

Introduction

This is Palm Sunday. We remember that on this day one week before his resurrection over two thousand years ago Jesus rode into Jerusalem on an unbroken colt of a donkey. The crowds were waving palm branches and casting their cloaks before him. These were expressions of affirmation that Jesus was Messiah. They began to cry out vocalizing their testimony. What they acknowledged on that Sunday, they abandoned by Friday. They would reject him vociferously and call for his crucifixion. Jesus knew their hearts. Luke tells us that as the procession drew near the city, Jesus wept over Jerusalem. He said, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.” Jesus prophesied that enemies would come and not leave one stone upon another because the city did not know the time of its visitation. The king came and the people celebrated under false pretenses. The king was not what they had expected and their shouts of Hosanna on Sunday turned to cries for his crucifixion on Friday. They did not know the significance of the day. They did not know what really makes for peace. Weeping, Jesus explained the reason for their failure: these things were HIDDEN from them. We are continuing our study of Matthew, and this morning we come to a text of profundity as it reveals that Jerusalem was not the only locale where people failed to see because the things of the kingdom were hidden from them.

[Read Text; Pray]

There are two aspects of God’s saving work that are seen by some as impossible companions. I am talking on the one hand about the sovereign work of God. On the other hand I am talking about human responsibility. There are those who claim that if God is sovereign in salvation, then human beings cannot be held responsible for refusing to believe. There are others who posit that if God commands sinners to repent and turn from their sin, they must be understood as possessing the capacity to turn because God would never command of people something that they cannot do.

Can it be true that God is the one ultimately on whose effectual working salvation depends and yet that he also calls all people everywhere to respond to the good news of the gospel? Well, Jesus certainly does not see these aspects in conflict with one another. In the text which we just read, he presses them right up next to each other as if to declare his affirmation of both. God is sovereign in salvation, yet human beings are responsible.

I want you to see in verses 25-27 . . .

I. The Sovereignty of God in Salvation.

A. I need to make sure you know what I mean when I say that God is sovereign in salvation. To speak of the sovereignty of God in salvation is to say that God is the ultimate determiner of who is saved, who is joined to Christ in salvation and who is not. It is to say that God works effectually in bringing sinners to repentance and faith. Ultimately his will is not thwarted. The gospel goes out proclaiming forgiveness and reconciliation with God for all who will believe. To affirm God's sovereignty in salvation is to say that ultimately, it is God who gives a heart to believe. It is God who is at work in human beings both to will and to work for his good pleasure. It is God who through the Holy Spirit brings about new birth. He replaces a stone cold heart that is spiritually dead and incapable of believing with one that is alive to him. It is because of his sovereign intervention and provision then that sinners repent and believe in Christ unto salvation.

From eternity God has chosen in Christ those who will be saved and he works in them to bring them to himself in the course of time according to his good pleasure. Another way of putting this is that when God sent his son Jesus to atone for sin, he did not send him to make salvation possible but to make it certain for the elect of God.

The Apostle Paul articulates the sovereignty of God in salvation in Ephesians 1. He states, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as HE CHOSE US in him BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he PREDESTINED us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will to the praise of HIS glorious grace with which HE has blessed us in the Beloved."

Paul articulated the order in which this work of God comes about in Romans 8, starting with verse 28. "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."

This doctrine of God's sovereignty in salvation is at the heart of what we around here refer to as reformed theology. It is not a theology developed outside the Bible, nor was it a product of the Reformation, but it is thoroughly biblical, and it was recovered and freshly understood in the Reformation. It is despised by many, and we have to contend for this thoroughly biblical doctrine anew and afresh in every generation because the pride of man is antagonistic to it. When we turn to the Bible, we cannot miss the teaching. It is not isolated off in a corner somewhere. It comes out everywhere. And this morning we see that it is taught by Jesus Christ himself.

B. Jesus powerfully brings across his affirmation of divine sovereignty. It starts with praise to the Father and then moves to the choice of the Son.

1. Look at verses 25-26. Jesus makes a public declaration of praise and thanks to the Father.

Jesus Begins, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth." He is publicly praising the Father. Jesus wants everyone around to hear him extolling his Father. I think back to the baptism of Jesus. There the Father publicly proclaimed his delight in his Son. "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." Now we are hearing that very Son exclaiming his delight in his Father. And what does he say of him? He declares that he is the Sovereign ruler of all things. He calls him Lord of heaven and earth. Jesus is rejoicing and glorying in the sovereignty of God—that he rules over all, that he does according to his good pleasure in all things, that he works all things according to the counsel of his will, that he is in heaven and does whatever pleases him.

Any idea of God which disarms him of sovereignty is a diminished view of God. Any understanding of God which espouses an indeterminacy to the future in order to make room for human significance is a faulty conception of God. It diminishes the dominion, the power, the wisdom, the glory, and the majesty of God. Jesus did not hold such a view. He was greatly delighted to proclaim his father as the Lord of Heaven and Earth. He is the king eternal under whose rule is every person, every leaf, every particle of dust, indeed every single molecule of matter.

Now to make his praise even more pointed, Jesus reflects upon what has been taking place in his recent experience. Recently he had been conversing with crowds who should have believed, cities and towns which had hardened their hearts against the message of the kingdom because it did not fit with what they desired. They were like haughty children who rejected John and rejected Jesus because John and Jesus didn't play their game. And so Jesus denounced the cities where most of his mighty works had been done because they did not repent. He indicated that their guilt was worse than that of Sodom. It could seem to the onlookers, perhaps his own disciples, that the will of God was being thwarted by these unbelievers.

However, in this declaration Jesus is saying that it is not so. The refusal of these cities to repent is not an indication that the Lord of heaven and earth is being thwarted. They may be resisting the message, but they are not able to thwart the purpose and plan of God.

Jesus moves forward then to explain how his Father's purpose has been accomplished even in the resistance toward the miracles and the message. "I thank you Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, **that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.**"

Jesus declares that the rule of the Lord of heaven and earth extends even to who comprehends the things of the kingdom. He has hidden them from certain ones and revealed them to certain others. Namely, he has hidden the things of the kingdom from the wise and understanding. These are the people who see themselves as wise and understanding. They compare to the folks who refuse to see themselves as sick. Meanwhile, God is pleased to reveal the things of the kingdom to children. This is not the haughty

child of the marketplace playground but a humble child who is teachable and open. This is the simple, untaught individual who is open to learning.

If you want to know the truth, if you want God to reveal truth to you. Then you need to humble yourself before him. You need to be willing to be taught. God in his sovereignty will hide the truth from those who think they have got it all figured out. But he will reveal it to those whose hearts cry out, "Lord of heaven and earth, teach me. Lord, show me your ways."

2. Now look at verse 27. This verse depicts the relationship shared by the Father and the Son. It is a relationship in which the Father has turned things over to his Son. He is the Son of the Lord of heaven and earth. Jesus is the Son of God. There can be no doubt what he is saying here. And he demonstrates that the sovereignty he has received from the Father is the same kind of sovereignty exhibited by the Father. The Father hides and reveals according to his will and the Son does the same thing. The father chooses from whom he will hide the truth and to whom he will reveal it. The Son also chooses to whom he will reveal the Father. There is this exclusive fellowship and relationship of knowledge that is shared by the Father and the Son. "No one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son." Sin has cut human beings off from God, from the knowledge of God, from fellowship with God.

But in Christ human beings are offered the joy of re-entering that fellowship. And yet ultimately re-entry will occur by the will of the Son. Jesus states, "**no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son CHOOSES to reveal him.**" To know God, to fellowship with God, it ultimately depends upon the gracious revealing work of the Son. Outside of that revealing, no one knows the Father or the Son. But to experience that revealing depends upon the choice of the Son.

C. What Jesus is declaring in this exclamation of praise is stunning. It will offend human pride. This word of praise from the lips of Jesus exclaims and delights in the sovereignty of God. Part of getting it right, when it comes to who God is, is seeing him not as a powerful tool you can manipulate to your purposes and passions but as the Ruler of the Universe. To him you owe everything. Yet he owes you NOTHING. God is not a

genie in a bottle. He does not exist for the sake of heaven and earth. Heaven and earth exist by him, through him, and for him. He does not owe it to you to reveal things to you. He does not owe it to you to treat you the same way he treats others. Because of your sin, the only thing he owes you is judgment and punishment. His every kindness is pure mercy! When he hides, it is just and when he reveals, it is mercy and grace.

Do you worship God with this understanding? Do you worship with the kind of reverence that belongs to this God? And do you hold your faith in this God and in His Son with a gripping humility and a sense of the absolute gift of grace it is to know him? Do you realize that if not for grace you would be just like the ones from whom God hid the things of the kingdom? It is immeasurable kindness, undeserved mercy, and incomprehensible grace that has moved God to reveal himself and the truth of the gospel to you, if you know it. And do you wonder what is at the heart of Reformed theology that makes us diligent to preserve the grasp and appreciation of it? It is this that God, who owes us nothing is the one who has given us everything. You and I are children who have been graced in a way that we could never earn or deserve and on which we could never lay claim. Praise God!

It is Jesus who in this text shows us the sovereignty of God in salvation. And he does so not with an expression of shame or embarrassment but with great delight in God and joy. When people do not believe, it is not a threat upon the plan and purpose of God. It is a demonstration of how dark and depraved is the mind of man apart from the intervention of God. And it is a demonstration to those who believe that it is only by the revealing grace of God that we do believe. And that is a reason to join Jesus in his exclamation of praise. To God be glory! "I thank you Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children."

The second major aspect of salvation is

II. The Responsibility of All Humanity in Salvation. (28-30)

A. If it is God who elects and God who must do the work so that human beings come into the kingdom, then how in the world do we work this thing out? What does evangelism look like? And does one like have to figure out whether one is one of the elect so as to know whether to repent or not?

B. Jesus gives us the answer right here. Having just declared that he and the Father must reveal it for people to grasp the kingdom and to have fellowship with the Father and the Son, Jesus lifts his voice and utters a stunning invitation. He says, "Come." And who is invited? Anyone is invited who labors and is heavy laden. These are people who feel the weight and the burden in their souls of sin and guilt. They see they can never measure up to the glory of God. We will talk about this more when we come back to this text in a few weeks.

For now I want you to see that Jesus issues an invitation. To everyone standing around, he says COME. Come to him. Trust in him. Rest in him. Come like a child to learn from him. But come.

Should you try to figure out if you are one of the elect so you will know whether or not to believe? No. Should you try to discern if Christ has chosen to reveal the Father to you so you will know whether to come to Christ? No. If you are weary and want rest for your soul, then come. Those who come to Jesus this way are coming into the kingdom.

C. So see, how God's sovereignty and human responsibility relate. It is God who must do the soul work. But when there is soul work, men and women will see themselves as bearing a load of guilt and shame. They will feel the prospect of facing the judgment seat of Christ to be overwhelming. They will see their attempts of trying to measure up to God's holy standard as an absolute impossibility in themselves. They will see that no amount of trying really hard is going to get them to the standard of the Lord of heaven and earth. So they respond to Christ's invitation. They come. They put their faith in his work and their lives in his hands. That is what you need to do today if you are burdened by your sins and your guilt. Come. Jesus will receive you. Come. He won't be telling you, "wait a minute, let me check my list to see if I chose you before the foundation of the world." He will be saying, receive the rest I died to provide for you.

And let me tell you, you are responsible to come. Hear the voice of Jesus and respond. If you do not come to Jesus, you will be justly punished for your sins for all eternity in a place of fire and torment, where there is unrest and sorrow and gnashing of teeth. You must come. The invitation has

been issued. If you have not come to Christ, turning from your sins and trusting in him, will you not come today?

Conclusion

It is not EITHER God is sovereign OR humans are responsible. Both are true as they can be and Jesus is the one to show us right here in Matthew 11. If you feel the burden of sin and desire rest, come. And if you come, know this, it was God at work in you to give you sight and to cause you to come. It was God who revealed the things of the kingdom to you. It is the Son who has graciously chosen to reveal to you the Father who is the Lord of heaven and earth.