

The God who is sovereign

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[0 : 00] Today's reading is from Isaiah chapter 45 verses 1 to 13, which can be found on page 732 of the Church Bible.

Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed. I will go before you and level the exalted places. I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hordes in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.

For the sake of my servant Jacob and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name. I name you, though you do not know me. 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.

[1 : 17] 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.

Shower, O heavens, from above and let the clouds rain down righteousness. Let the earth open that salvation and righteousness may bear fruit. Let the earth cause them both to sprout.

I, the Lord, have created it. Woe to him who strives with him, who formed him, a pot among earthen pots. Thus the clay say to him who forms it, What are you making?

For your work has no handles. Woe to him who says to a father, What are you begetting? Or to a woman, With what are you in labour? Thus says the Lord, The Holy One of Israel, And the One who formed him.

Ask me of things to come. Will you command me concerning my children, And the work of my hands? I made the earth, And created man on it.

[2 : 26] It was my hands that stretched out the heavens, And I commanded all their host. I have stirred him up in righteousness, And I will make all his ways level.

He shall build my city, And set my exiles free, Not for price or reward, Says the Lord of hosts. Well good morning, My name is Andy, Assistant pastor here at Grace Church.

Do keep Isaiah 45 open, We'll be dotting around a little bit as well. Let me pray again. Father, as we come to your word, Please help us understand more of who you are, That we may praise you and worship you.

Amen. Amen. Well usually at Grace Church, We like to work our way through books of the Bible, Through our sermons, But every now and again, We stop and pause, And think about big topics, Or some Bible doctrines, And think about what the Bible as a whole, Has to say about this issue.

And for the next three weeks, As Phil said, We're going to think about God's sovereignty. Now we don't use that word sovereignty much, Do we? Other than occasionally to talk about King Charles, He is our sovereign, Just means he's in charge.

[3 : 44] But in practice, That's not really true, Is it? We might love Buckingham Palace, The Christmas Day speech, But he's practically not really in charge, Of our lives.

But in God's case, Sovereignty doesn't just mean, He's the figurehead monarch, As it were. It means he's actually the one, Who controls the details of the universe, And the details of our lives.

And right at the start of thinking this through, The headline on the handout, On the back of the service sheet, Is that God alone is creator. And so he is ultimately in charge.

God alone is the creator. So he is ultimately in charge. That's how the Bible opens. The first thing that we learn about God, Is that he is the creator.

I've put lots of verses on your handout, We won't be looking them all up. Don't worry, I'll be reading some out. So Genesis 1, 1 says this, In the beginning, God created, God is the creator, God is the

creator, And decided, How the earth should be, The only one.

[4 : 58] How fast the earth should spin on his axis. That a day should last 24 hours. He decided where to put Montblanc. That humans would walk on two legs, And have two eyes, Et cetera, And so on.

And so the whole of reality, The Bible says, Can be split into two categories. A creator, And created. And later on in the Bible, It's revealed explicitly, That God created, Not just the physical stuff, That we can see, But also the spiritual world as well.

Let me read from Colossians 1, 16 and 17, For by him, That's Jesus, All things were created, In heaven and on earth, Visible and invisible, Whether thrones or dominions, Or rulers or authorities, All things were created through him, And for him, And he is before all things, And in him, All things hold together.

That tells us that right at the start, God, The God of the Bible, Is the only sovereign. That challenges the view, I think that some, Hold that this world, Is jointly ruled, By God and Satan.

Like they, They battle it out, They fight it out, To see who's in charge, At any moment. Sometimes Satan wins, Sometimes God wins. Like a Harry Potter film, Where Harry goes up against Voldemort, And each time, One seems to get the upper hand.

[6 : 30] No, The Bible says quite clearly, God alone, Is the creator and in charge. Perhaps you, You spotted the repeated line, Through that reading in Isaiah 45, I am the Lord, And there is no other.

And the Bible tells us, That the world continues, To work like this. It's not like that God, Is the watchmaker, Who just sets it up, And just sets everything going. But he sustains the world. Now, Everything depends on him. That the last line of Colossians 117, In him, All things hold together. All things depend on Jesus, Each moment of every day, Including our, Continued existence.

Now that sets it all up. God is the only creator, The only sustainer. And then, For the rest of our time this morning, And for the next two weeks, We're going to, Just think how far that spreads.

Just to think that, Because of that, God is absolutely in charge, Of everything. And so we're going to go through, Different areas of life, And I'm basically going to point, To a few verses, And say, God's in charge of that as well.

[7 : 41] Essentially that's for the next few weeks. Well firstly then, God is ultimately in charge, Over all creation. Over all creation. It's there in our reading, From Isaiah 45 verse 12.

As we've seen, God created the world, And continues to sustain the world, Every minute of every day.

Gravity only continues to be gravity. Light only continues to travel, At the speed of light, Because God decides, To sustain the world in that way.

Incidentally, That's the only reason, We can do science. Because we can be confident, God sustains the universe, The same way today, As he did yesterday.

But God is not like the boss, Who takes control, Over the big decisions, And delegates all the small stuff out. He is in control, Of the tiniest details, Of the world.

[8 : 48] Consider Jesus' words, In Matthew 10, On the handout. Are not two sparrows, Sold for a penny, And not one of them, Will fall to the ground, Apart from your father.

Let's just pause. How in charge of the world, Would you need to be, To control every, Death of every sparrow. Just think for the last, 24 hours, And the ways that sparrows, And other birds have died.

And we can get really creative here, I spoke to a couple of teenagers, Before the service, We thought of three, So cats, Maybe, You have a cat, And they like to bring you a present, Of a dead bird, God has to be in charge, Of every cat in the world, And every cat owner, And their routines, To be in charge of everything.

Just think about, Double glazing. God is in charge, Of every window cleaner, Convincing a bird, That the window or door is open.

And lastly, We are getting quite creative here, Jet engines, Birds, Getting sucked into propellers, Poor things, But God is in charge, Of every, Every air traffic controller, Every pilot, Every flight plan.

[10 : 04] You see, To be in charge of, Even the tiniest detail, You've got to be in charge, Of everything. He's even in charge, Of random events, Or seemingly random events, As it were.

So Proverbs 16, 33 says, The lot is cast, Into the lap, But it's every decision, Is from the Lord. I was playing a game, Yesterday with the kids, And you roll the dice, I rolled it, God decided, What number, Would come up.

That is why, Some people in the Bible times, Cast lots, Because God controlled, The outcome. So in the story of Jonah, They wanted to find out, Who's the cause, Of the big storm?

They cast lots, The lot fell to Jonah. He was responsible, It was God's way, Of making clear, Who was responsible, For that big storm? Or thinking in, Acts chapter one, When it turned out, To choose a new apostle, To replace Judas.

They cast lots, The lots fell to Matthias. That's not chance, God is in control. He ultimately picked, Who his apostle, Would be.

[11:15] I guess, Perhaps unwittingly, We can take on, A world view, From the secularists, That things just happen, By natural causes. The Bible says, There's no such thing, As a natural cause.

Everything is supernatural. Everything is sustained, By Jesus, And without Jesus, Nothing, Would exist. And the very fact, That we pray, Shows this to be true.

It gives the game away, Really, Isn't it? We believe, When we pray, That God has it, In his power to act. And the things, That we pray for, The wide ranging things, That we pray for, Shows us just how in charge, We believe God to be.

And yet, Perhaps in the same time, We are tempted to shrink God down. And to shrink him down, Into perhaps something, Like a cruise control God. The view that God, Has made the world, He sets it on a course, Like you're on the cruise control, In the car, He set it going.

And that God has his, Metaphorical right foot, Just hovering above the accelerator. Waiting to, Take the control back, Just in case things, And there's trouble brewing ahead, Or something, Things get a little bit, Out of control.

[12:26] It's easy to operate, With that view of God. That is, We kind of, We think of him, As quite capable of intervening, In the world, In our lives, In our affairs.

But only actually, Occasionally doing so. Most of the time, He just lets things, Take their course. Just here and there, He might have to intervene, To get somebody out of a scrape, Or to engineer some meeting, Or orchestrate some kind, Of resolution.

But that is not, The God of the Bible. He's in charge, Over everything. The creator, And sustainer.

And that leads us, On to the second area. If God is in charge, Over all creation, All of the time, Then he must be in charge, Over all of history.

He's in charge, Over all history. We see it, At the start of our, Reading, From Isaiah 45, Verse 1.

Thus says the Lord, To his anointed, To Cyrus, Whose right hand, I have grasped, To subdue nations before him, And to loose the belts of kings, To open doors before him, That gates may not be closed.

God describes, How he's going to raise up, This Persian king Cyrus. And that happened. He, In 539, King Cyrus was raised up, He defeated the Babylonians, And God's people were then set free, From exile, Back to their land.

[13:56] Or think of the life of Joseph, That we, We looked at last autumn. That is a wonderful picture, Of God's control, As he, As he goes from being sold, Into slavery, To ending up being prime minister, And saving countless numbers of lives.

And yet he declares, To his brothers at the end, Genesis 50, 20, You intended it for evil, But God intended it for good. And then just think about, The death of Jesus.

At the moment, We can call the greatest evil of all time, The death of Jesus on the cross. And yet Acts chapter 2, Says that that act was according to the definite plan, And foreknowledge of God.

The one moment, We might be tempted to, To look at history, Look back and think, That got out of hand. No, It was all done to God's plan, To save sinners.

The last verse on this point, From Daniel chapter 2, On your handout. He changes times and seasons, He removes kings, And sets up kings. He gives wisdom to the wise, And knowledge to those who have understanding.

[15:10] And so it's not just the history of God's people, That God's in charge of. It's not just Israel. And now the church. But all of history, Both sacred and secular, If I can put it like that.

And it's not that, And it's not that, Just God sees what's going to happen, But he does it. He declares it. He removes kings. He sets up kings.

He has decided, Who is going to be prime minister, On the 5th of July. And so when it comes to human history, There were no surprises to God. No mistakes. Nothing that made God, Jump out of his seat. No times where he dropped the ball, And nothing that fell through the gaps. And yet, The Bible tells us that, God is not just in charge of monarchs, And general elections, But over all of everyone's lives, And decisions. Now that's our next point, That God is in charge, Over all of everyone's lives, And decisions. Consider Proverbs, Chapter 16, Verse 9. The heart of man plans his way, But the Lord establishes his steps.

[16:21] All our circumstances are in God's hands. He has a comprehensive diary of our lives, With everything in it. Now what's the furthest thing ahead in your diary, If you have a think?

Mine is 8th of November, 2025. But God knows my diary, For the next 10 years, For the next 20 years, And in my diary, I put things, And have to cross them out again, Because plans change. But God's got the final diary, He knows exactly, What's going to happen, Even before it's happened. Apparently Christians in the past, Used to write DV, After every appointment, In the church calendar, Which is Latin for, Deo valente, Is that right?

Charlie? Deo valente? Yep, great. Or something like that, It means God willing. And so we, We could say, The next service of Grace Church Dulwich, Is here, Next Sunday, 10.30, DV. Now we think, And hope it is, And we're planning for it to, Be that. But of course it's down to God. The school roof could collapse, Which let's face it, Is not out the realms of, Possibility.

[17:38] And loads of things, Could happen. We're making plans tentatively, Tentatively, Subject to God's will. And so if you don't already, Perhaps we should all start writing DV, In our diaries.

Remind us of this point. This is what I planned, But it's up to God, Who is in charge, And whether it happens or not. And yet the Bible, Pushes this further.

It pushes this further, To say that God is even in charge, Of human decisions. That verse in Proverbs 21, On the handout, The king's heart is in a, Is a stream of water, In the hand of the Lord. He turns it, Wherever he will. Even the most powerful people, On the earth, Cannot outmaneuver, God's control. So next time you wash your hands, You can just move, The water around, Just one little twitch, Of the muscle, And the water just moves, Around the hand.

That is how easy, That's a picture, Of how easy it is for God, To change the mind, Of the most powerful people, In the world. It's that easy, For God to change the mind, Of King Charles, Joe Biden, Vladimir Putin, Rishi Sunak.

[18:52] But this is perhaps, Where God's sovereignty, Becomes unnerving. I guess most of us, Are probably sort of happy, With God being in charge, Of creation, And history on the macro level, But it gets a bit unsettling, The thought of God, Having control over my life, And my personal choices.

And so the objection is raised, But hang on, Are we just puppets? People say, Well surely I have free will. Well the Bible says, Yes and no.

Yes we make real choices. We really can go, Either way, At various crossroads in life, We come to, Decisions of what to study, Where to go to uni, What job to take, Who to marry, All that kind of thing.

And so rightly, We are held to account, If we do what's morally wrong. As it was the case, With Joseph's brothers, As it was for the case, In the Bible, When the people who killed Jesus, Held to account.

But at the same time, The minds in which we make real choices, Are not independent of God. Our thinking processes, Are not God free zones.

[20:12] And so back in Isaiah 45, If you ask King Cyrus, Why did you invade the Babylonians? He wouldn't say, God made me do it. God made me, Invade the Babylonians, And end the exile for God's people.

Those are real decisions, He took for himself. And yet Isaiah 45 verse 1, Together with Proverbs 21 verse 1, Makes it clear, That God decided, To direct the heart, Of King Cyrus, To do that.

Those real decisions, Were precisely the ones, That God had decreed, Before the beginning of time, That he would make. And again, To push this further, To really dwell on this, Just think, To give me completely, Independent free will, God would have to carve out, A little bit of the universe, That he didn't have control over.

About the universe, Where he, He lets go of the reins, And hands them to me. And then I'm in charge. But the Bible is clear, That God stands behind, Every human decision. I like the story of Joseph, Like Jesus' death. Now that may raise, Lots of questions, About salvation, And about suffering, And evil, And we'll cover those, In the next couple of weeks. [21 : 37] But this is another area, I think, Where we're tempted, To shrink God down. Absolute, Unconstrained freedom, To determine one's own future, Is seen by the world, Of basically what it means, To be human.

We rail against the idea, Of someone else, Deciding our future. But God is so big, He's so wise, That he can create, That he can create, That he can create, A universe, Where he is 100% in control, That he has planned, It all down, To the tiniest detail, And at the same time, I can make real choices, And take real responsibility, For my actions.

Those are truths, That are truths, That are truths, That are truths, Like train tracks, That run parallel, Through the Bible, Where both are true, At the same time. That's Ed Scratcher, Let's chat more about that, After the service.

But the summary there, That God alone is creator, And that he ultimately, Is in charge, Over everything, Nothing and no one, Can stop God, Carrying out his plans, And his actions. In the words of the football chant, He does what he wants. Even better, In the words of Isaiah 45, I am the Lord, And there is no other.

[22 : 56] And in this, We don't have to worry, About a tyrannical ruler. That's what we get nervous about, Isn't it? With someone who has, Absolute power all the time. We're nervous. Because human beings, We use power for evil, A lot of the time.

Who is it? Was it Lord Acton? Absolute power, Corrupts absolutely, Something like that. But God is, 100% good.

And he's loving, And he's wise. Again, We're going to think more about this, In a couple of weeks time, But for now, The children's song, From earlier, Sums it up.

We don't have to do the actions. Deuteronomy 32, The rock, His work is perfect. All his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness, And without inequity.

Just and upright, Is he. Well, So what? So what? How does this cash out, God's sovereignty?

[23 : 58] Well, Three applications on the handout. Firstly, All. God being fully in control, Of everything, Leads us, Basically to fall on our knees, And worship him, And trust him.

How amazing, That God is in control, Over everything, From world leaders, To ants collecting their food. We don't fully understand this. And actually, That is a source of great praise, Not scratching our heads, And puzzling all the time.

It's really wonderful, That God is bigger than us. That we don't, Fully understand God. That leads us, To awe, To glory, And praise to him.

Revelation 4, 11, Worthy are you, Our Lord and God, To receive glory, And honour, And power for you, Created all things, And by your will, They existed, And were created.

So, We should have a right awe, And worship of God. Next, Humility. God being sovereign, Means that we must be willing, To admit, That there are very few things in life, We can control, On a human level.

[25 : 10] I read recently, Of a mother, Who was teaching a three year old, The King James version, Of the Lord's prayer, But he was struggling, With the words, So, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, Became my kingdom come, My will be done.

It's quite insightful though, Really, Isn't it? That is often, What we, Repeat silently, In our hearts, We kind of want to rule, Our own lives, And yet, God being fully in control, Of everything, Leads us to a big dose, Of humility, Consider work, There's just one example, Of many we could choose, No matter how hard, We studied in school, And you really should revise, By the way, And how much we worked, There's no way, No way we can control, We controlled all the elements, Over the years, That put us in the positions, That we are today, Absolutely no way, In fact, We only wake up each day, Because God has chosen, To give us another day of life, That is a big dose, Of humility, And lastly, Trust, I guess many of us, See the chaos, And unpredictability, In today's world, And dread the future, We wonder, Will we face persecution, An economic decline, Another pandemic, A war, What will the future hold, For my children, My grandchildren, My godchildren, Will they suffer, We can constantly ask, The what if questions, And our minds, Just run away with themselves, Don't they, Keeping us up, At night, But when Jesus, Was faced with

anxious disciples, He encourages them, And now, That because the whole, All creation, Is dependent on the Lord, For his existence, Moment by moment, And he is generous, And that because we're, Worth much more to him, Than flowers and birds, We can trust, That God, Our heavenly father, Will take care of us, He is the creator, He is the sustainer, He is the provider, And that because,

A few things, Give greater comfort, Than knowing, That the world, And our lives, Are under God's, Careful rule, And that the one, Who rules, Is our loving, Wise Lord, And so we can, Trust him, With our lives, Our families, Our futures, Our exam results, And the future, Of the world, Because God, Is completely, In charge, And he is good, Let's pray together, Heavenly father, We praise you, And worship you, That you are, The creator, And sustainer, Of the world, Minute by minute, Hour by hour, We give you, Great thanks, And praise, For how you, Sustain us, Each day, Please help us, To look to you, As our sustainer, Each and every day, Of our lives, Amen.