

# Suffering and the Sovereignty of God

## Part 1- Let us Rejoice!

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January 6, 2013

### Romans 8:16-25

- 16** The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,  
**17** and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*.  
**18** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.  
**19** For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.  
**20** For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope  
**21** that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.  
**22** For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.  
**23** And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.  
**24** For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he *already* sees?  
**25** But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

To the Glory of God

Verse 17 says that we are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Jesus Christ. And most of the time that this verse is read- all sorts of preaching and teaching about our spiritual rights and our spiritual benefits come forth with the idea that us being fellow heirs with Jesus Christ is all about healing and financial and material blessings.

But verse 17 ends with a very interesting statement. It says that we are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Jesus Christ- but only if we suffer with Jesus Christ- that what we are sharing with Jesus is not

simply the good things that make our lives easier down here- but also those things which make us fit for Heaven; those things that change us and mold us and shape us and form us into the Image and Likeness of our Lord Jesus and which allow us to share in His Holiness. So Suffering is a Biblical concept that we need to understand rightly and fully.

And because each of us earnestly desires to be changed and because each of us earnestly desires to be like Jesus and to share in His Holiness- God has heard your cry and He has laid this series of messages on Suffering on my heart to bring to you at this time.

So if God is pleased- we will take a short vacation from our *Journey through Luke* and we will examine what the Bible teaches about the issue of Suffering.

Now there are a thousand ways to do this- but right out of the box- I want you to know that the underlying purpose of this series of Messages on Suffering comes from the ultimate reality of God as the supreme Value in and above the entire Universe. God is absolute and eternal and infinite. And everything else and everybody else is dependent and finite and contingent. God Himself is the great supreme Value. And everything else that has any value at all- has it- only by and through its connection to God.

God is supreme in all things. He has all Authority, all Power, and all Wisdom— and as **Lamentations 3:25** says:

**The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, To the person who seeks Him.**

... and God's Name, as Creator and Redeemer and Ruler of all, is Jesus Christ.

In the last few years, 9/11, tsunamis, Katrina, and ten thousand personal losses have helped us discover how little the modern American church is rooted in this Truth about God. David Wells, in his new book, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World*, says it like this:

“This moment of tragedy and evil [referring to 9/11] shone its own light on the Church and what we came to see was not a happy sight. For what has become conspicuous by its scarcity, and not least in the evangelical corner of it, is a spiritual gravitas, one which could match the depth of horrendous evil

and address issues of such seriousness. Evangelicalism, now much absorbed by the arts and tricks of marketing, is simply not very serious anymore.”<sup>1</sup>

In other words, the vision that most people in the modern Church have of God in relation to evil and suffering is unbelievably frivolous. Far too many in the modern Church have not been spending their energy to go deep to understand and to be in awe of and to hold in admiration the unfathomable God of the Bible. Against the overwhelming weight and seriousness of the Bible- many in the Church are choosing, at this very moment, to become more light and more shallow and more entertainment-oriented, and therefore completely ignorant and irrelevant to massive suffering and evil. The popular God that has been manufactured by “the first Church of fun and games” is simply too small and too weak and too nice to hold a hurricane in His Hand for example that will kill thousands and impact nations.

Yet the Biblical categories of God’s Sovereignty lie like land mines all through the pages of the Bible- waiting for someone to seriously open the book to seriously read them and to seriously understand them and to seriously apply them. These Biblical Truths don’t kill anybody- but they do great harm and damage to the trivial notions that have been fabricated by the modern Church and they change the way we look at God and therefore they change the way we look at life and death and suffering. Because as I have told you many times- I do not believe that the Bible and Salvation exist simply to teach us how to live better lives- but to prepare us for sufferings that are sure to come and to cause us not to just live well- but to suffer well and to die well- to the Glory of God.

The goal of this series is to be used by God the Holy Spirit to cause God to stand forth before this Church- to reassert His Creator-rights over our lives to the end that we will see His crucified and risen Son- Who has all Authority in heaven and on earth. And the goal of that is that with that knowledge of God- a strong and vibrant and powerful trust and confidence in the ultimate Supremacy of Jesus Christ over all things will awaken within us- and that in turn will provide us with deep and profound comfort in our suffering and sweet and precious and ongoing fellowship with our Lord Jesus in our tragedies.

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<sup>1</sup> David Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow’rs: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), page 4.

This series is born out of genuine suffering- some more intense than others. Suffice it to say that nothing I will preach in this series is dealing with a theoretical issue. I live in the same world of pain and loss that you live. And so I am aware that some people who hear these messages are dying. Some who will hear are those who love those who are dying; Some have chronic pain or people who have just lost one of the most precious persons in their life.

Some of you do not really believe in the Goodness of God—or maybe not in God at all- and you will count these messages as your one last effort to see if the Gospel is real. And then there are those people who are about to enter a time of suffering in their life for which they are totally unprepared. That is why I am preaching these messages.

The approach I am going to take in this opening Sermon is not to solve any problem directly- but rather to celebrate the Sovereignty of God over Satan and to celebrate God's Sovereignty over all the evils that Satan has a hand in. My conviction is that by letting God speak for Himself in and through His Own Word- that genuine Biblical Spirit and Truth worship will awaken within us like Job's—and that worship will shape our hearts to understand whatever measure of God's Mystery about Suffering that He wills for us to know at this time. So what follows is a celebration of

### **Ten Aspects of God's Sovereignty Over Suffering and Satan's Hand in It.**

You see, what I mean when I say that “God is Sovereign” I am not simply giving you a clever little quote that you can put on your bumper or on your ball cap. When I say that God is Sovereign- I do not mean that God merely has the “Power” or the “Right” or the “Ability” or the “Knowledge” to govern all things- but that God actually *does* govern all things- *all* things- including the most horrendous acts of violence that cause us to put our hands over our mouths or the most devastating natural disasters that cost hundreds of thousands of lives or the cancer in the mother of 3 small children that she will leave as orphans- that the one true living God of the Bible *does* govern all things- for His Own wise and holy Purposes.

That ultimately- although He certainly may use it- it is *not* the so-called, “free will of Man” and Man's bad and wrong choices that bring

forth the evil and suffering in the world but God's Holy and mysterious Will. And that whatever struggle we go through to try to grasp that Biblical concept- I suggest to you that God *not* being absolutely Sovereign over all these things and Him *not* governing all these things according to His Own wise and holy Purposes would create even *bigger* struggles. *That* is what I mean to say.

So let us begin this series on suffering by celebrating God's Absolute Authority over all suffering.

## 1. Let Us Celebrate That God Is Sovereign Over Satan's Delegated World Rule

In the Bible- Satan is sometimes called:

- ✓ **“The ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11)**
- ✓ **“The god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4)**
- ✓ **“The prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians. 2:2)**
- ✓ **“Spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians. 6:12)**

So this means that we should probably take him seriously when we read in **Luke 4:5-7**:

**5** And he [satan] led Him [Jesus] up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.

**6** And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.

**7** Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours."

And of course that would have been true because if the Sovereign of the universe bows in worshipful submission to anyone- then that one would *become* the Sovereign of the universe. But we need to know that Satan's claim that he can give the authority and glory of world kingdoms to whomever he wills is only a half truth.

There is no doubt that Satan *does* play havoc in the world by maneuvering a Stalin or a Hitler or an Idi Amin or a Bloody Mary or a Saddam Hussein into murderous power. But the Bible clearly and repeatedly teaches that Satan does this only with God's permission and within the limits that God's has sovereignly appointed.

Let's take for example **Daniel 2:20&21** that says:

**20** Daniel said, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, For wisdom and power belong to Him.

**21** "It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men And knowledge to men of understanding.

and **Daniel 4:17** that says:

... the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, And bestows it on whom He wishes...

When the kings are in their God-appointed place- with or without Satan's agency- they are in the sway of God's sovereign Will, as **Proverbs 21:1** says:

The king's heart is *like* channels of water in the hand of the LORD ; He turns it wherever He wishes.

It is true that periodically- evil nations rise and set themselves against the Almighty. But **Psalms 2:2-4** says:

**2** The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,

**3** "Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!"

**4** He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them.

Do people honestly think that their sin and evil and rebellion against Him can actually defeat or even hinder the Counsel of an absolutely Sovereign God? **Psalm 33:10&11** answers,

**10** The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples.

**11** The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart from generation to generation.

We can rejoice because the Bible says that God is absolutely sovereign over all the nations and over all their rulers and over all the satanic power behind them. They do not move one inch without His Divine Permission, and they cannot operate outside His sovereign Plan.

## 2. Let Us Celebrate That God Is Sovereign Over Satan's Angels (Demons, Evil Spirits)

Satan has thousands of cohorts in supernatural evil. They are called:

- ✓ “Demons” (Matthew 8:31; James 2:19)
- ✓ “Evil spirits” (Luke 7:21)
- ✓ “Unclean spirits” (Matthew. 10:1)
- ✓ “The devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41)

We get a tiny glimpse into demonic warfare in **Daniel 10** where the angel who is sent in response to Daniel's prayer says in verses 12&13:

**12** Then he said to me, “Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding *this* and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words.

**13** “But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia.

So apparently the demon, or evil spirit, over Persia fought against the angel sent to help Daniel, and a greater angel, Michael, came to his aid. But the Bible leaves us with no doubt as to who is in charge in all these skirmishes. The great Reformer, Martin Luther got it right when he wrote in his hymn, “*A Mighty Fortress is our God*”:

And though this world, with devils filled,  
Should threaten to undo us,  
We will not fear, for God hath willed  
His truth to triumph through us.

The prince of darkness grim,  
We tremble not for him;  
His rage we can endure,  
For lo! his doom is sure;  
One little word will fell him.<sup>2</sup>

We also see glimpses of those “little words” that Luther was talking about at work, for example, when Jesus comes up against thousands of demons in **Matthew 8:29-32**. They were possessing a man and making him insane. The demons cry out,

**What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?"**

So as furious as they may be and as much damage to humans beings that they may cause- demons and devils all know that a specific time has been sovereignly set by God for their final destruction and there is nothing they can do about it and it causes them to fear. And so all Jesus had to do was to speak one little word: **“Go,”** and the demons immediately came out of the man. That is a sovereignty that we can rejoice over.

So there is no question Who is absolutely sovereign in the battle against demons. And **Mark 1:27** says that:

**They were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him."**

Demons always and in all cases instantly obey Jesus Christ. Jesus doesn't argue with them; He doesn't debate with them; He doesn't scream at them and shake people all around- Jesus simply speaks to the demon or the fallen angel and they instantly obey Him. And that is because God has absolute Authority and Power over all demons and fallen angels. As for Satan- Luther wrote:

The prince of darkness grim,  
We tremble not for him;

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” (1529).



His rage we can endure,  
For lo! his doom is sure;<sup>3</sup>

But as for Christ- one writer said,:

Even though they slay him,  
They always must obey him!<sup>4</sup>

But we can rejoice that God is sovereign over all of Satan's angels.

### 3. Let Us Celebrate That God Is Sovereign Over Satan's Hand in Persecution

The Apostle Peter describes the suffering of Christians like this:

**8 Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.**

**9 But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.**

**10 After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.**

So the sufferings of human initiated persecution are like the jaws of a satanic lion trying to consume and destroy the faith of believers in Christ. But the issue is not do these precious souls suffer- because manifestly they do- but the real issue is:

**Do these Christians suffer in Satan's jaws of persecution apart from the Sovereign Will of God?**

When Satan crushes Christians in the jaws of their own private Calvary, does God not govern those jaws for the good of His precious child? Let's turn to **1Peter 3** to see the Apostle's answer to that question.  
**1Peter 3:13-17:**

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Unknown

**13** Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?

**14** But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. **AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED,**

**15** 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;

**16** and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.

**17** For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

In other words, if God wills that we suffer for doing good- then we will suffer. And if God does *not* will that we suffer for doing good- then we will not. In other words- our suffering is *not* the result of a lack of faith on our part- that if only we prayed the right prayer or bound the devil or spoke positively to that circumstance- then we would not have had to go through it. The Bible does not teach that, dear friends. And we also need to know that the vicious lion who prowls the earth for our souls does not have the last say concerning our trials either- the God Who loves us and called us and saved us does. And we should rejoice over that.

According to **Luke 22:3&31**- the night Jesus was arrested- satanic power was in full force. And in verses 52&53- Jesus spoke into that situation one of His most sovereign Words. He said to those who came to arrest Him in the dark:

**52 ... "Have you come out with swords and clubs as you would against a robber?"**

**53** While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours."

So the jaws of the lion closed on Jesus that night not one second sooner and not one second later than the Father had planned from before the beginning of time. In **John 10:17&18**- Jesus said:

**17 ...I lay down My life so that I may take it again.**

**18 No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."**

Boast not yourself over the Hand that made you, Satan. You have but this one hour. What you do, do quickly because God is absolutely sovereign over Satan's hand in persecution.

#### **4. Let Us Celebrate That God Is Sovereign Over Satan's Life-Taking Power**

The Bible does not take lightly or minimize the power of Satan to kill people- including Christians. Jesus said in **John 8:44**,

**You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies.**

The Apostle John tells us, in fact, that Satan does indeed take the lives of faithful Christians- but again- only by God's Permission and only according to God's Will. **The Revelation 2:10** says,

**Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.**

Is God not then the Lord of both life and death? He is. No one lives and no one dies but by God's sovereign decree- not only in their appointed time- but also in the manner in which they will die. That time has already been appointed for them before they were born and not a single second can be added to their life or taken away from it. Before your time- you are invincible and it is impossible for you to die and at your appointed time- it is impossible for you to remain another second. So nobody "dies before their time" as we so commonly say- we die at the appointed time of God and in the appointed way of God. Moses wrote in **Deuteronomy 32:39**:

**‘See now that I, I am He, And there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, And there is no one who can deliver from My hand.**

There is no “god” and no demon and no Satan that can snatch to death any person that God wills to live. Please turn to **1Samuel 2**. In Hannah’s prayer in **1Samuel 2**- the inerrant Word of the living God says:

**1Samuel 2:2-10**

**2** “There is no one holy like the LORD , Indeed, there is no one besides You, Nor is there any rock like our God.

**3** “Boast no more so very proudly, Do not let arrogance come out of your mouth; For the LORD is a God of knowledge, And with Him actions are weighed.

**4** “The bows of the mighty are shattered, But the feeble gird on strength.

**5** “Those who were full hire themselves out for bread, But those who were hungry cease *to hunger*. Even the barren gives birth to seven, But she who has many children languishes.

**6** “The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up.

**7** “The LORD makes poor and rich; He brings low, He also exalts.

**8** “He raises the poor from the dust, He lifts the needy from the ash heap To make them sit with nobles, And inherit a seat of honor; For the pillars of the earth are the LORD’S , And He set the world on them.

**9** “He keeps the feet of His godly ones, But the wicked ones are silenced in darkness; For not by might shall a man prevail.

**10** “Those who contend with the LORD will be shattered; Against them He will thunder in the heavens, The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; And He will give strength to His king, And will exalt the horn of His anointed.”

And James- the half- brother of Jesus- wrote in **James 4:13-16** that God’s sovereign Control over all the Universe goes all the way up to serious natural disasters and the rising and falling of great nations down to the business appointment you have tomorrow afternoon at 2:00pm when he said:

**13** Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit."

**14** Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

**15** Instead, *you ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."

**16** But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.

So if the Lord wills- we will live. And if He doesn't- we will die. God, not Satan, makes the final call. Our lives are ultimately in God's Hands, not Satan's and not our own. God is sovereign over Satan's life-taking power. And we should rejoice over that.

## **5. Let Us Celebrate That God Is Sovereign Over Satan's Hand in Natural Disasters**

Hurricanes, tsunamis, tornadoes, earthquakes, blistering heat, deadly cold, drought, flood, famine. When Satan approached God in the **Job 1:11**- he challenged God,

**"Stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face"**

And in verse 12- we read:

**Then the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your <sup>1</sup>power, only do not put forth your hand on him."**

The result of this was two human atrocities and two natural disasters. One of the disasters is reported to Job in verse 16:

**"The fire of God fell from heaven [probably lightning] and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you."**

And then the worst report of all in verses 18&19,

**"Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and**

**struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead.”**

So even though God had loosened the leash of Satan to do this- that was not what Job focused on. In **Job 1:20&21**-we read:

**20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped.**

**21 He said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD .”**

And just in case you might think that the only reason that Job said this was because he was overcome with grief (as many of the false teachers of our day say) the inspired writer of this Book added a narrative comment to this exchange in verse 22 that forever seals the deal when he said:

**Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.**

Somehow Job had discovered what many in the modern Church seem not to know- that it is no comfort at all to focus on the freedom of Satan to destroy. And that is true precisely because the hedge about God’s Children is so strong and so sure that Satan would have no freedom at all to touch a single hair of our heads but that the sovereign God of the Universe gave him that permission. And if the God Who loves me and Who called me to Salvation has allowed Satan to touch my flesh- the Promise of Scripture is that God is working that “bad thing” together with everything else that God has either caused or allowed to come into my life for the greater Good of the Glory of God and ultimately the fulfillment of my own Joy.

So while blaming Satan or blaming some generic force called ‘nature’ may lift from some the burden of having to deal with God’s Sovereignty- for others, like Job- and I pray for you too- there is infinitely more security and infinitely more relief and infinitely more hope and infinitely more support and infinitely more glorious truth in despising Satan’s hateful hand and looking straight past him to God for the Cause of all natural disasters and then to not only find Judgment in

them – but to also find God’s Mercy in their rubble. And if that concept startles you- I suggest to you that that is the only purpose for why the Book of Job is in the Bible.

Elihu helped Job to see God’s Mercy in the suffering brought about by natural disasters and in **Job 37:10-14**. He said:

**10** “From the breath of God ice is made, And the expanse of the waters is frozen.

**11** “Also with moisture He loads the thick cloud; He disperses the cloud of His lightning.

**12** “It changes direction, turning around by His guidance, That it may do whatever He commands it On the face of the inhabited earth.

**13** “Whether for correction, or for His world, Or for lovingkindness, He causes it to happen.

**14** “Listen to this, O Job, Stand and consider the wonders of God.

Job’s first impulses in Chapter 1 were exactly right. When James wrote in the New Testament about the *purpose* of **The Book of Job**, this is what he said:

### **James 5:11**

**... You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and *is* merciful.**

God, not Satan, is the final Ruler of wind—and the waves. Jesus woke from sleep and, with absolute sovereignty, which He had from all eternity and has this very moment, said, “**Peace! Be still!**” **And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm**” (Mark 4:39; see Ps. 135:5-7; 148:7). 298 years ago- Isaac Watts wrote the song that we sung this morning and in that song he said:

There’s not a plant or flower below,  
But makes Thy glories known;  
And clouds arise, and tempests blow,  
By order from Thy throne.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Isaac Watts, “I Sing the Mighty Power of God” (1715).

Satan is real and he is terrible. All his designs are hateful. But he is not sovereign. God is. And even though he lived at a time even before **Genesis** was written down- Job knew that when Satan went out to do him harm- Job was to worship with the words

**“The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”**

And we need to know that Job did not exercise great human strength here and simply worship God *in spite of* his troubles and great sufferings- no, Job worshipped God *because* of his suffering. In other words- Job’s understanding of God and God’s Sovereignty and the Workings of God on his behalf was such that his own sufferings were the *catalyst* or the *impetus* or the *cause* of his worship. And he had this knowledge without having a single Book of inspired Scripture to rely on or get strength or instruction from. We should all study the life and the Book of Job and get great comfort from knowing what Job knew and what eh learned later on about God’s absolute Sovereignty in suffering.

## **6. Let Us Celebrate That God Is Sovereign Over Satan’s Sickness- Causing Power**

The Bible is vivid with the Truth that Satan can cause physical disease. **The Acts 10:38** says that Jesus

**“...went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.”**

So the devil had oppressed people with sickness. In **Luke 13:16** Jesus finds a woman who had been bent over, unable to stand up for eighteen years. He heals her on the Sabbath, and in response to the criticism of the synagogue ruler he says,

**“Ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?”**

There is no doubt that Satan causes much disease. This is why Christ’s healings are a sign of the blatant and violent and forceful entry



of God's Kingdom into the kingdom of Satan and its final victory over all disease and all the works of the devil.

So we must know that God is a healing God by Nature. And it is right and good to pray for healing. God has provided physical healing along with a thousand other blessings of His Grace. And there are times that it is God's perfect Will to heal the sick bodies of human beings- either by instantaneous miracle or by slow progressive healing or through medical attention or through surgery or good chicken soup. And when it is God's will to heal your body- nothing on earth and no demon will stop that.

But there are times when it is *not* God's will to heal the physical bodies of human beings but that we are to *endure* the physical problem with grace and hope- resting in the Providence of God. And when that is true- there is nothing that will bring about a healing- not surgery; not doctors and not the prayer of faith.

So we are to pray and then we are trust His answer. Jesus said in **Matthew 7:9&10:**

**If you ask your Father for bread, he will not give you a stone. If you ask him for a fish, he will not give you a serpent.**

Now the answer may not be bread. And it may not be a fish- But it won't be a stone and it won't be a serpent- so whatever answer God gives will be good for you. That is what He promised.

But beware lest anyone say that Satan is sovereign in our diseases. He is not. When Satan went to God a second time in the book of Job, God gave him permission this time to strike Job's physical body.

**Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.**

And when Job's wife despaired and said,

**“Curse God and die”**

Job responded *exactly* as he did before. He looked past the temporary and finite cause of Satan to the ultimate and merciful Cause of God and said,

## **Job 2:10b**

**... Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?"**

And once again- lest we attribute error or irreverence to Job, the writer places this comment at the end of verse 10:

## **Job 2:10c**

**... In all this Job did not sin with his lips.**

Satan is real and full of hate- but he is not sovereign in sickness. God will not give him even that tribute. As God said to Moses at the burning bush in **Exodus 4:11**,

**Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes *him* mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD ?**

## **7. Let Us Celebrate That God Is Sovereign Over Satan's Use of Animals and Plants**

The imagery of Satan as:

- ✓ **A "lion" (1Peter 5:8)**
- ✓ **A "great dragon" (The Revelation 12:9)**
- ✓ **The "serpent of old" (Genesis 3)**

... simply makes us aware that in his destructive work Satan can, and no doubt does, employ animals and plants—from the lion in the Coliseum, to the black fly that causes river blindness, to the birds that carry the avian flu virus, to the pit bull that attacks a child, to the bacteria in your belly that doctors Barry Marshall and Robin Warren recently discovered cause ulcers (winning for them the Nobel Prize in medicine).

If Satan can kill and cause disease, no doubt he has at his disposal many large and microscopic plants and animals. But he cannot make them do what God forbids them to do. From the giant Leviathan that God made to sport in the sea (**Ps. 104:26**) to the tiny gnats that he summoned over the land of Egypt (**Ex. 8:16-17**), God commands the world of animals and plants. The most vivid demonstrations of it are in the book of Jonah. **"The LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah"**

(Jonah 1:17). And it did exactly as it had been appointed. **“And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land” (Jonah 2:10). “Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah” (Jonah 4:6). “But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered” (Jonah 4:7).**

Fish, plant, worm—they are all appointed and are all obedient. And Satan can have a hand there- but even in this- he is not sovereign. God is.

## **8. Let Us Celebrate That God Is Sovereign Over Satan’s Temptations to Sin**

Much of our suffering comes from the sins of others against us and from our *own* sins. In the Bible- Satan is called **“the tempter” (Matt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5)**. This was the origin on earth of all the misery that we know—Satan tempted Eve to sin, and sin brought with it the curse of God on the natural order (**Gen. 3:14-19; Rom. 8:21-23**). Since that time Satan has been tempting all human beings to do what will hurt themselves and others.

But what is amazing is that the most famous temptations in the Bible do not portray Satan as being sovereign in his tempting work. For example- it is true that the Bible tells us in **Luke 22:3-4** that **“Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot. . . . He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them.”** But Luke also tells us that the betrayal of Jesus by Judas was the fulfillment of Scripture:

### **The Acts 1:16b**

**... the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas...**

And the Apostle Peter said that Jesus was

### **The Acts 2:23b**

**... delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God...**

As with Job- the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away—the life of His Son, Jesus Christ. So Satan was not sovereign over the

Crucifixion of Jesus Christ- which was the greatest sin ever committed by anyone- God was.

Even more famous than the temptation of Judas is the temptation of Peter. We usually think of Peter's three denials, not his temptation. But Jesus says something to Peter in **Luke 22:31&32** that makes it plain that Satan is definitely at work here- but that he is not sovereign when he said:

**“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again [not: *if* you turn], strengthen your brothers.”**

Again, as with Job- Satan certainly seeks to destroy Peter's faith. And God gives Satan some leeway here- but Jesus intercedes for Peter, and says with complete sovereignty, *“I have prayed for you. You will fall, but not utterly. And when you repent and turn back— not *if* you turn back— you will strengthen your brothers.”*

So even though Satan is certainly at work in our temptations- Satan is not sovereign in the temptations of Judas or Peter or you or those you love- God is.

## **9. Let Us Celebrate That God Is Sovereign Over Satan's Mind-Blinding Power**

The worst suffering of all is the everlasting suffering of hell. And the Bible says that Satan is doomed to experience that suffering. **The Revelation 20:10** says,

**“The devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”**

Satan's aim is to take as many there with him as he can. And to do that- he must keep people blind to the Gospel of Jesus Christ- because the Gospel **“is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16).**

No one goes to hell who is justified by the Blood of Christ.

## **Romans 5:9**

**“Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God”**

Only those who fail to embrace the wrath-absorbing substitutionary Work of Jesus Christ will suffer the Wrath of God. Therefore, Paul says in **2Corinthians 4:4**,

**“In their case the god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”**

This blinding is the most deadly weapon in the arsenal of Satan. If he succeeds with any person- their suffering will be endless. But even at this most critical point Satan is not sovereign, God is. And oh, how thankful we should be about that! Two verses later in **2Corinthians 4:6** Paul describes God’s blindness-removing Power over against Satan’s blinding power.

**“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”**

The comparison here is between God’s creating Light at the beginning of the world and God’s creating Light in the darkened human heart. With total Sovereignty- God said at the beginning and at your new birth, “Let there be light.” And there was light.

We were dead in our trespasses and sins, but in great mercy God made us alive together with Christ (Eph. 2:5). We were blind and spiritually dead. We saw nothing compelling or beautiful in the gospel. It was foolishness to us (1 Cor. 1:18, 23). But God spoke with sovereign Creator authority, and his word created life and spiritual sight, and we saw the glory of Christ in the gospel and believed.

Satan is a terrible enemy of the gospel. But he is not sovereign. God is. This is the reason that any of us is saved.

## **10. Let Us Celebrate That God Is Sovereign Over Satan’s**

## Spiritual Bondage

Satan enslaves people in two ways. One way is with the misery and suffering that comes from making us think there is no good God worth trusting. The other way is with pleasure and prosperity, making us think we have all we need so that God is irrelevant. To be freed from this bondage we must repent. We must confess that God is good and trustworthy. We must confess that the pleasures and prosperity of life do not compare to the worth of God. But Satan hates this repentance and does all he can to prevent it. That is his bondage.

But when God chooses to overcome our rebellion and Satan's resistance, nothing can stop him. And when God overcomes him and us, we repent and Satan's power is broken. Here it is in **2Timothy 2:24-26**:

**24 The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged,  
25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth,  
26 and they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.**

But we must know that Satan is not sovereign over his captives- God is. When God grants Repentance- we are forcefully set free from the snare of the devil, and we spend our days celebrating our liberation and spreading it to others.

The evil and suffering in this world are greater than any of us can comprehend. But evil and suffering are not ultimate. God is ultimate. Satan, the great lover of evil and suffering, is not sovereign. God is.

### **Daniel 4:35**

**He does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"**

### **Isaiah 46:10**

**[He declares] the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose."**

**Lamentations 3:37&38**

**Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?**

**Proverbs 19:21**

**Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.**

**Proverbs 16:33**

**The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.**

**Romans 8:31, 35-37**

**Therefore, “If God is for us, who can be against us? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us”**

One of the great Puritans was a man named, William Cowper. Even though God used him mightily- he often struggled with depression and doubt. One night he decided to commit suicide by drowning himself. He called a cab and told the driver to take him to the Thames River where he planned to throw himself into the river and die. However, a thick fog came down and even though the cab driver was born and raised in London- he simply could not find the river- the fog was that thick. After driving around hopelessly lost for a long time- the cabby finally stopped and just let Cowper out. To Cowper’s surprise, he found himself on his own doorstep. God had sovereignly sent the fog to keep this child of God from killing himself. Cowper stood there amazed at God’s mysterious Sovereignty and went inside his house and wrote a hymn called *“God Moves in a Mysterious Way”*. This precious old hymn says this:

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never failing skill  
He treasures up His bright designs  
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy and shall break  
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err  
And scan His work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.

Let's pray