

The omnipotence of God

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[0 : 00] So this evening, we're thinking about the omnipotence of God. That's our doctrine for this evening.

We'll largely be in the book of Isaiah, chapter 45, that Bob read for us. But just as we begin, probably same as every time where we've been thinking about the doctrine of God, we are being confronted with our limited powers and the absolute power of God.

So for those of us who like football and the Champions League was back this week, there seemed to be a lot of chat among the pundits about Ronaldo and Messi. Are they still the best players in the world?

They've obviously been at the top of their game for the last 10 years, but the understanding is that now their powers are waning. Now they're getting that bit older. And it's a reminder that no one stays at the top forever.

We don't need to go to the world of football. The strongest person that we know, whether that's physical strength, emotional strength, strength of character. We recognize that that's something that had to be worked at and developed.

[1 : 06] It's something that will not last. It will begin to diminish. And all of human strength has a threshold. So whenever we are thinking about power, power in another person, we instinctively imagine there is a limit to that.

Powerlessness for us is a shared human experience. Now whether that's at the very small level of the jam jar at the breakfast table that you just can't open, whether that goes deeper to it, it's the behavior that we just can't change, or whether as Christians it's the person that we are frustrated that we cannot save them, we cannot make them listen to the truth and appreciate it, we understand that powerlessness is something that we live with.

And so as we think about God being omnipotent, being all-powerful, this is intended to be a source of comfort for the people of God, something attractive about God.

But it's something obviously that's going to challenge our thinking, because again we're being presented with, here is our creator, and we are creatures, and the distinction is massive, and sometimes it's really hard for us to even begin to comprehend.

So when we think about God's power, we use words like infinite. The only limit that God's power has is that he cannot act against his perfect character, he cannot act against his covenant purposes and promises, he cannot act in a way that diminishes his perfect holiness.

[2 : 41] But he is infinite in power. God's power also is eternal. It is constant and it is unchanging. Unlike us, where power builds up and power wears down, that's not the case with God.

His power is eternal. We also think about God's power being self-sufficient. All the great leaders, the great generals, the great kings of history, were all reliant on another, perhaps the strength of their armies, in order to demonstrate their power and their greatness.

God's power is self-sufficient. Now, God chooses to work through providence.

God chooses to work through people like us. God chooses to work through the preaching of his word to achieve his purposes, but he doesn't need to. His power is self-sufficient.

And God's power, unlike ours, is absolute. No one and nothing opposes his will. So that's what we're thinking about today.

[3 : 51] God's omnipotent power. Four places that we can go to see that. Four lessons that we can learn for everyday life. So, let's begin thinking about how we see God's omnipotence in creation.

So we've been reading from Isaiah 45, but we could also have read Genesis 1. We could also have read Job 38 to 41. The setting for thinking about how Isaiah introduces the theme of God the creator in Isaiah 45 is interesting because Isaiah 45 is this future prophecy that God is going to

raise up in the future King Cyrus.

King Cyrus is going to set God's people free, return them to the land of Israel. And there seems to be a question in the minds of God's people.

So if you look at verses 9 and 10, it says there, Woe to those who quarrel with their maker. Does the clay say to the potter, What are you making?

There seems to be the implication that God's people are saying, Well, if you're going to set us free, then surely there should be a figure like a Moses figure, a David figure, an Elijah figure.

[5 : 08] King Cyrus? A foreign king? That doesn't seem to make sense. And so at that point, having said, Why are you questioning me? Verse 11, This is what the Lord says, The Holy One of Israel and its maker.

Verse 12, It is I who made the earth and created mankind. On it my hands stretched out the heavens. I marshaled their starry hosts. God reminds them, I am your creator.

I am the one who made the earth and the heavens. I am the creator of mankind. Trust me, I know what I'm doing. I have good and saving purposes for you, even when you're not able to understand how I choose to work.

Verse 18 and 19 goes to the same point. This is what the Lord says, He created the heavens. He who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it.

So again, here's the idea of God, the creator, forming and fashioning. God filling creation, the sea, the sky, the land, including people. I have not spoken in secret.

[6 : 10] I have not said to Jacob's descendants, seek me in vain. I, the Lord, speak the truth. So as he wants, as God wants his people to trust his words, he reminds them of his power in creation.

So we can look to the created world, to this universe that we live in, to give us comfort that there is an all-powerful God who is on the throne, and we can trust his word.

So creation is the place where we go to see God all-powerful, God's absolute power. Go back to Genesis 1, and we discover that God created with total freedom.

He spoke, and there was. God created without materials. God created out of nothing. And God created a world without defects.

He looked, and it was good. Creation comes about as God's express will. It's there in Genesis 1. They're reminded in Isaiah 45, this world that we live in is not the product of blind forces.

[7 : 23] The world is not a closed system, but rather there is a God who created it all. Job 38 to 41, finds God himself speaking to Job, and reminding him, in a sense, of the creator-creature distinction.

Chapter after chapter, Job having wanted to be in the presence of God, and to meet with God, God comes and says to him, well, where were you at the beginning?

Did you have the wisdom to teach me how to make this world? Says to him, can you tame the mighty creatures of the earth?

A reminder to Job, a reminder to Job, of God's great power, and his right to do as he will. And so, in the Bible, we discover that creation is the place where God's power is on public display.

Coming in the next week or so, I think it is, Van Gogh Live, I think he's coming up from London to Edinburgh for a little while. And no doubt, that'll be a wonderful exhibit.

[8 : 37] Maybe some of you have got tickets. Van Gogh was a wonderfully creative person, but when we think about Van Gogh or any other artist, they needed raw materials. They were limited in their scale of production.

Imagine, God is the only creator. And the universe is his permanent exhibition.

An exhibition to us of his power, his glory, his majesty. Do we have eyes to see? Do we have eyes that lead us to worship?

So we see God all powerful over creation. Isaiah 45 also reminds us that God's absolute power is shown in human history.

So, chapter 45, verses 1 to 7, is a word of prophecy that's spoken to this king, this king Cyrus of Persia.

[9 : 44] We're told that he is the Lord's anointed in verse 1. We are told that Cyrus will be summoned by God in verse 4.

The purpose of his anointing and summoning is that he will release Israel from exile. He'll restore people to the promised land, so that in the nations, people know there's one true God that praise and glory will go to God.

Two perhaps surprising things about the beginning of chapter 45. One, these words are written approximately 150 years before King Cyrus comes on the scene.

So another way we see God's absolute power is his absolute power to know the future with certainty. He doesn't suggest, well, at such and such a time, maybe a king will come.

No, he names him. Such is his knowledge of the future. And perhaps the other surprising thing, it is that God works through Cyrus, while at the same time it becomes clear, verse 4, that Cyrus will not acknowledge God.

[10:57] Verse 5, I am a Lord and there is no other. Apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me. So here is the extent of God's absolute power over human history in this regard.

He will anoint and summon a foreign king with no love for God, but will use that foreign king to be the means of his people's freedom. The might of an enemy empire serving the purposes of the one true God.

The point being, who is like our God? Moving towards the end of the chapter, verses 20 and 21, we find that emphasis again on future prediction.

Again, God emphasizing his power, his omnipotence, in the fact that he can foretell the things that come to pass.

There is a clear connection in this chapter between God speaking, God willing, and God acting. And there in verses 20 and 21, he's saying, well this is what I can do.

[12:14] No idol has this power. This is the extent of my rule. No emperor, no king, no person is stronger than me, comes close to me.

God's will will not be denied, because he has absolute power over human history. So we see that in Isaiah 45, raising up King Cyrus. We could perhaps go to Daniel chapter 4, to see the flip side, to see this happen with another foreign king, King Nebuchadnezzar.

King Nebuchadnezzar, who one day was standing on the top of his palace, looking over the city, saying, I made this. This is my glory on display.

And he was taken from the palace, to eat grass, like an animal. Failing to have the perspective, and the understanding, I am not the Lord.

I am not all powerful. In a sense, it's a very human problem. Wasn't that the problem in the Garden of Eden? Adam and Eve were tempted, by the serpent.

[13:22] Eat this, and you will be like God. But Isaiah 45 reminds us, God works in history, showing only he has ultimate power, so that we would learn to acknowledge him, and trust him.

Third place where we see it, and again it's in Isaiah 45, and it's related, it's to do with redemption.

Because in Isaiah 45, there's a lot of sense that God is in control of history, that he's working out his purposes, and those purposes, are saving purposes for his people.

Chapters like Isaiah 45, are great reminders, when we have that question, why did God create the world? We know that God didn't need to create the world, he wasn't lacking something, he wasn't lonely, because he's an eternal trinity.

One answer to why did God create, is that, so that his people might be saved by his grace, to enjoy his glory forever. And we see that emphasis coming through, in this chapter.

So, look at verse 8, let me read verse 8, it's a lovely image, So, God is going to describe himself as the creator, but here we have this reminder, that the same God that brings life at creation, is the same God who causes new life, spiritual life, to spring up and to flourish.

[15:09] Righteousness and salvation. In the New Testament, it's the language of new creation, it's the language of new birth, it's the language of spiritually dead, people being made spiritually alive, and all by God's powerful saving grace.

It's a gift to his people. And we have this here, that God is all powerful in salvation, that we don't earn or merit our salvation, rather it's a gift from God, who brings it to life.

Again, to move towards the end of the chapter, verses 20 to 25, you see in verse 20, that the nations are invited to gather, gather together and come, assemble you fugitives from the nations, ignorant are those who carry about, idols of wood who pray to gods that cannot save.

So the nations are gathered, and God is exposing the weakness of the idols, and of idolatry, the folly of praying to gods that cannot save, that cannot help, that do not have life.

And perhaps at this point, as we listen in, we're expecting judgment. Here is God gathering the nations to judge them for false worship, and for not knowing the one true God.

[16 : 41] But there's a remarkable turn. It's the turn that led to Spurgeon's conversion, as we discovered this evening. Verse 22, Turn to me, turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is no other.

Turn to me, you who have been ignorant, and living your own way, and pursuing false gods. Turn to me, turn to me, you who have been looking to, to another thing, a created thing, to find salvation, and help in your time of need, though it could not help.

Turn to me, and find me to be a savior. In Isaiah 45, it becomes absolutely clear, that there's no contest, between God and the idols.

The idols are torn down, they are the gods, who cannot save, they are the gods, who have failed, and who will always fail. Verse 21, There is no God apart from me, a righteous God, and a savior. There is none, but me. God enters into judgment, against the idols, so that, God would save, from the nations, his own people, that they would come, to recognize, his reality, his strength, his salvation.

[18 : 23] Turn to me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth. It pictures, and anticipates, the global spread, of God's kingdom. And we think about that, since the coming of Jesus, then the sending of the spirit, then the new testament, and the growth, of the church, and the spread, of the church, around the globe.

There are millions, and millions of people, who have, and who are, turning to God, and being saved, through faith, in Jesus. This isn't a limited call, to some people, to his own, covenant people, Israel. This is a universal call, because God's authority, is universal. So the invitation, is there to anyone, in all the world, turn to me, and, to be saved.

Verse 23, By myself, I have sworn, a word, that will not be revoked. Before me, every knee will bow. By me, every tongue, will swear.

They will say of me, and the Lord alone, are deliverance, and strength. When Paul, was writing to the Philippians, he used those words, to speak of Jesus, the Lord Jesus, who humbled himself, by becoming one of us, who humbled himself, further, by dying, on the cross, but then God, raised him, and gave him the name, that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee would bow, and every tongue, would confess, that he, is Lord.

[19 : 58] Jesus is, God's, Redeemer, and we are called, to bow the knee, to Jesus, today. So to read, a chapter like Isaiah 45, is to remind ourselves, that God's power is absolute.

And we can see that, in creation, we can see, that in his rule over history, we can see that, in his working out, his redeeming, purposes. We cannot say, God is weak, or God is limited, and be a true worshiper.

God's power is absolute. As Abraham was told, nothing is impossible with God. As Mary was told, no word of God ever fails. There's one more place, where God's ultimate power, is in view.

And that's why, Bob read for us, from 1 Corinthians 15, we need to think about, the resurrection. So, 1 Corinthians 15. Now we know, as people, we are resourceful, we have common grace, we have many abilities, can find solution, to many problems, victory over many enemies, but we cannot defeat, or escape death.

Death. So the resurrection, comes as good news, and comfort, and in the word of Paul Tripp, the resurrection, is a finger, that points, to the omnipotence, of God.

[21 : 29] Because God, and Jesus, did what we could never do, to conquer death. Those words, from Paul, were so powerful, weren't they? Without resurrection.

Christian faith, is a pointless lie. There's no forgiveness, there's no eternal life, there is a non-savior, we are a pathetic people, but, Christ has indeed, been, raised.

And he gave us, that eyewitness list, those people, who were there, to testify, to the risen, Lord Jesus, to give us, that confidence, of God's, resurrection power.

We speak about, Christianity, as a rescue religion, it's also a, resurrection, resurrection, religion. That was the message, of the first apostles, in Acts, we can read, Acts chapter 2, and verses 23, and 24.

This man was handed over, to you by God's, deliberate plan, and foreknowledge, and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death, by nailing him, to the cross, but God raised him, from the dead, freeing him, from the agony of death, because it was impossible, for death, to keep its hold on him.

[22 : 44] Paul, in another letter, in the letter to the Ephesians, in the prayer that he makes, for them, it would remind them, that the same power, that raised Jesus, is the same power, that's a work, in all God's people.

We connect, the omnipotence of God, with our comfort, the resurrection, life that we see, in Jesus, is the hope, of resurrection life, the certainty, of resurrection life, for us, when our faith, is in him. So resurrection power, is the other, great demonstration, in history, of God's omnipotence. And it's a demonstration, that gives us, the promise of new life, gives us, future hope.

So if those are the places, where we can go, and we can think about, God being omnipotent, how's this going to help us, for everyday life?

How's this a doctrine, for everyday life? Four things to consider, briefly. One, the reality, that we are all tempted, to doubt God's power.

[23 : 59] Now we see that, throughout God's word. Abraham, doubted, that he could have a child. Israel, doubted, that God could provide food.

The disciples, doubted, that they could have hope, when they saw, Jesus die, on a cross. God answered, all those doubts, with his omnipotent power.

No doubt, we are aware, of places, in our lives, where we are powerless, or we feel powerless. Where do you doubt, that change will come?

Is it in a difficult relationship? Is it seeing someone else's, spiritual apathy, or your own? Is it a pattern of sin, that you keep falling into, and you think, I just can't change, I feel powerless.

Well this is where, the rubber hits the road, isn't it? It's to be honest, to say, yes I can't change, but God, who is omnipotent, has the power, to bring change.

[25 : 01] That's a reminder, to look to him, not to try and fight through, on our own strength, nor is it to throw our hands up, and just give up, rather we are to look, and to look again, to our all powerful God.

Ephesians 1, that resurrection power, within us, the reality of Jesus, ruling in power, for his people, he can help, we can change, things do change, and so we trust, and so we pray, and so we wait.

Another lesson, and maybe this is especially, important for us, when we think about, our children, and young people, that we all need this way, of looking at the world.

You walk into a classroom, walk into a workplace, switch on the television, and the message, that we will hear, the message, our children, and young people will hear, is that of naturalism.

The world is a closed system, that there is no God, there is blind forces, that are in control, of everything. It's the wisdom, of the age. We sang Psalm 14, this morning, that's folly, folly to say, there is no God, or that God has no influence, or no care in his world.

[26 : 20] When we understand, that the way, that we think about ourselves, and the way we view the world, shapes our actions, and responses, we see how important, it is to be able, to look at the world, and to see that there is a God, and he's a powerful God.

I love the story, of Corrie ten Boom, when she was in, a pretty German prison camp, with her sister Betsy, and she was in, a really disgusting cell, was a part of the prison camp, that was so awful, that the guards, wouldn't come near.

You would think, that would be a place, of absolute despair, and misery. But for her, there was joy, because her and her sister, had freedom, to read the Bible, to talk about their faith, to invite others, who were stuck, in that horrible part, of the camp, to listen, and to share their faith, and so, she was able to thank God, for the fleas, those fleas, that kept the guards away, that gave her time, with her Lord.

that's seeing, this is our Father's world, and he is all powerful, and he is for me. Third lesson, I think, for everyday life, is that we need to understand, God's power, for everyday living.

Again, it's to understand, that living by faith, living the Christian life, is impossible, without God. We simply cannot do it, by ourselves.

[27 : 48] We cannot love our neighbor, as we should, we cannot show patience, like we ought, we cannot avoid gossip, we will not always tell the truth, we will not live holy lives, without the power of God.

Without that power, we would fail. But we don't live, the Christian life, without God. Rather, he sends his spirit, to dwell in us, the spirit of power.

As Christians, we can say, that we are a child of God, and our God, our Father, he's all powerful. That's how we can be confident, of living the Christian life, not on our own strength, but in his

strength.

That we don't need, to be ruled by anxiety, because our lives, are in the grip, of our almighty Father. And his grace, is sufficient for us.

And his strength, is made perfect, in our weakness. Connected to that, the fourth point, for how this touches, on everyday life, we need to embrace, dependence.

[29 : 00] And to understand, it's a good thing, when we recognize, that our God, is all powerful. I guess so much, of our family life, is gearing our children, young people, towards standing, on their own two feet, moving towards, independence, making their own way, in the world.

But in the Christian family, we never outgrow, dependence, on our compassionate, and powerful, Father in heaven. That's a wonderful thing. In the normal, Christian life, we will expect, trouble. Jesus told his disciples, in this world, you will have trouble. And we can expect, certain things, to be unresolved. We can expect, times of waiting, and groaning.

And in those times, we need to remember, the world is not ruled, by blind forces. We don't just throw up, our hands and say, well what will be, will be.

Rather we pray, and we wait, on God, our omnipotent Father. Because there is, profound comfort, to come from this doctrine.

[30 : 09] we will always, be limited in power. But God will never, be limited in power. His power remains, infinite and eternal. He's ruling with wisdom.

He's ruling, in accordance with his, saving plan. And this, our all powerful God, he responded to, our weakness, and inability, by sending his son, Jesus, to bring us salvation, through his atoning death, on the cross.

And he does that, so that, we can hear, the wonderful words of, Isaiah 45, and verse 22, as an invitation.

Turn to me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is no other. That verse 24, would be our testimony, that we would say of God, in the Lord alone, our deliverance, and strength.

Let's pray, briefly, to him, before we sing again. Lord, our God, we, praise you, that you are, omnipotent, that there are no limits, to your infinite, and eternal power.

[31 : 35] And we thank you, that you created, this world. And we thank you, that you sent Jesus, to be, the redeemer, for his people.

We thank you, for the power, shown in the life, of Jesus. We thank you, for your power, shown, in the resurrection, of Jesus. Lord, we pray, that in our weakness, we would increasingly, be looking, to your strength, as a source, of comfort, and hope, for ourselves, in our lives.

Lord, that we wouldn't be, trying to go alone, and live by our own strength. That we wouldn't have, our, minds, changed, that we, imagine that the things, that happen in life, are just random, and not in your control.

Rather, that we would see, that you are almighty, eternal, Father in heaven. You sit, on the throne, you are ruling, and reigning.

And you invite us, to turn to you, and to be saved. You invite us, to turn to you, and find, and enjoy, eternal life. So may we, turn to you, even now, to worship you, and to enjoy you.

[32 : 57] In Jesus name. Amen. Now our, closing hymn, this evening, is, Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation.

And we will stand, together, to sing.