

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

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May 17th, 2026

Sermon Title: All Things, Part 1: Does God Control “All Things”?

Sermon Text: Romans 8:28

Rom. 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Main Point: Scripture teaches that God is sovereign over “all things,” and there is nothing that ever happens which is beyond God’s Fatherly control.

Outline:

1. Sovereign Over the World Around Us

Is. 45:5-7; Job 37:11-12

2. Sovereign Over the Wills Around us

Genesis 50:20; Ezra 1:1; 2 Sam. 16:10; Acts 4:27-28; Prov. 21:1

3. Sovereign Over the Works Around us

a. Health Events

Psalms 54:4; Deut. 32:39; Ps. 31:15; Job 14:5

b. Financial Events

1 Sam. 2:7; Deut. 8:18

c. “Chance” Events

1 Kings 22:34; Ruth 2:3

Introduction

What does it mean that God is sovereign? To be sovereign is to be “over” something. A Sovereign stands above all and is in control. Now, if I asked you,

what is a king sovereign over you'd probably say, "His kingdom." And if you wanted to know "where is that, or where does the kingdom that he is over extend to?" you might pull out a chart or a map and show me where that king's realm extends to.

But with God, there's no boundary on the map, because he made it all. But those boundaries are what I want to talk about today. What does it mean for you, as a believer, and for all other followers of Christ, that you follow a God who is maker of everything, king of everything, and that there is nothing outside of his control?

Some of this we may have thought about, but some of it we may not have. Case in point: for some of us, it may not have been something we were raised with to believe that God is sovereign over absolutely everything that takes place.

And more than likely, if I told you that God is sovereign over your salvation, you would all say "Amen." If I told you God is sovereign over angels and demons, maybe you wouldn't blink. We are very comfortable with God being in charge of the "spiritual" stuff.

But what about the flat tire on your way to work? What about the lay-off notice? What about the weather pattern that ruined the crop or the microscopic cell that divided the wrong way? What about the person who intentionally hurt you and sinned against you?

You see, we may sometimes think we need to try to protect God from the messy details of our lives. We think, surely God is too big to worry about gravity or traffic. Or we may have a philosophical worry that if God is sovereign even over the sinful actions of human beings that we may end up portraying him as the author of sin. And so we might say "God is sovereign," but we put a big asterisk at the end: "except for this, and this, and this..."

But when Paul wrote Romans 8:28, he didn't use an asterisk. He didn't offer a disclaimer. He didn't even mention exceptions. But he did use two small words that cover everything in the entire universe: "All things."

And this phrase "all things work together" is bedrock for the rest of verse 28. Paul says that we can be absolutely sure that every event that takes place in our lives is

something God is sovereign over, and therefore cannot and will not separate us from his love.

When you are in the hospital with a child. When you're waiting on a diagnosis... when you get that nightmarish phone call you never thought you'd get... as your pastor I want you to know and believe in those moments that it's not a cliché for God to say, "I'm here, and I'm at work, and I'm doing something bigger than you can ever imagine." But if you don't even believe God is in control in those moments... the big moments... the seemingly exceptional moments, then you can't rejoice with Paul here in the knowledge that all things are worked together, woven together by a loving and wise and all-powerful God.

How can I convince you of this? I could take the philosophy route. I'm a middling philosopher, and maybe I could even convince you. But human wisdom can only get you so far. If we are going to really be convinced, we have to hear it from our God's mouth. We need to see it in his word.

And what I'd like to do today is really establish the scope of God's power from the Scriptures. Just how much of the world does God really have sovereignty over, according to Scripture? And our answer is going to come in three categories. First, God is sovereign over the world around us. Second, God is sovereign over the wills around us. Third, God is sovereign over the events around us. And we'll explain what each of those mean as we go.

1. Sovereign Over the World Around Us

First, I want you to know and to be convinced that God is sovereign over the natural world.

And I want to start here, because God's sovereignty over nature is one of the most fundamental truths we know about the whole world around us. Also, nature is very big. And so if all things work together for our good, we have to know and believe that even the events of nature are under God's absolute control. If we're not, then that's a BIG gap in the "all things" that Paul is talking about here today.

The whole Bible teaches this, beginning with the book of Genesis, of course.

Foundational to all of this is that God is the creator. Before these things were, God

already was. First there was nothing, and then he made everything by the word of his power. So it's very reasonable to understand: if God makes it, then he can unmake it. If he can make it, then he can change it. If he can make it, then he can control it just as much as when he *first* made it. Always God possesses absolute, minute control over the physical world around us. Listen to this from Isaiah 45:

“I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none beside me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things” (Isaiah 45:5-7).

So here God is, and he's saying, “I make the sun go up, I make the sun go down. When it goes up, you know that I'm God, when it goes down, you know that I'm still God.” And what is more fundamental to the natural order of things as we know them than the sun? So that's the principle, right? God is saying, “because I'm the one that *made* this in the beginning, it's mine to do with. I control all of nature.” So that's the principle: God rules over nature completely and comprehensively.

Now let's look at a specific example of this. This is from Elihu, who is one of Job's friends, as he watched the storm clouds gathering:

“He loads the thick cloud with moisture; the clouds scatter his lightning. They turn around and around by his guidance, to accomplish all that he commands them on the face of the habitable world” (Job 37:11-12).

So growing up in Kansas, storms were always a big deal. You could see them coming from far away, and we love clouds and chasing them in Kansas. My dad used to be a tornado spotter and I would go with him. And when I was older and had come to the Lord, I always saw the weather with a special awe. I remember riding my bike out past the edge of the little town I lived in with a friend, and the night was pitch black, there was no moon out at all, and we just sat there on our bikes staring at this huge thunderhead, and inside that thunderhead was lightning flashing... miles away. And that long delay before the thunder finally shook our bellies. And I remember as a believer marveling at the power of God to create that thunderhead, to send it wherever he wished. I thought of the thunderings and

lightnings of Mt. Sinai. I really think we're meant to see the hand of God in nature. It's one of the ways that he screams to us, not only that he is here, but that he is powerful over the very things in nature that make us feel so small and weak.

And I don't even have time to go into the other examples of God's power over nature: Jesus stilling the storm, the flood of Noah, the sun standing still for Joshua, the ravens feeding Elijah, or the mouths of lions being shut for Daniel. The Bible is relentless in its testimony: nature is not a machine left to run on its own; it is an instrument in the hand of our God.

2. Sovereign Over the Wills Around Us

Second, I want you to be convinced that God is also sovereign over the wills around us.

Why would we dwell on this? Because Paul's claim here in Romans 8:28 is that "all things work together for good." *Many* (and in fact most) of the things we suffer in this life will be connected with other people and *their* choices and actions. They may not even necessarily be bad things, but they change the world.

Matthew is preaching a sermon series in the evenings from the book of Genesis on the life of Joseph. And Joseph suffers specifically because of other peoples' sins. His brothers hate him. His brothers sell him as a slave. His brothers lie to their father. His master's wife makes a pass at him (not his choice). His master throws him into prison. He sits there forgotten. And eventually... *eventually* Joseph is freed from prison, placed over Egypt, and is used by God to save his family.

But there is a *whole* lot of sin that gets Joseph from his father's house to being over Egypt and saving his family's lives. And yet in Genesis 50:20 Joseph rightly says to his brothers about all of these things that they did to him: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." Just think about that: they meant hate against Joseph. They were driven by sin, not by good purposes.

God meant their as the means to get Joseph to Egypt. They meant jealousy and deception against their father. Absolutely evil. Yet God meant it as the way to save this family and keep his promise to the Fathers.

Man has “*this* intention,” but God has another intention. And it’s all over the Bible. In Isaiah 10, the King of Assyria invades Judah. His heart is full of arrogance, and he comes to destroy. But God says, “He means it for evil. I mean it to discipline this stubborn people that I love.”

In the book of Ezra we read that the Persian King Cyrus made a decree to rebuild the temple. He wanted to do this for his own reasons, and yet Ezra says he really did it because the Lord stirred his spirit (Ezra 1:1).

Shimei curses King David. Cursing someone is bad! But when David’s soldiers try to stop Shimei David says not to do that because it is God who has moved Shimei to curse him (2 Sam. 16:10).

Now, you might say, well all of those examples involve sinners suffering. What about suffering that innocent people experience? And so if I might use the most extreme example against the most innocent person, look no further than Acts chapter 4, Peter is talking about the death of his friend and his Lord, Jesus, and he relates something precious: he tells us that Herod, Pontius Pilate, and angry crowds acted on their own sinful hatred to murder the Son of God. Yet they were actually gathered by God “to do whatever [His] hand and plan had predestined to take place” (Acts 4:27-28).

All people from the least to the greatest are under the command of God. And even the will of a king is under God’s control. That’s why Proverbs 21:1 can say, “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.”

Now, here is the question I think you are probably pondering at this moment: “How can the king’s will not be violated if God is sovereign over his decision?” “How can God be sovereign, and we are still responsible for what we will and do?”

Well, so I said I wouldn’t get into philosophy here in the sermon, and I won’t. But if you do find yourselves asking questions about this, I will use some of the tools of scripture, philosophy, and theology to give you a sketch of an answer to this question during our Question and Answer time during next week’s Sunday School.

But let me set your expectations: I will still hit a wall where I don't know and will point you to God's greatness and mystery, but I do think we can get the beginnings of an answer.

For the moment, I hope you're convinced that the Bible does tell us that all the things we experience at the hands of others – from the smallest to the greatest – are under the loving care and plan of our Father.

3. Sovereign Over The Works Around Us

The third category of God's sovereignty that I want us to remember is the one that I think may come up the most often: the works around us. The events of the world. The things that just seemingly happen to us that catch us off guard. Let me mention different kinds of events so that I can help you see what I mean.

Health Events

The first type of event I want to mention is health events. I've hit my 40s, and like clockwork when I get together with other men my age, we're talking about a few things: doctor's visits and colonoscopies. These are the things that occupy us. Why? Because as we get older, we realize how frail we are. We can feel things breaking down bit by bit. And that keeps going through life. But health events occupy a lot of the suffering of our lives. And yet Scripture reminds us: yes, God is even sovereign over your health.

I've been pretty healthy throughout my life so far, but I've had some health scares. And during one particularly scary time in my life, I clung to this verse about God's sovereignty over our health: Psalm 54:4, "Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life." God is sovereign over your health. He keeps me breathing. He keeps me alive. He upholds me from one moment to the next. My health is in his hands. Why? Because he is sovereign over my health.

In Deuteronomy 32:39 God says these things in a really stark and direct way: "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal."

In Psalm 31:15 David prays, “My times are in your hand.” The amount of days I will live are planned and written by God, and cannot be changed.

In Job 14:5 we’re told that God determines the exact length of our human lives.

Think of that. I ultimately don’t have control over this, but part of following God is resting in the knowledge that *He* does.

Financial Events

A second type of event I want to mention is financial. Finances and money are something the Bible talks about a lot. Jesus has a lot to say about money. Not just how we’re supposed to use it, but also how God is sovereign over even how much we have.

In 1 Samuel 2, Hannah sings a profound song regarding this reality. She declares that the Lord makes poor and makes rich (1 Sam. 2:7). In Deuteronomy, God warns the Israelites not to credit their own hard work for their prosperity. He reminds them that he alone gives the power to acquire wealth (Deut. 8:18). God rules over the financial markets and personal bank accounts. This is very humbling, because it should keep us from becoming proud if we do well, or from despairing if we are in financial hardship.

If you are in a season of hardship, I hope that you will take shelter in these twin truths: God is sovereign, *and* He is your loving Father.

If God is your Father, but he’s *not sovereign*, then all you have is a small god who is sort of spectating your life and wringing his hands. Which isn’t what Scripture tells us.

But on the other hand, if God is sovereign but he’s *not your Father*, how is any of this good news for you? We’ll see next week that apart from Christ it isn’t good news. But I want to take this opportunity to tell you, he can be your Father. Our God is an adopting God. You need only reach out to Christ in faith, and he will receive you readily and joyfully into his family, and make you his disciple.

“Chance” Events

I want to mention one other type of event. And it might seem odd for me to mention this, but God is also sovereign over “chance” events.

Now, I’ll get even clearer what I mean: ultimately there are no “chance events.” But there are things that *seem* to be governed by chance, even in Scripture. Let me give you some examples.

In the book of Ruth, the text says Ruth “happened” to come to the field of Boaz.

Or the arrow that struck Ahab “at random” in 1 Kings 22. Listen to how the text speaks of this moment: “But a certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel between the scale armor and the breastplate.”

How do we make sense of this? Is God sovereign, or are there “random” “chance” events? R.C. Sproul says that if there is even one rogue atom doing its own thing apart from God’s will in all the universe, then God is not God. But is the Bible telling us that there *are* some of these rogue atoms flying around out there that God isn’t sovereign over?

The authors of Scripture (in the limited number of times when they speak this way) are speaking from our human level. Many things in our lives do seem random. A person “happened” to run a red light and hit our car head on. My father “happened” to have a heart attack in a hotel in Salina, Kansas in 2001. I as a young atheist “happened” to reluctantly go to a Christian bookstore with my mom where I saw a book that changed the direction of my whole life. You “happened” to speak to the person who eventually became your spouse.

And on and on and on... all of life is filled with these events. And from our perspective, who could have known it? Which of us would have planned our lives the way that they worked out? Some of those are hard turns, painful turns, sharp turns. Some of them are wonderful. But all of them are ultimately from God.

Conclusion

We will talk next week about how this more directly applies to us and the scope of our whole lives. This week, I want you to do this, though: would you put away any plans that you might have to rule your own life? I know this is hard: it is hard to

give up control. And all I'm asking you to do is *recognize* your lack of control: your life is under the domain and power and sovereignty of a good and loving God. Would you simply recognize that and begin living as a responsible person, but also recognizing this is God's world, and really even your own life is God's life.

Because here is the truth we have to face: if we do insist on putting an asterisk next to God's sovereignty—if we say He is in control of salvation and the spiritual realm, but not the cancer cell, the layoff notice, or the "random" car accident—we are actually robbing ourselves of this incredible comfort Paul is offering us in Romans 8.

As R.C. Sproul has said, if there is even one rogue molecule in the universe, if there is even one rogue human will, or one truly random stray arrow that God did not decree and does not control, then Paul is lying. He is giving empty comfort. He can't actually promise that *all things* work together for good if God does not actually control *all things*.

But the Scriptures are clear: the same God who spoke the thunderheads into existence, the God who turns the hearts of kings like streams of water, and the God who guides the "random" arrow between the armor plates—that is the God who is actively orchestrating every single detail of your life right now. And as we'll see next week, he is using every one of those details (whether we can see it in the moment or not) for your "good."

He weaves every medical diagnosis, every financial loss, and every seemingly random occurrence into a perfect tapestry of grace. It might look messy and painful from the underside where we are sitting, but from His perspective, there are no accidents. There is no asterisk. From God's own perspective it's all forming a beautiful tapestry on which his grace is being displayed.

So when the nightmare phone call comes, or the storm clouds gather in your own life, you don't have to wonder if God is merely watching from the sidelines. Instead, you can know, with absolute certainty, that your sovereign Father is at work, and He is weaving it all together for your eternal good.

Let's pray.