastors now and then was to faithfully teach the Word, whether it appears to be in season or not.

Well, that principle because especially important at certain places in our study of God's plan of redemption. We explained at the beginning of all of this that there are a number of ways that God has planned the salvation process that is dramatically different than the way you and I would have designed it, all sorts of ways. For example, the fact that it is a free gift, the fact that we don't have to earn it, the fact that a person can actually know for sure that he or she is on their way to heaven, the fact that it cannot be taken away. There is much about this process that is quite different than what human beings would have done on our own.

So the question then becomes: Well, how do we respond when we learn or we observe that God's ways are different than ours? One of those test points that is found in 1 Peter chapter one where we find reinforced the principle that we saw last week in Ephesians one that God's plan for redemption includes our being chosen before the foundation of the world. I would like us to dig into that great topic this morning. So open your Bible, if you would, to 1 Peter chapter one. That is on page 180 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you.

Now here is the key question before the house this morning. It is what part man plays in the salvation process and what part God plays. Or, stated another way, what is the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility? If you have been around churches or theological discussions you may recognized this as the difference between being Calvinistic or being Arminian, named after two theologians in the 16th century. John Calvin who emphasized God's sovereignty in the salvation process and Jacob Arminius who emphasized man's responsibility. And understand this. There are thousands of shades, ok? It is not just, well, I am a Calvinist or I am an Arminian. There

¹ 2 Timothy 4:1-5.

is thousands of shades on this subject with plenty of extremes on either side. For example, one of the early leaders in the biblical counseling movement took what I would consider to be a hyper Calvinistic position. And one of his very first books when he said, “God does not love the world. He only loves those who will eventually trust Christ.” So he would disagree with what I said from this very pulpit a couple of weeks ago on Easter Sunday when I was preaching from John 3:16. And I made the statement to everybody who was here, some of whom I had never seen before, that God loves you. Regardless of what you could tell me about your past, regardless of what might be happening right now, regardless of what might be happen in the future, I can say on the authority of the Bible that God loves you. And I base that on a simple and I think clear understanding of a verse like John 3:16.

“For God so loved the world...”²

Well, this particular leader in the biblical counseling movement believes you can't say that to a group of people, because in his view it only applies to the world of the elect. And because he took that position so early in his ministry many other groups of people, entirely wrote off everything else he had to say about biblical counseling. And I had that particular, what I consider to be a hyper Calvinistic position thrown up in my face in teaching settings all over the country and in foreign countries. That is an extreme position, at least from where I am coming from.

Now here is the other extreme, though, people treating the doctrine of election which is taught in many pivotal places in Scripture... do we all get that? Treating the doctrine of election which is taught in many pivotal places in Scripture the way my grandmother viewed spanking. I don't want to hear it.

In fact, I have a friend who preached on Ephesians 1:4, a verse we looked at last week where Paul says that in love God chose us in him before the foundation of the world. My friend taught that verse on Sunday and was fired on Monday.

Now you might say, “Why are there so many opinions and so much disagreement?” That is a really important question. And I want to try to choose the words to the answer to that question very carefully, because I understand that for some people you get really nervous. I am quite calm, I want you to know. I am not nervous about this at all, but I am trying to choose my words carefully. And here is at least part of the answer to the question: Why are there so many different positions on this topic? It is because there is a healthy theological tension in Scripture between these two concepts. That is it. And imbalance often creeps in when men and women don't let all aspects of Scripture inform their position on this point.

Well, what do we try to do around here? The answer is we try to be balanced. We are not afraid to be biblical. We are more concerned about what the Scripture says than what some theologian dead or alive said. Just tell me what the Bible says.

² John 3:16.

I received a couple of interesting notes this week that struck a similar chord to that. One person said, “Thank you for your faithful determination to direct every small aspect of your church body toward the absolute truth of God’s Word.” She said, “The people I see around here don’t wallow in their feelings or give lazy excuses or shirk responsibility. The people I see fight to follow God’s Word, open their lives and purify their hearts.”

That is a great compliment to this church family, especially in light of what Paul said would be true of many people who said they are followers of God and yet they would not endure sound doctrine.

Another person wrote this this week. “Thank you for your reliance on God’s Word in allowing the Spirit to work in each of us individually rather than coming up with your conclusion and making the Scriptures fit your message. Thank you for preaching well the good news.”

That is a great compliment, too. And I am not saying that any of us around here do it perfectly. I am not saying that. But that is our goal. And the fact that the persons who attend our church, you want it that way. You want to hear the Word. That makes my job a whole lot easier. As long as I know that what I am saying is based on the Scripture, I know that I am on solid footing. That is not true for many pastors anymore. But thank God for you.

Now just to be sure I am practicing full disclosure, if you would say, “Hey, I had a rough night last night. I am about to go to sleep. Would you kind of give me the bottom line?” I will do that. Let’s see that. I have been in this business a long time, ok? My understanding of Scripture and that of our church leadership leans Calvinistic. I mean, if you just have to have a label, there it is. Just like that. I am going to wait till the end to hear what he says. I will just give it to you right now. My understanding of the Scripture leans Calvinistic. Now we are certainly not hyper Calvinists by any reasonable definition of that term. But what I mean by that is we want to understand man’s responsibility within the context of the clear teaching of the sovereign grace of our God.

Now with that in mind, let’s read our passage and be looking for examples from both sides of the spectrum even from these verses we are going to read from 1 Peter one.

Verse one says:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance

which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.³

Now, for sake of time, jump down to verse 22. I wish I didn't have to skip it. There is just so much here, but look at verse 22 and follow the argument through.

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.

For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER." And this is the word which was preached to you.

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For this is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone,"⁸ and, "A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has

³ 1 Peter 1:1-9.

called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.⁴

What a tremendous passage from the Word of God, huh? And we are talking about how God's plan of redemption... we are going to have a 12 week series on this. It includes the fact that we are chosen before the foundation of the world. So let's divide up the remaining part of our time around four principles that help us appreciate God's severing place in the salvation process.

It starts by understanding the context in which all of this was given. The doctrine of election is intended to be an encouragement when times are hard. Now I am going to be using words like chosen and election and predestined and predestination and foreknowledge somewhat interchangeably here. They are not identical. But they are certainly complementary to the same overall theological concept of God's place in the process of men and women becoming followers of Christ. But it is always important when trying to understand something, especially if it is difficult from Scripture, to think about the context, especially in this passage, the background, what is going on.

This book was written not long after Emperor Nero burned the city of Rome and then spread the rumor that the fire had been started by followers of Christ and that led to a significant persecution of God's people. And you see that alluded to throughout his book. These are individuals. Peter is writing to people about election because they were suffering.

You may feel in a similar way today. We have men and women in our church family right now who are facing all sorts of tremendous challenges. I mean who among us is not suffering in some way at some level? And eventually that is going to impact our relationship with the Lord, right? The way we suffer. Either in a way that draws us closer to him or drives us further away. It has been well said. Trials are either going to make you better or trials are going not make you bitter. And one of the ways that you can draw closer to the Lord is that in a time of suffering you open your heart to learning deeper things from the Word. You learn things, truths that you might not have been motivated to learn before. That is what the psalmist meant when he said:

“It is good for me that I was afflicted.”⁵

Seriously? Yeah.

⁴ 1 Peter 1:22—2:12.

⁵ Psalm 119:71.

“It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes.”⁶

So Peter writing words that were inspired of God told these dear men and women, “God wants you to remember how long he has loved you.” That is what the doctrine of election is all about. That is what the doctrine of predestination is all about. That is what the word foreknowledge means. And I want to be careful in this setting not to be too graphic, but the word know in the Bible many times includes, involves a man and a woman within the boundaries of monogamous marriage enjoying one another sexually. They knew one another. The exact same root of that word is the word that we have foreknowledge. And when we talk about God having foreknowledge we are talking about him—think about this—entering into a loving relationship with you personally, you, with you individually before the foundation of the world.

He didn’t start loving you a decade ago. He didn’t start loving you a century ago. He started loving you before the foundation of the world. So his love for you is secure. His love for you is powerful. His love for you is eternal even in the midst of your pain and uncertainty. And Peter believed and God believed that recognizing that can bring us great hope as we suffer. Think about how long God has loved you before the foundation of the world.

Pastor Dustin and Tricia Folden’s 15 month old son Sawyer had heart surgery this week to widen his aorta down at Riley Hospital. That would be a frightening experience for any parent for sure. Some of you have been in that situation where your little baby was needing surgery. And I really appreciated Tricia’s Facebook post and, you understand, any time I throw something like this up I always do it with that person’s permission. So this isn’t shocking Tricia right now, but I really like seeing this. She said, “I am thankful for a nurse who got Sawyer’s blood drawn with one poke.” Any parent understands that one, huh? Did you ever want to say to a nurse, “How about if I try”? A nurse who... and I am sorry for all the medical professionals who just heard that. I am not talking about you. I am talking about the... well, you know. Thankful for a call telling us we have a room at the Ronald McDonald house for as long as we need, the fact that there is a place like the Ronald McDonald house for a friendly cashier at the hospital café, for yummy sandwiches at lunch and for a God who uses small blessings like these to remind me that he is here walking us through all of this. That is exactly right.

Friend, God did not start loving you yesterday. And the longer we understand his love to have lasted, the easier it is to remember that nothing can separate you from his love today. So wherever you end up on this Calvinism, Arminianism spectrum, please don’t let what many times turns into a sophomoric theological debate rob you of the contextual point of the doctrine. That as a follower of Christ, God’s loving relationship with you began a long, long time ago. And, friend, if you have never trusted Christ as Savior and Lord that would be another strong reason to do that without delay.

Now that is the big point of the chapter, for sure. But I realize there are some legitimate questions here which is why this is such a controversial topic. So let’s let it stretch us. It

⁶ Ibid.

is a great opportunity to flex our theological muscles. I mean, how should we think about the fact that followers of Christ are chosen before the foundation of the world? Well, understand this principle is taught in many places in the Word. This is not a one verse doctrine. We saw it, if you were listening carefully, in the verses that I already read, how we are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father in 1 Peter 1:2. And then in verse three:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope...”⁷

Or verse 15.

“...but like the Holy One who called you...”⁸

Or 1 Peter 2:9.

“But you are A CHOSEN RACE...”⁹

Friends, and remember. They are suffering. And this doctrine is imprinted all over this important passage to help them as they suffer. But it is found many, many other places in the Word. I am just giving you a survey, because I have to go to work over on the other side of the campus. I mean, I am trying to do this as quickly as I can, but this is all over the Bible, like this where Jesus said:

“You did not choose Me but I chose you.”¹⁰

Is there anything unclear about that? And you say, “I feel my finger starting to come to my ears.” That is because we don’t like being put in our place. Can I just say it like that? All God’s people don’t like being put in our place. We just don’t like it. God is really big. And we are not.

Or Acts 13:48. There is a lot of passages like this in the book of Acts.

“When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”¹¹

There it is.

Or Acts 16:14.

⁷ 1 Peter 1:3.

⁸ 1 Peter 1:15.

⁹ 1 Peter 2:9.

¹⁰ John 15:16.

¹¹ Acts 13:48.

“A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.”¹²

Or this text. We know the front end of it. We love it.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.¹³

It is everywhere in the Bible like this passage that got my friend fired. It makes me want to put it up on the PowerPoint screen. There it is.

...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.¹⁴

By my count it is mentioned five times in that single text. And what I am saying is we would have to ignore boat loads of Scripture if we wanted to hold our ears from hearing this particular topic. It is everywhere. Here is another really clear one in Romans 9:15.

For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.¹⁵

How much clearer could it be, my friend, than that?

Now, you read verses like that and you might conclude, well, salvation must be entirely of God with no involvement of man whatsoever. Here is the other side. Here is the other point of the tension. The Bible also teaches that the gospel offer is both universal and legitimate. So when I spoke about a couple of weeks ago here on Easter, sure.

¹² Acts 16:14.

¹³ Acts 8:28-30.

¹⁴ Ephesians 1:4-6.

¹⁵ Romans 9:15-16.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him...”¹⁶

Or this passage taught later by Peter in 2 Peter.

“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”¹⁷

Or this, Paul’s words to Timothy.

This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.¹⁸

I am just reading from the Bible, right? There it is. Or this. I will give you this one from the King James because many of us learned it this way and even have a song to go along with it. You remember this?

“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”¹⁹

Now how do you reconcile this? How do you reconcile a God who chooses and responsibility of man to exercise faith and come to him and which come first? That is where the depravity of man comes into this discussion. Always keep in mind that human beings are completely incapable of saving ourselves or of initiating the process. You need to understand that theologically and that view is taught in many places in the Word, like Isaiah 64.

“For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.”²⁰

Ephesians 2:1.

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.”²¹

Dead people initiate nothing. That is just the truth from the Word of God.

So when it comes to the issue of sequence, God is the one who initiates the process by his grace. And by his mercy because you and I are incapable of initiating it on our own. That is why God’s Word frequently emphasizes his complete sovereignty over the affairs

¹⁶ John 3:16.

¹⁷ 2 Peter 3:9.

¹⁸ 1 Timothy 2:3-4.

¹⁹ Revelation 22:17.

²⁰ Isaiah 64:6.

²¹ Ephesians 2:1.

of men. I hope you believe in the sovereignty of God. And I hope you believe in the sovereignty of God long before you go through an intense period of suffering. For example, Isaiah 46:10.

“Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure.’”²²

That is what God says.

Or Ephesians 1:11.

“...also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.”²³

The sovereignty of God. Now here is what is really amazing. Man, that is kind of stretching my brain. Good. That is good, isn't it? God exercises his sovereign will in a way that allows human beings to exercise their will and for which they will legitimately be held responsible. Is that {?} on that? That is really important. God exercises... that is how smart he is. He is like way smart. God exercises his sovereign will in a way that allows human beings to exercise their will and for which they will legitimately be held responsible. Can you think of examples in the Bible where these ideas, the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man are laid side by side where you see God sovereignly working but in a way that human beings are making choices for which they will be held accountable? Here is probably the classic one. It is the wicked choices of Joseph's brothers. Joseph said:

"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”²⁴

Or here is another fascinating example. It is Acts two. Peter, the same guy whose words we are reading this morning, his first sermon. Listen to this.

Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know — this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.²⁵

Who killed Jesus? You could accurately say that God killed Jesus. Yet, they, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put him to death. The bottom line is both of those truths are accurate. Both of those truths are correct.

²² Isaiah 46:10.

²³ Ephesians 1:11.

²⁴ Genesis 50:20.

²⁵ Acts 2:22-23.

Now you might say, “I am not sure I can understand how both emphases could be reconciled.” Well, here is what I would encourage you to think about then. Friend, learn to love and trust and prefer a God whom you are incapable of completely understanding in this life. Do you really want a god who can fully understand? Because I hope this doesn’t come off offensive, because that is not my way, but eh would not be much of a god if you could fully comprehend all of his ways and all of his attributes today? That doesn’t make him much. Learn to love and trust and prefer a God whom you are incapable of completely understanding in this life. The formal term for this part of the discussion, by the way, is the transcendence of God.

You might say, “Man, you are giving us a lot of theology today.”

That is good. We are proving to God right now that we will endure sound doctrine. No one has stomped out in anger yet. Right? The transcendence of God Isaiah said:

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.”²⁶

We saw that in what Peter said.

“...and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,”²⁷

You understand. There is aspects of who God is that we do not understand yet. So, yes, on the one hand we have enough evidence to exercise genuine saving faith in what God has revealed to us in his Word. But our doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture does not demand that God answer every question we might have in this life. In part because our capability to understand truth this side of heaven is significantly limited. Do you believe that? Our ability to understand truth this side of heaven is significantly limited by both the nature of humanity and also the effects of the fall.

That is why Paul said for now here is what we have got going on right now. We see in a mirror dimly. That is the best we got, huh? And we see in a mirror dimly. John said:

“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.”²⁸

There is a sense in which these concepts of divine sovereignty and human responsibility are like standing in the middle of a set of railroad tracks. And you look as far down as you possibly can and at the point of the horizon they appear to eventually come together.

²⁶ Isaiah 55:8-9.

²⁷ 1 Peter 1:8.

²⁸ 1 John 3:2.

That is what theological tension looks like, seemingly incompatible truths that ultimately this side of heaven can only be understood fully by our all wise God. But, see, instead of ignoring one side or the other, we choose to let Scripture be Scripture. Isn't that what we want to do? We are going to let Scripture be Scripture and believe all that his Word declares on each and every topic.

Another illustration that I found helpful over the years is to think about the issue of a person coming to Christ from both man's perspective and God's. It is like walking through a doorway. And from man's perspective, written over the doorway is, "Whosoever will may come." But when you walk through that doorway in repentance and faith and look back from God's perspective it says over the same doorway from his side, "Chosen before the foundation of the world."

So learn to love and trust and prefer a God whom you are incapable of completely understanding in this life.

Now hear this, please, because this is where I think many of us get tripped up, especially as it relates to God's working with other people. See, Peter wants you to walk away this morning being encouraged by how long God has loved you, if you are a follower of Christ and let that impact the way that you suffer instead of asking all sorts of questions about God's dealings with others that are simply not answered in Scripture.

If you know your bible, you might know that Peter had to learn this lesson kind of the hard way, like a lot of the lessons that Peter learned. But what is interesting is this actually happened right at the end of the recorded interchanges that Jesus had with Peter. Do you remember this? It was right after the fish breakfast. You know, about the fish breakfast, right? One of the greatest breakfasts ever, because Jesus cooked it. And it was a tender passage where Peter is restored after having denied the Lord three times. It is a delightful thing. But as with many of us, it is almost like, Peter, shut up. That the more you talk, the worst this is going to get. And here is what happens in that text. John 21. Truly, truly, Jesus is talking to Peter.

"I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go."²⁹

What is Jesus saying here? He is saying, "You, too, are going to die by crucifixion." What? Yeah, the text goes on to explain that.

Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God.
And when He had spoken this, He *said to him, "Follow Me!"

Peter, turning around, *saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; the one who also had leaned back on His bosom at the supper and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?"

²⁹ John 21:18.

So Peter seeing him *said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?"

Jesus *said to him, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!"³⁰

And, friend, when I start asking, well, how does the doctrine of election apply to this person or that situation, et cetera, invariably I am going to get my eyes off of the wonderful way this truth was intended to bless me as I try to grow in him, especially during times when I suffer.

So what is the bottom line? Well, let the doctrine of election encourage and stimulate you today. See, in joy being part of God's redemptive team, I don't have to fully understand every nuance of whom God has chosen and what he hasn't and all they why and the wherefore. But I know this. There are all kinds of people God is drawing to himself and I want to be part of making that happen. Right?

"...but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence."³¹

And I want to challenge you. Are you ready for a challenge? If you are going to continue to think about this message, and you probably will. And if you are going to continue to talk about this message, and you probably will, I want to encourage you to spend at least 51 percent of your time praying for and trying to speak to those that the Lord has placed around you that he may be in the process right now of drawing to himself. Also spend time being amazed that God started loving you before the foundation of the world. If this just becomes some sophomoric, theological debate it lost the power that it was intended to have.

And I would also encourage you on this. Trust God to effectively hoe his patch. He will get his part done, won't he? He will get it figured out. He is like way smart. Trust God to effectively hoe his patch while you faithfully hoed yours.

I got an email this week and this has not been fully decided yet, but I think it illustrates exactly what I am talking about. You may know that many Chinese students over at Purdue were very, very glad for that and so many of them are gone for the summer and they come back either as new students or returning students right before the beginning of the semester. And so many of them end up, Purdue organizes this, and so they fly into O'Hare. And as I am told, many of those flights end up at O'Hare about three o'clock in the morning. And so then those persons are bussed from O'Hare down to Purdue and there has to be some mechanism to transition them into temporary housing while they find their own or maybe permanent housing. But somebody has to take them from that place where the busses stop and so historically that has been done in a parking lot over at

³⁰ John 21:19-22.

³¹ 1 Peter 3:15.

Purdue. And if it was raining, so what. So here are these tired individuals and bam you are in the rain or there is no restroom facilities for the people who were working there. It just was not a great way to do it. And so we have been contacted about whether or not a more logical place for those seven or 800 Chinese students to make that transition would be... anybody want to guess? Faith West. Now, again, it is not a done deal. We will see what a severing God plans to do. But do you think that if there are seven or 800 Chinese students that God could be bringing right to that place that it is possible he might be working in some of their lives? And we are just going to trust him to do his, because he is like way good at doing his part. We are just going to trust him to do his part. And we will joyfully do ours.