

## **Twin Truths: God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility**

John 3:11-21

43-15

This morning we're going back to John chapter 3, so open your Bible, if you will, and come with me to the third chapter of John. We're going to take a look, an initial look at this section, verses 11 to 21. And then I'm going to kind of digress a little bit because there's something I have to tell you to set this entire passage in a proper context and to put it in your mind in a way that will be most helpful.

But let me read, we left off our discussion of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in the opening ten verses where Jesus talks to him about being born again, born from above. And we talked about the new birth. We talked about being born from above. It's a work of God; it's a divine work, a work of sovereign grace and sovereign power. It's a monergistic, unilateral work of God that's not a synthetic work where you have God participating with man. It's not some kind of coalescing of the will and power of man, with the will and power of God. It's a singular work of God by which He comes down from heaven, irresistibly brings a call—we call it an effectual call on the heart of a sinner—draws that sinner to himself, regenerates that sinner, and then justifies that sinner, sanctifies that sinner and then glorifies that sinner. It's a work of God. The new birth being born from above, in the very illustration of birth, makes the point because no one participates in his own birth. You didn't participate in your physical birth; you didn't participate in your spiritual birth. It is a work of God, a divine, creative miracle.

So we went through that discussion, verses 1 to 10, with Nicodemus. Our Lord continues to speak to Nicodemus but beyond Nicodemus because as you begin in verse 11, the pronouns are plural as He says, "I say to you." In verse 11, the pronoun is plural, so it broadens beyond Nicodemus to anyone else who happened to be there listening and to everyone else, for that matter, who will ever read this.

We pick up the monologue, the conversation ends in verse 10. Nicodemus has nothing else to say. But Jesus then speaks from verses 11 to 21. I want you to notice the emphasis here. "Truly, truly I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen and you do not accept our testimony." That is an indication that Nicodemus did not accept what Jesus said about the new birth. That's the post-mortem on that part of the conversation. You didn't accept it. That explains the ignorance of verses 9 and 10. Nicodemus doesn't understand; how can these things be? And Jesus says, "Are you the teacher of Israel and you don't understand these things?" The reason he can't understand—ignorance is the product of unbelief. And so he is not a believer. You do not accept our testimony.

Then our Lord goes on to say, "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven but He who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up. And so whoever believes will in Him have eternal life, for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal

life.” Martin Luther called that verse the gospel in miniature, the most familiar verse in the Bible.

Verse 17 then, “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged, he who does not believe has been judged already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment, that the light [meaning Christ] has come into the world and men love the darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil, hates the light and does not come to the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the light so that his deeds may be manifested, **in having been**, as having been wrought in God.”

Now if there’s any one word that jumped off the page as I was reading that, it had to be the word “believe” because it appears seven times. In the first ten verses, we notice that the term “born again” appeared five times—“born again, born from above,” speaking of that divine, supernatural, sovereign, miraculous, gracious work of regeneration done by God. That was the theme of 1 to 10, the new birth, regeneration. The theme here is faith, believing. And so we have identified this message this morning as “*Sola Fide*,” Latin for “faith alone.”

Now why do I choose to use Latin to title a message? Because that is a classic term used to describe the doctrine that is taught in verses 11 to 21, going all the way back to the Reformation. If you go back to the sixteenth, seventeenth century when there was a clarification of the gospel, when the Reformation happened, there were five *solas* that the Reformers identified. Those five *solas* became the identifying benchmarks of the Reformation, and they are really the *solas* on which Protestantism is founded and a true understanding of the gospel.

The Reformers came up with, first of all, *sola Scriptura* as over against the Roman Catholic Church. They affirmed that there’s only one divine revelation, Scripture alone, *sola scriptura*. Not what is stated *ex cathedra* by the pope, not the product of church councils, not the collective magisterium of the Roman Catholic tradition—those are not divine, inspired, and authoritative revelations. *Sola Scriptura*, and then they came to *sola Christus*. Mary is not a co-redemptrix, only Christ. Christ alone, the only savior.

Salvation is not by grace and works, it is by grace alone—*sola gratia*, *sola gratia*. And it is appropriated not by works or any effort of man, but *sola fide*, “by faith alone” and the final *sola, soli Deo gloria*, “the glory of God alone.” So those *solas* define the Reformation and when you read any Reformation literature, you’re going to be running into the *solas*. In fact, through the years, many times I have spoken on these subjects at conferences designed really to give the *solas*, and a number of speakers would come in and address *sola Scriptura*, *sola Christus*, *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, or *soli Deo gloria*. Great, great themes.

So we’re looking at *sola fide*, the aspect of salvation that declares that one is saved by faith alone, not by faith and works, for by grace are you saved through faith, it is not of works. That’s Ephesians 2:8 and 9. It is not of works. It is by faith alone. Or Romans 3, “No one is justified by behavior, by the deeds of the Law.” Or Romans 4, “Abraham is justified by faith and not by works.” Or Romans 10, “One is saved by believing in the resurrection of Christ and acknowledging His Lordship.” The Word of God is crystal clear on that. I read earlier from Hebrews 10 an Old Testament statement, “The just shall live by faith.” That is to say, justification comes by faith and faith alone. And we all know something of the history of that. That was the great discovery that Martin Luther made that launched the Reformation. And he was kind of the triggerpoint to get it rolling, and it roared against the Roman

Catholic Church and Protestantism, named as a protest against Catholicism, was born and the true gospel was recovered. Salvation comes by faith alone, not by faith plus works—by faith alone.

That is what John is saying in verses 11 to 21. He is telling Nicodemus and beyond Nicodemus using those plural pronouns, “I say to all of you,” that is to anybody else who was standing there with Nicodemus, including His own disciples, “And I say to all who will ever read this that you will be saved only by faith.” Verse 15, “Whoever believes will have eternal life.” Verse 16, “Whoever believes will not perish but have eternal life.” Verse 18, “He who believes is not judged.” It is about believing. It is about faith and faith alone.

This is consistent with John’s purpose. If you remember, John gave his purpose at the end of his letter, John 20:31, “These have been written,” meaning the entire letter, the entire gospel, “These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” John consistently says eternal life, that is, the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation to God. The hope of heaven comes to those who believe. It is by faith alone.

Now what is so fascinating about this is the fact that it comes on the heels of verses 1 to 10. Just think about this. Jesus is talking to a non-believer. He’s talking to a man who is in a defective, heretical, apostate religion. He is desiring to bring that man to a knowledge of the truth and consequently He says to him three times in this conversation, down through verse 11, “Truly, truly,” which is a way of saying, “In contrast to all the error that fills your mind, error which you have learned and then taught as *the* teacher in Israel, “I want to tell you the truth. And the first truth I want you to understand is that salvation is a divine work that God does from heaven down, that doesn’t depend on you.” We saw that. It’s absolutely crystal clear in verses 1 to 10.

And then without any explanation, without any transition, our Lord takes the next part of the conversation, turns it into a monologue and says this, “Anyone can be saved who believes,” and explains that in these verses. Anyone can be saved who believes. So on the one hand you have the doctrine of divine sovereignty. On the other hand you have the doctrine of human faith, human belief, or human responsibility. There are warnings that I just read you. If you don’t believe, you’ll be condemned. If you don’t believe, you’ll be judged, which means that if you don’t believe, you’re responsible for your unbelief, you will be held guilty, and you will be punished. This is human responsibility. Consequently you need to believe. You need to believe and in believing in the Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, you will not perish; you will have eternal life. So here is human responsibility, both negatively and positively. You will bear the full weight of judgment if you refuse to believe. On the other hand, if you will believe, eternal life waits for you no matter who you are.

So you have then as clear a presentation of sovereign salvation in verses 1 to 10 as anywhere in Scripture, and right against it you have a clear presentation of human responsibility. And the question that if I don’t answer today, you will be asking in every verse, is how do those two things fit together? I’ve done questions and answers through the years in every place I’ve ever gone in the world, and every time there is an open question and answer session, I am asked this question: “How can salvation be solely a work of God and me be held responsible for believing or not believing? How can those two go together?”

Now I want to say this to you, first of all. Most people in doing evangelism would avoid that question all together, assuming that Christians who have been Christians for a long time don’t even like to face that question. They would do everything they could to keep a non-believer in the dark about it,

and they would be doing exactly the opposite of what Jesus did. Jesus is talking to a non-believer and He presents to him the twin parallel truths of divine sovereignty in salvation and human responsibility, and He does it at the very beginning of the conversation. This is a work of God, solely a work of God, but you will be held responsible if you do not believe, and you are called to believe and eternal life awaits you if you will believe. Those are twin truths that run parallel.

May I tell you? They will always run parallel. They will always run parallel. They will never come together. They will never intersect. They will never be diminished; legitimately, they are what they are. The fact that you don't understand how they go together only proves that you're less than you should be. It doesn't say anything about God. Your inability to harmonize those things is a reflection of your fallenness, my fallenness. People ask me all the time, "How do you harmonize those?" And my answer is, "I don't. I can't." They can't be harmonized in the human mind. But realize this, you are a puny mind and so am I, and collectively we are puny compared to the infinite, vast, limitless mind of God. All I can tell you is that in the Word of God, these truths run parallel. And the answer is to believe them both with all your heart. And the one, divine sovereignty, will inform your worship and the other, human responsibility, will motivate your evangelism.

So how are we to understand these things? Well, we're going to get into the text and I'm going to show you the condition of unbelief, the commendation of belief, and the condemnation of unbelief, but we'll leave that for next time. I want to talk about this particular issue 'cause, as I said, if I don't, in every verse you're going to have this dilemma in your mind about how does this work? How could we be saying these things about you must believe, if you believe you can be saved, and make that square with what we already know about divine sovereignty in salvation. How do those things come together? They don't. I say it again, they are parallel truths, they are both true. I've been around a long time and I have seen every imaginable, every conceivable effort to harmonize those things done by people, well-intentioned people, very gifted people, well-known preachers, theologians, writers, commentators who tried to harmonize it. Anybody whoever tries to harmonize those two things destroys one or the other of them, or both of them. You can't change them, you can't tamper with them. You must be content to believe them both.

Now how can I help you to deal with that? I can't harmonize it. I can't bring it all together. I can't solve your dilemma. I can't answer the apparent paradox. So what am I left with? I want to make you comfortable with your inability not to get it. Okay? That's my objective, okay? I just want you to be completely happy that you don't get it. Okay? Just put you to rest, stop fighting that. That's where we're going today. I want you to be comfortable with the fact that, wow, you just might not understand something. I know that's a big pill to swallow because of human pride, but get over it and be content not to get it.

Now I want you to understand that when the Bible deals with these things, it doesn't explain itself. It isn't self-conscious. You don't read—I know this is really tough to get—you don't have caveats like that. You don't have underlying statements. You don't have efforts to make explanations. These things are stated in Scripture as parallel realities and never really explained or harmonized because they both exist. And the fact that we can't understand them leaves us with one option, and that is to believe them both and be content with that.

Let me give you a couple of illustrations to help you with your comfort. Turn to Isaiah 10, and this might seem a bit of a different angle on this but I want you to show, to be able to see how God shows us these things in maybe surprising ways.

God has a will. We know that. God will do His will, or whatever the Lord wills, He does; whatever He purposes, He brings to pass. The will of the Lord cannot be thwarted. He is absolutely sovereign. He does what He wills in every life. He does what He wills among men. He does what He wills in the world. He brings His own purposes to pass. That aspect of the sovereignty of God is clearly revealed all over Scripture.

But here's a very interesting illustration of how that goes together with responsibility. In the tenth chapter of Isaiah, God introduces Assyria, the nation of Assyria, the people of Assyria. And he introduces that pagan, idolatrous nation in a very interesting way. Verse 5, Isaiah 10, "Woe to Assyria." Okay, a judgment is coming on Assyria, a judgment from God: "Woe." "Woe" is an onomatopoeic Hebrew term. We say, "Woe" in English. It actually in Hebrew, *oyeeyaa*,; it's that kind of groan. That's why I mean onomatopoeic; that's a word that sounds like its meaning. So it's a word of terrible distress that signifies destruction and judgment. God is going to destroy Assyria. God is going to bring divine judgment on Assyria.

Then from there we read, "The rod of My anger and the staff in whose hands is My indignation." God says I'm going to judge Assyria, and then He identifies Assyria as the rod of His anger and the staff of His indignation. In other words, Assyria is a weapon in the hands of God. Assyria...God is picking up Assyria like a weapon to use Assyria to unleash His wrath.

On whom? Verse 6, "I send it against a godless nation and commission it against the people of My fury." That's a sad designation because He's talking about Israel. God, and it happened in history, picked up Assyria and sent Assyria as a destroyer against an apostate idolatrous Israel. God says, "I am going to pick up Assyria, the rod of My anger, the staff of My wrath, My indignation, and I'm going to send it against a godless nation, against Israel." And that's what He did. Assyria was God's tool. You know the story of the Assyrian invasion of the northern kingdom in 722—took them captive, massacred them, and they never returned from captivity; the northern part of the divided kingdom. Assyria was the weapon. And He says in verse 6, "To capture booty, to seize plunder, to trample them down like mud in the streets," and that is exactly what happened.

Then you come to verse 7, most interesting. "Yet, it does not so intend, nor does it plan so in its heart." I'm going to use Assyria to do this and this is not Assyria's plan. This is not what Assyria is choosing, this is what I am choosing for Assyria to do. This is not Assyria's intent. This is not its plan. Rather, it has its purpose—to destroy and cut off many nations.

Assyria is targeting all kinds of nations and their names in the next verse, verse 9, that identify some of those. Assyria has its plan, but I have My plan, and I without their planning it, or intending to do it, I'm going to pick them up and use them as My weapon.

Well, this is amazing. Assyria has no intention of doing this. God literally, sovereignly picks them up, drives them at Israel to accomplish His will, and then He says in verse 5, "Woe to Assyria." Woe to Assyria, a nation to be destroyed for doing something they didn't choose to do, doing something they didn't plan to do, doing something that was not their intention to do.

Assyria had its own plans. God had different plans. But Assyria will be destroyed. Verse 12, "It will be when the Lord has completed all His work on Mount Zion, representing Israel and Jerusalem, He will

say, 'I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness.'" And then He goes on to quote what the king of Assyria said when he became proud and launched against Israel. God says, "I'm going to destroy him."

Verse 16, "I'm going to send wasting disease. Under His glory a fire of kindle like a burning flame. The light of Israel will become a fire, his Holy One a flame and burn and devour his thorns and briars in a single day. He will destroy the glory of his forest and fruitful garden, soul, and body as when a sick man wastes away," etc. This is an amazing juxtaposing. God punishes a nation for doing what God picked them up and made them do. There's no explanation. There's no way to harmonize those things. Full responsibility for pride fell on the king of Assyria. Full responsibility for evil intention and massacre fell on Assyria. Even though they were acting by divine decree, they bore full responsibility for what they did. This again is an illustration of those parallel realities: human responsibility and divine sovereignty. And they will always run parallel, and they will always have to be understood that way. Sinners bear the full weight of responsibility for their acts of defiance against God, even when God is using them to accomplish His purposes. And yet all things are decreed and determined by God as to their final end.

Let me take you into the New Testament, for a moment. Turn to Matthew chapter 11, Matthew chapter 11, and this may be a little more on point. Matthew chapter 11, verse 27, this is a verse on divine sovereignty. "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father." Now listen, "And no one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." Did you see that? The only one who knows the Son is the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. You can't know Christ if He doesn't will for you to believe in Him. If He doesn't will you to know Him. Well, that's verse 27, strong on divine, sovereign, determined purpose. You can't know the Son unless the Son wills you to know Him.

And then verse 28, what does it say? "Come to Me all who are weary and heavy laden and I'll give you rest."

How can that be? He just said that no one can come unless the Son reveals Him Himself. How can you say that? But that's all over the Bible. They're those two parallel realities, those twin truths again. On the one hand, the sovereign purpose of God; on the other hand, an open offer: "Come to Me" all who are weary, heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, learn from Me. I'm gentle and humble in heart. You'll rest for your souls for My yoke is easy, My burden is light."

You have this firm statement about no one being able to know Christ unless it is revealed to him from above. And then you have an immediate plea from the heart of Christ for anyone and everyone to come.

Turn to John 6, and we'll get to John 6, one of the really great chapters in Scripture. But in John 6 we can pick it up at verse 35, Jesus says, fed the multitude; then He's taught about the bread of life, about Himself being the bread of life. In verse 35 He said, "I am the bread of life, he who comes to Me will not hunger. He who believes in Me will never thirst." So if you have spiritual hunger and spiritual thirst, that can be remedied and answered by coming to Christ. What does that mean? It means believing. Verse 35 is one of those "whoever"—"He who believes in Me, whoever believes in Me will never thirst." I said to you, "You have seen Me and yet do not believe." You don't believe. Your problem is, you've seen Me, you've heard Me. I just created food to feed 20 to 25 thousand of you. I've been teaching you. I've said all this. Your problem—you don't believe; you don't believe.

And then He says in verse 37, look at this: “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me.” And He goes from the failure to believe to divine sovereignty. You won’t believe, you won’t come. And then He immediately says, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me.” And, by the way, in verse 40 He says, “This is the will of God, My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life.” It goes back and forth from divine sovereignty to human responsibility. It goes from new birth, regeneration as a work of God, the Father chooses, the Father draws, the Father gives to the Son, the Son receives, the Son keeps and loses none. That’s the divine side. And it just moves easily without an explanation to the reality that anyone, whoever believes, may have eternal life.

Down in verse 44, “No man can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws Him.” Well, you can’t come unless the Father draws you, and yet verse 45, “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.” That seems to support the idea that this is a divine work of God. In fact, verse 46, “Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from the Father, He has seen the Father.” And this is talking about the divine side. “You can’t know the Son, you can’t know the Father, you can’t know eternal life in them unless God draws you, unless God calls you, and yet, verse 47, “Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.” It’s a matter of believing.

Verse 57, “As the living Father sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me.” All you have to do is receive Christ, take Christ in and you’ll have eternal life. Down in verse 63, it is the Spirit who gives life. That’s regeneration. That’s John 3:1 to 10; it’s the new birth, the regeneration born from above. It’s the Spirit who gives life. It’s the Spirit who gives life. And yet verse 64, “There are some of you who do not believe. There are some of you who do not believe, that’s your problem. And as a result of that, verse 66, “Many of His disciples withdrew and weren’t walking with Him anymore, so Jesus said to the Twelve, ‘You do not want to go away also, do you? Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, we have believed and have come to know that You’re the Holy One of God.’”

Back and forth from the sovereign choice of God, the sovereign revelation of the Father and the Son, the sovereign work of the Spirit who gives life to believing and not believing. Those things are side-by-side in Scripture everywhere. Two parallel truths to be affirmed if not fully comprehended.

In the second chapter of the book of Acts, there is another one of these illustrations where Peter is preaching on the Day of Pentecost, and he indicts the Jews for rejecting Christ and crucifying Christ. He says, “Men of Israel, listen to these words,” Acts 2:22, “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 and put Him to death.”

The predetermined plan of God and yet you nailed Him to a cross. And we know from the teaching of our Lord that they were to be held accountable for that, that their house was left to them desolate. They were guilty of not only stoning the prophets, but killing the Son of God Himself, and they would bear full weight for the responsibility of their unbelief and their action against Christ. Yes, by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, and yet full responsibility on the part of those who rejected Him and took His life.

In the fourth chapter of the book of Acts: “Truly in this city they were gathered together against Your

holy servant, Jesus, whom You anointed,” speaking to God, “Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, the people of Israel to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.”

So there, the Jews, the Romans, Pilate, Herod, everybody involved in the execution of Jesus, they were doing what they wanted to do in unbelief and an unbounded iniquity and yet they were executing the purpose predestined by the hand of God. Those parallel truths. The Old Testament prophesied the betrayal of Jesus. It prophesied Judas. The New Testament records the fact that Judas was the fulfillment of the one who was prophesied to lift up his hand, His own familiar friend who would lift up his hand against Him. It was ordained by God that Judas would be a betrayer in John 18, that Jesus says, “I have lost none of them except the son of perdition that Scripture may be fulfilled.” And yet in Acts 1:25 it says, “When Judas hanged himself, and fell and burst his bowels open, he went to...he turned and went to his own place.” These are samples of how consistently Scripture puts these things parallel without mingling them and therefore diminishing one or the other, or both.

One final illustration in Romans 9, 10 and 11, we'll wrap it up here in just a few moments. Obviously these are great passages. I remember when the first time I ever went through Romans 9, 10 and 11, those three chapters, I think, took a year. I admit, people were screaming for mercy within six months; we plowed through it in a year. But so I'll give you just the overview.

Chapters 1 through 8, the gospel. Chapters 1 through 8, the gospel. The gospel is introduced in 1, and then it becomes the subject in all its beauty and all its nuances, aspects, and the gospel is through 1 through 8.

Now you come to 9 and in 9 to 11 the gospel, having been explained, the apostle then bears his heart over the application of that gospel truth to sinners. And he chooses one group of sinners, the one that is the most familiar to him, and those about whom he cares the most, the Jews. So let's take the gospel from the opening eight chapters and let's apply it to the Jews. How does he feel about his nation?

Well, chapter 9 verse 1, “I'm telling you the truth in Christ, I'm not lying. My conscience testifies with Me in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh who are Israelites.” So here's his problem. He understands the gospel. He's unfolded the glories of the gospel and he's looking at his people, his nation Israel, and his heart is broken to the degree he would almost give up his own salvation if Israel could be saved. The same thing is in chapter 10, verse 1. “My heart's desire, my prayer to God is for their salvation.” Same attitude. Chapter 11, verse 1, “Has God rejected His people? No He has not. May it never be.”

So what you have here is Paul's passion that this glorious gospel which he's unfolded be applied to Israel. Now that brings into play these two parallel realities. And you have the first one, divine sovereignty in chapter 9, and you have the second one, human volition in chapter 10. Let's see how chapter 9 begins. Chapter 9 begins with affirming the privileges that the Israelites had. Verses 4 and 5, the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the temple, the promises of the Father's. Even Christ came through the line of Israel, all of that. The Word of God didn't fail. What happened? “Not all Israel is Israel.”

What? "Not all Israel is Israel." God makes choices. And you go down to verse 13, you see an illustration. "Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated." What? "Jacob have I loved, Esau I hated. I even determined that the older would serve the younger." Verse 14, the response then, "What are we going to say? There's no injustice with God, is there?" That doesn't sound fair. How can you make that determination before they're born? How can you choose Jacob and not Esau? How can you do that? That's not fair.

Verse 15, Here's God's answer from Exodus 33, "I'll have mercy on whom I will have mercy. And I'll have compassion on whom I will have compassion." I make that decision. I decide to whom I will give mercy and compassion. "It doesn't depend on the man who wills. It doesn't depend on the man who runs." It depends on God who has mercy. Verse 18, "He has mercy on whom He desires. He hardens whom He desires."

So the question is then in verse 19, "How can He then find fault with me?" I'm not even a factor. If He's making all the choices, how can He hold me responsible for rejecting? Because who could resist that sovereign will? That's your complaint. That's not fair. What's God's answer? Simply, "Shut up, you have no right to ask that." That's what he says in so many words.

Verse 20, "Who are you, O man, who answers back to God?" "Who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did You make Me like this, will it? Does not the potter have a right over the clay? To make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? So what if God desired to demonstrate His wrath and make His power known through vessels prepared for destruction?'" God has a right to put His glory on display, the glory that He gets through His wrath. And so what if God wanted to make known the riches of His glory on vessels of mercy. God is glorified in His wrath and He's glorified in His grace.

From Hosea, verse 25, "I'll call those who were not My people My people." I'll make that call. I'll make that decision. That's a sovereign decision made by God. That is the most strong section of the New Testament on the sovereignty of God in choosing people for salvation.

Now you come to chapter 10, the next chapter. Here's the other side, human responsibility. What's the problem? "My prayer to God is for their salvation. I pray that they'll be saved." Why are they not saved? Well, "they have a zeal for God," verse 2, "but not in accordance with knowledge." They don't have enough knowledge. He's not saying, "Well I...there's no way they will be saved because I guess God didn't choose them." He doesn't say that. He says, "The problem is they don't have knowledge." And what is it that they don't understand? Well, they don't understand the things you need to understand. I mean, you totally need to understand. For example, they don't understand God's righteousness. Wow, that's really important. They don't understand that God is as righteous as He is. They think God is less righteous than He is. And they seek to establish their own righteousness. So they have a bad theology proper. They think God is less righteous than He is. They have a bad anthropology. They think they are more righteous than they are, and so they can satisfy God on their own.

So they have an inadequate view of God as holy, perfectly righteous. They have an utterly inadequate view of themselves as totally and utterly sinful. And therefore they don't subject themselves to the righteousness of God. In other words, they don't fall under the burden of realizing they can never attain to the righteousness of God, and therefore cry out to Christ to end the reign of the Law and bring them righteousness and how would that happen? It would come to everyone who

believes. How amazing is that? Verse 4, they don't understand that righteousness which brings an end to the tyranny of the Law is available to everyone who believes. And so, Paul says, "That's what we preach," verse 8. We preach the Word about faith. We preach about faith. We preach that if you confess with your mouth "Jesus is Lord, believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead, you'll be saved, for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness."

And then He says in verse 11, "Whoever believes in Him will not be ashamed." Whoever believes, it doesn't matter, Jew, Greek, same Lord, Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him. For whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Wow! After that, chapter 9, resolute, absolute on the sovereignty of God in salvation, here it's about knowing the truth, believing the truth, believing in Christ.

How do we respond to these two things? Well, we have a mandate. Verse 14, and this is how you resolve this. "How will they call on Him in whom they haven't believed? How will they believe in Him whom they haven't heard? How will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they're sent?"

You see, faith, verse 17, comes from hearing the Word concerning Christ. So what's our responsibility? Climb into an ivory tower and try to find a solution to these two parallel truths? To try to find a way to resolve the apparent paradox? To try to catapult ourselves to the level of the mind of infinite God? No. Our responsibility is to recognize this. We have been given a command and a commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature because anyone who believes can be saved. Anyone who believes will be saved. "Anyone who comes to Me," Jesus said in John 6, "I will never turn away." The only way people can come to Him and believe is if they hear. The only way they can hear is as if we go and tell them.

If this issue of sovereignty and human responsibility is nothing more for you than some kind of a mental exercise, then you've missed the entire point. We are held responsible for the proclamation of the message of salvation to the ends of the earth, to the ends of the earth. And if we do that, they will say what is recorded in verse 15, borrowed from Isaiah 52, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news, good tidings, the gospel."

In the end, the final word, and it's a magnificent one, comes at the close of chapter 11, at the close of chapter 11. Verse 33, now we know what our mission is, to go to the world and preach the gospel, to be the preachers who are sent, to tell the truth so people can hear, believe and be saved. But this is where the final resolution comes, verse 33, Romans 11. This is Paul, and Paul understood these two parallel truths, certainly as well as any human being could understand them. And he says this, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God." The first thing to acknowledge is this, what God knows and what God understands is vastly beyond us. It is at a depth we cannot fathom. In fact, he says, how unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways.

Can you take the instruction from that? You cannot understand these two things and how they harmonize in the mind of God. You never will understand them in this life. They are unsearchable and unfathomable. There are plenty of people who would like to give God a little advice and their idea of harmonizing these. But the problem is in verse 34, "Who knows the mind of the Lord and who became His counselor." Do you think God's waiting for you to give Him some hints on how He can

simplify? Who do you think you are? You don't know the mind of the Lord. You can't even come close. You're not going to counsel Him.

Furthermore, in verse 35, He's not obligated to you to give you any more information than you have. "Who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again." Do you think God owes you something? You think He owes you an explanation? No, in the end, "from Him, through Him, to Him are all things, we put them there and we leave them there. To Him be the glory forever, Amen."

Now, I did all that, said all that, took you through all that so that when we start to look at the role that faith plays, you're going to be at peace and at rest as you think about that in comparison to the wonderful section on regeneration, the work, the divine work of God.

Do you feel a little more comfortable with those two things? I hope you do. That's the whole point. In Psalm 77 (applause)...thank you...in Psalm 77 and verse 19 it says, "Your way was in the sea and your paths in the mighty waters"...I love this..."and your footprints can't be known." Beautiful imagery, right? You walk through the sea and you don't leave any footprints. I'm content with that. I rejoice in that. And I live my life believing both of those things, but the one that puts the responsibility on me is *sola fide*; divine sovereignty puts no responsibility on me. Faith and believing puts all the responsibility on me, to believe, to not be left in unbelief, and to proclaim a message so that others can hear and also believe. So next time we're going to look into the wonderful section on whosoever believes will not perish but have everlasting life.

Father, thank You for our time this morning, as we have grappled in our minds with these things—some of us for a long time—and perhaps not understood how marvelous and how wondrous these realities are. And how the very reality that they're beyond us speaks of their divine character. We honor You, we adore You, we love You, we exalt You, we lift You up and even in all our efforts to do that, we can't comprehend You as you really are. We long for the day in heaven to come when our knowledge will be made perfect and our understanding will be made clear and we'll be able to glorify You perfectly. Until then, we give You the honor that the apostle did, and we say with Him that from You and to You and for You are all things, to You be the glory forever. Amen.

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