

The Sovereignty of God

Romans 9:14-18

Introduction

Philippe Petit -- was a French guy who was a tight rope walker. In 1974 - came up with the idea for the ultimate daredevil stunt -- he flew over from Paris to NY -- because he wanted to walk across a tight rope strung between the two newly built WTC towers. His feat was to be the highest tightrope walk without a harness or net ever accomplished to that day

The night before -- He snuck his way up to the top of the building using a fake construction ID / the next morning -- August 7th -- with a helper he secured a line between the two towers and around 8 am - walked across a tight rope 1,350 feet above the pavement below -- to the amazement of New Yorkers below. Police waited to arrest him while he gave his free show!

He crossed 8 times in 45 minutes -- as crowds cheered from below

He was charged with disorderly conduct and trespassing but the DA eventually dropped all charges -- If Petit would agree to give a free show in Central Park. Petit signed one of the steel beams of the WTC -- identifying where he began his historic walk in the sky -- the girder was destroyed on 9/11

Petit's stunt was actually credited with bringing much needed publicity to the new buildings which were not completely finished -- but were being panned by architectural critics as ugly / utilitarian and too large for the space

Petit had nothing to do with the making of the twin towers in NYC -- but he made use of them -- to highlight his own craft of tightrope walking.

We are told in the Scriptures that God made use of an event and a person to demonstrate His power to our world in OT history

In fact -- we read of this person in Romans 9

Romans 9:17 - 'For the Scripture says to pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate my power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.'

In Romans 9 -- Paul is referring back to the grand redemptive event in Israel's history -- that of the Exodus -- the crossing of the Red Sea on dry land

When Israel began taking the land under Joshua -- he sent two spies into Jericho -- who met a woman who put her faith in their God -- named Rahab

Joshua 2:9, 10 - 'And [she] said to the men, "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of

the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt . . .'

That was 40 years after the Exodus - - - they heard / they were still talking about it . . . the fame of YHWH and the deliverance of the Israelite slaves out of Egypt

God's showdown with pharaoh – a pharaoh who vacillated between telling Israel to go and then stubbornly changing his mind after the plagues were removed - - - speaks to us yet today of God's power over all.

Pharaoh was the ruler of the mightiest nation on the earth at the time

Egypt had enslaved the Israelites for 400 years

God sent Moses to go and deliver Israel – thru the use of the ten plagues / frogs / hail / locusts

When it came to the last plague – the death of the first-born - - - Pharaoh finally told Moses and the Israelites to go - - - but he had one final change of heart and sent his army after Israel which had camped out next to the Red Sea

In dramatic fashion – Moses parted the Red Sea with his staff - - - and when the Egyptians followed suit - - - God destroyed pharaoh's army there in the midst of the sea

It was a divine miracle / supernatural act of deliverance

The event let everyone know – this people descended from Abraham / Isaac and Jacob had a God unlike any other deity they had heard of

This God reigned over heaven and earth - - - and none could thwart His purposes - - - or withstand His mighty power

As Paul has been speaking of God's ultimate program of salvation including a remnant of the Jews and also inclusive of Gentiles - - - He speaks to us of God's mighty power

Theologians sometimes refer to this as the doctrine of the 'sovereignty of God'

When we talk about the sovereignty of God – one of His attributes – we are talking about His power to rule over His creation and universe

A. W. Pink: 'God does as He pleases, only as He pleases, always as He pleases. None can thwart Him, none can hinder Him. So His own word expressly declares: "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." (Isaiah 46:10). "He does according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand." (Dan. 4:35) Divine sovereignty means that God

is God in fact, as well as in name, that He is on the throne of the universe, directing all things, working all things after the counsel of His own will.'

Paul now brings this attribute into his discussion of God's dealings with Israel – and how some of them are saved and some of them are not

I. God's Sovereign Mercy - vv. 14-16

Paul raised the issue of whether or not God's Word or promises have failed in regard to Israel – since many of them have chosen not to believe in Jesus the Messiah – v. 6

Paul's response is that God has been and is saving those whom He chooses to save

In a sense – He is showing mercy upon whom He chooses to show mercy – [v. 15]

Is there injustice with God?

Paul sounds like he has taught this before and he knows the objections of the natural heart

If God shows mercy to some and justice to others - - - is that fair?

If we understand what Paul has just said in vv. 6-13 – this is the kind of question we might be inclined to ask

MLJ: 'His whole emphasis here is upon this: why is it that one man has faith and another man does not?'

Paul's point: God will have mercy on whom He chooses

The answer: Mercy – by definition is not an obligation – it cannot be earned / it is undeserved

We see a picture of this kind of grace in one of Jesus' parables – the parable of the Vineyard

The landowner hires various workers to work in his vineyard – tells them they will receive a denarius for their labor

The landowner goes out a couple hours later – and hires a few more

Then finally – it's an hour before closing time – and he hires a few more laborers to work his field

Then comes pay time at the end of the day – and the landowner – to the shock of the first workers hired - gives everyone a denarius

Matthew 20:10-12 - 'And when those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; and they also received each one a denarius. And when they

received it, they grumbled at the landowner, saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.'

Matthew 20:13-16 "But he answered and said to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong: did you not agree with me for a denarius? 'Take what is yours and go your way, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. 'Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?' "Thus the last shall be first, and the first last."

The point of the parable is that the landowner is just – He is perfectly just - - - but the workers have a skewed perspective on things

And – in Paul's picture - - - God Himself is free to be gracious to:

- 1) Some
- 2) All
- 3) None

Tim Keller: 'Consider a rich person who decides to choose twenty inner-city kids and guarantee full college tuition. There are literally thousands of potential recipients and the woman could help a lot more than twenty children. But - can anyone say that since she has helped some, she is being unfair to everyone else? No, she has no particular obligation to help any of the children. Since all she has given is sheer mercy, there can be no talk about being unfair.'

Paul takes us back to Exodus 33:19

Exodus 33:19 - 'I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.'

This statement came following Israel's sin with the golden calf

Which was quite a significant event – Moses up there on Mt. Sinai - receiving the Ten Commandments

Think of all God had done for them – recently – delivered out of Egypt – thru the plagues – a mighty display of God's power – then they go out and make a golden calf to worship!

Moses comes down from the mountain and breaks the two stone tablets – showing the breach of the covenant

3000 Israelites are slain in the guilt of the sin

It's a terrible thing – Israel is not showing themselves to be very faithful to the God who loved them and delivered them

Maybe God should just abandon them and choose a new people

But Moses prays and intercedes for Israel - asks God to remain with them

God essentially says that He will – but He makes this statement about His own being and character: 'I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I show compassion.'

The point: Israel did not deserve mercy – but God would choose to show mercy

*** Mercy by its very nature and definition is not something that can be deserved

In dealing with sinful – undeserving humanity - God is free to show mercy to whom He will show mercy

MLJ: 'The mystery, the thing that we ought to be amazed about, is not that He has mercy upon some and not upon others, but that He has mercy upon anybody at all, and especially that He has mercy upon us!'

If we wish to demand that we get what we justly deserve – we are asking for condemnation

What the gospel allows us to do – is to ask for mercy

II. God's Use of Pharaoh - vv. 17-18

Paul here refers to the OT account of Moses and the pharaoh of Egypt

Israel was enslaved to the Egyptians – for 400 years

God appeared to Moses and sent him to Pharaoh to tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go

Pharaoh said – 'I don't think so' – 'Who is the Lord and why should I obey Him?'

Moses began to unleash a succession of plagues upon the land – demonstrating that God wanted the people to be freed

Pharaoh at times seemed to be ready to let them go – at least while the consequences were in view – but when the plague was removed – he would change his mind [this happened again and again]

Exodus 9:13-14 - 'Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of the

Hebrews, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me. For this time I will send all My plagues on you and your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth."

Exodus 9:15-17 - "For if by now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth. But, indeed, for this cause I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power, and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth. "Still you exalt yourself against My people by not letting them go.'

i.e. – God says – ‘Pharaoh – you are not in charge here – I am!’ – and I could have blasted you out of existence a long time ago – - - but I left you here

Pharaoh does not have a proper view of God and His relationship to Him

God put pharaoh in power over the mightiest nation on earth at the time - - - Scripture says God is sovereign over all rulers and authorities

Romans 13:1 - '... for there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.'

Pharaoh thought he held all the cards / all the power as far as Israel was concerned - - - they were his slaves

God says, ‘No – I put you here for a purpose.’

Pilate [the Roman Governor of Judea] tried to tell Jesus he was in charge at his trial

John 19:10-12 - 'Pilate therefore said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you, and I have authority to crucify you?" Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason He who delivered Me up to you has the greater sin." And as a result of this Pilate made efforts to release Him, but the Jews cried out saying, "If you release this man you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar.'

Jesus is telling Pilate – you only have authority in this situation because God [My Father] put you here – and you will be held accountable for how you use your authority before God - - - choose wisely!

That's all of us – we have certain things given to us
We have this life – so many years to live

We have this body to motor around in
We have hands that can be used to serve others or to do wicked deeds
We have this mouth to speak His praises – or pour out blasphemies

Choose wisely – everything we have is a gift from God

C.S. Lewis: "For you will certainly carry out God's purpose, however you act, but it makes a difference to you whether you serve like Judas or like John."

Does this mean – that pharaoh was a pretty good guy and God came along and turned his heart hard and cold?

No! - - - Pharaoh – on his own was enslaving the Israelites / committing infanticide – having Hebrew baby boys put to death

That's who he was

So – he already was a bad guy – and God gave him over to his sin – [just like we see in Romans 1]

When God gives people over to their sin – there is a hardening that takes place that they themselves have invited upon themselves

Paul will later say a partial hardening has happened to Israel

Why? Because they rejected / crucified the Messiah and said 'let His blood be on us and on our children' – [Matthew 27:25] / [there are also dispensational purposes w/ Gentiles]

God gives people over to their stubborn and sinful ways

God gave pharaoh up to his own wicked heart

God does not cause evil

Walter Chantry: 'If evil acts of men will serve God's will, all that is needed to produce sin is already in their hearts, and Satan is standing by, eager to stir it up. All God need do is withhold His mighty restraint of evil and allow it to run its course, so far as it suits His purposes.' [David, p. 273]

MacArthur: 'The will to sin always stems from the sinner's own heart, not from God. He is never the author or efficient cause of evil.' [Truth War, p. 127]

Joseph's brothers wickedly sold him into slavery / etc.

God did not make the brothers sinners – they already were – but He used their sin to accomplish His own purposes

Genesis 50:20 - 'And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good to bring about this present result, to preserve many lives.'

Philippe Petit used the WTC to highlight his craft - - - 'it's there – I'll use it'

God makes use of the wicked in spite of themselves

Charles Spurgeon: 'Yet never is God the author or accomplice of sin. Never is He otherwise than the hater of sin and the avenger of unrighteousness. Sin rests with man, wholly with man, and yet by some strange overruling force, Godlike and mysterious, like the existence of God, His supreme will is accomplished.' [MTP 16, p. 501]

God made use of Pharaoh's proud / defiant stance towards Moses and His God

In the end Pharaoh's stubbornness made for a more spectacular deliverance for Israel and a display of God's almighty power to deliver out of his hand

One of the distinctions of monotheism – [which Judaism introduced to the world] – is that there are not multiple deities

If you go back and look at ancient civilizations / the Sumerians / the Canaanites / the Egyptians / the Babylonians - - - [who did they worship?] they all worshiped multiple gods who reigned over different geographical regions / or over different aspects of life

The Egyptians had the god Ra - was the Sun god – considered the chief deity
Osiris – the god of death

Set – was a god of violence and war – he killed Osiris

Sumerians – Enlil – was the god of wind / storms and air
Utu – god of the sun

The Greeks and Romans had Zeus / Jupiter as a chief deity
Apollo – was the deity of healing / music / prophecy
Hermes was the chief messenger of the gods

In Acts 14 – at Lystra – Paul healed a lame man

Some of the people try to worship Paul and Barnabas

Acts 14:12-15 - 'And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you in order that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them.'

Judaism came along and said – 'there is One God and He rules over all'

As Christians – we believe that as well - - - same OT Scriptures / God as a trinity

Hebrews 1:1, 2 - 'God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, thru whom also He made the world.'

David Jeremiah: 'God is absolutely sovereign and is doing what He wills to do. He may choose or not choose. He may bless or not bless. He is God.'

Spurgeon is correct when he says

Spurgeon: 'He that perishes chooses to perish; but he that is saved is saved because God has chosen to save him.'

Conclusion

If we understand our lost condition before God – we will see the grand privilege we have to ask God for mercy – because of our sins

Luke 18:9 - 'And He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt.'

Luke 18:10-12 - 'Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer. The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

Luke 18:13 - 'But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!"'

Luke 18:14 - 'I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted.'

Jesus told us to ask and ye shall receive

‘Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’