

God Over Sin, #2

God Over All

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With the time we have remaining here this morning, I want to deal with point 3 now, having laid this out, having laid out Jonah in the book of Jonah as an illustration of the bigger point, I want to help you think through what this means. How does God rule over sin? How is it that he rules over sin? You see, part of what I want you to walk away with here today is very simple: I want you to walk out of here this morning more impressed with the glory and power of God than you are with the sin and rebellion of man. That's what I want. I want you to walk out realizing that there is nothing that man can do to thwart the will of God and the accomplishment of his purposes and we're going to see from Jonah some of the practical ways in which God overrules sin to accomplish his holy will.

How does God overrule sin? Here's one way: he frustrates the sinner's plans. Look at verse 4 again. Jonah wants to go west on a ship on the Mediterranean Sea but God frustrated the intentions of Jonah's life at that point by hurling a great wind on the sea so that the ship could not reach its destination. God sovereignly orchestrated things so that Jonah's sinful purposes could not be carried out. It's like a strong and discerning and wise and compassionate parent. You might see your child throwing a tantrum on the floor but a good parent is in complete control of that situation. A child isn't overthrowing the rule of the household when parents are doing their jobs, you simply deal with it and bring it under control. Well, if we can see that on a human level in a misty sort of way, then how much more can God do this as he reigns over his own creation. God, here in Jonah 1, used his control over nature to make it impossible for Jonah to carry out his plans. Listen, whenever a man's plan to do evil is frustrated and he's not able to carry out what he tried to do like some of these nut jobs that go and try to spray bullets around and kill a lot of people, so many times you'll hear that somewhere in that the gun jammed, God providentially placing limits on the wickedness through his sovereign ability to frustrate the actions of men. This is what he did with Jonah. Whenever you see somebody planning evil and find that it doesn't take place, the cops intervene before it happens, you see, you as a Christian should look at that and say, "Ah, God is sovereignly ruling over sin. What this guy intended did not come to pass." And you give credit to God who is operating that unseen current directing events to accomplish his will.

Now secondly, he frustrates the sinner's plan. How does God rule over sin? Secondly, he exposes sin. He exposes sin and this is just so sobering. You know the situation, the storm is raging and the men are trying to find out, verse 5, they are afraid, each man is crying to his God, "Please help us!" and no help is coming. Then in verse 7, "Each man said to his mate, 'Come, let us cast lots so we may learn on whose account this calamity has struck us.' So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah." Now, last week we quoted from Proverbs 16:33 that says, "The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD." Just as you see God's sovereign hand explicitly stated in Jonah as he appoints a storm and ends it, raises a plant and destroys it, so also here in verse 7, God is sovereignly directing the result of that lot to expose Jonah as the one in sin. Now, listen to me, people's sins, your sins will find you out because God exposes sin. Even if it's just sin that you're cherishing in your heart, God will expose it. In an unguarded moment, you'll speak and some people will say, "Where did that come from?" In your heart and mind you say, "That's just what I've been thinking for so long and now it's out, it's exposed and I'm ashamed." People's sin find them out when they do their best to cover it up. Wayward spouses are repeatedly found out eventually. Listen, as a Christian, as a biblical thinking Christian, you have to look at that and say that's no accident. That is God exposing that sin and putting limits on it by the sovereign outworking of his providence.

Thirdly, how does God rule over sin? Thirdly, this is on the grace side, he brings sinners to salvation. He brings sinners to salvation. Look at chapter 1, verse 15 again. Jonah was on board with all of these pagan sailors. They didn't buy into this when they climbed on board as the crew. Verse 15, "they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging." Verse 16, "Then the men," the other sailors, that is, "feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows." We saw in chapter 3, actually we didn't look at this, alongside that chapter 3, Jonah went and preached and look at verse 5, "Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them." God bringing pagans to salvation even in the Old Testament and when a man comes to Christ, the flood of sin coming out of his life is redirected; the overflowing faucet is turned down dramatically from a flood to a trickle. God brings sinners to salvation and thus overrules sin. He stopped me in my sin that Sunday morning. He stopped Saul of Damascus as he was going out to persecute the church. He rules over your sin. He ruled over your sin when he brought you to salvation. Your sinful life beforehand was redirected and there is no longer the massive quantity of sin spewing out of your life like there was before, right? Think about it. You were a sinner before you came to Christ and now you pursue righteousness. That is God overruling sin in your own life. This is what he does every time he draws someone to faith in Christ, he sovereignly overrules sin in their lives.

Fourthly, God limits the consequences of sin. Verse 17 of Jonah 1, "the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights." Think about that. Jonah should have, naturally speaking, drowned. He should have drowned. That's what happens when you do when you can't swim far enough to get to safety and you're in the middle of the sea, you should drown. Jonah should have drowned there but he didn't because God sovereignly overruled the consequences of

Jonah's sin and spared him death at that time. Can't you look at your own life, beloved, and realize that you very often have not felt the full consequences of your sin that it could have gone to? The different things that you have done? You were out when you were a teenager and you are half drunk, speeding at 80 miles an hour and you didn't die in a car crash because God spared and limited the consequences of your sin. We're just giving you illustrations of ways to think about God's sovereignty over sin here.

Verse 5, he persuades the conscience through his word. Chapter 4, verse 10 of Jonah. God had asked him in verse 9, "Do you have good reason to be angry?" Jonah says, "Yes, I have good reason to be angry, even unto death." And in verse 10 the Lord said, "You had compassion on a plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight." You were so worked up and compassionate, as it were, on that plant. Jonah, you were compassionate on a plant and yet you're angry with me because I want to have compassion on the souls of men, hundreds and thousands of men? Jonah, I want to have sovereign compassion on them. You can be compassionate on a plant but you're angry at me for being compassionate on sinners. What happened there? Jonah's conscience was obviously pricked and convinced at that point and then he went out and wrote the book to show how foolish he was and how righteous God was.

Beloved, one of the purposes of Scripture is that it's profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, 2 Timothy 3:16, so that you might be adequate, equipped for every good work as a Christian. Beloved, listen to me carefully: God speaks to your mind through his word and as he speaks to your mind and as you understand, it transforms your mind and draws you just a little further away from sin and a little closer to the image of Christ. His word persuades you, convicts you about things that you were doing and you say, "Oh, that's sinful against God. I don't want to go there anymore. Lord, I repent. I confess it and I'm going to change." So God in that process is transforming your heart and pulling you away from sin.

There are multiplied other things that we could talk about, all that I want you to see, all of this has been illustration to see the one big point and that is that God rules over even sin to accomplish his purposes. The ultimate victory over sin was at the cross, right, when Christ took on the burden of the punishment of God on behalf of his people, bore the punishment, buried in the grave and on the third day resurrected out of the grave, manifesting perfect great sovereignty over sin. Think about it longer term. Think about it eschatologically about the end of time when God judges sinners, casts the devil into the pit, brings his people into glory and utterly perfects them and banishes sin forever from the presence of his people. Is there going to be any question at that time whether God is sovereign over sin or not? He is going to vindicate his sovereignty. He is going to vindicate his righteousness in ways that will put it all on display in an incontestable way that will cause his people to bow down and give him glory and say, "Yes God, you have ruled over all. You ruled over sin and now we see the perfection of it all in glorified bodies in the presence of our Savior who even overruled my sin to accomplish his eternal purposes." 2 Thessalonians 1:8 says that God will deal "out retribution to those who do not know Him and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus." These will

pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power when he comes to be glorified in his saints on that day, 2 Thessalonians 1.

What I want to do now is help you think through what this means for your life. The point here wasn't so much to engage a difficult theological discussion and leave other questions unanswered, although we've done that, I want to help you think through this in a right way. First of all, understand this, is that the reality of God's sovereignty over sin does not lead you to treat sin lightly. You and I don't know the ultimate outworking of God's secret will. What we respond to in our lives is what he has revealed in his word. We obey his word. That's what God has appointed for us is for us to obey his word. Ecclesiastes 12 says the conclusion when all has been heard is, "Fear God and keep His commandments because this applies to every person, for God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil." There should be a motivating force in your life that says, "I'm going to obey God because I know that's what he blesses. I'm not going to sin because I know that that violates his holiness and I love him too much as a Christian to do it any other way anyway." This doesn't make you trifle with sin and say, "Oh, I'll sin because it's all in God's secret will." A true believer doesn't think that way. A true believers says, "I love the righteousness of God and I want to reflect the character of Christ who saved me." So you don't pull this into your life and say, "This makes it easy for me to sin." That's the furthest thing from your mind, and understand God will hold you accountable for how you respond to his word. And so you don't play games, you don't attempt to God by saying, "Hey, God, I understand you are sovereign over sin. Watch this." A true believer wouldn't even go there because a true believer has a heart tender to the word of God.

Now, secondly, what we've done here this morning is we have laid a foundation for you to really seriously deal with past regrets of things that you have done or pains that others have brought into your life. This is where all of this was leading up to, beloved, was to be able to talk to you about this. The ways that people have sinned against you in the past is not a barrier to your Christian joy at all. It couldn't possibly be. What you need to do in light of these truths is say, "Wow, somehow in a way that I don't understand, God was working out good in this difficulty and in these things that people did to me that I can't even see and understand. I'm not going to think from the starting point of the way this impacted me, I'm going to think from the starting point of Scripture and say that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love him." In that, as difficult as that is, as much as it makes you maybe cringe a little bit some of you, what you have to understand is that in God's sovereignty over sin is the avenue of the redemption of those bad areas in your past that allow you to change your perspective of them and look upon them from the perspective of God and say, "Oh, God was working out his purposes from the very beginning. I don't fully understand that but I trust him. This wrong that happened to me was not isolated from the directing hand of God."

And you say, "I don't understand. You don't know how bad it was." I don't need to know how bad it was. I really don't. The responsibility is on you to take this and go to God and say, "God, I don't understand how that could have been something as part of your good

purposes for my life but I believe what your word says and I ask you from the bottom of my heart to bring good out of it that honors your name and is good for me, and I pray that while I am in this place of not understanding, that you would give me a sense of comfort and understanding in my heart that allows me to rest in the reality of your character rather than the limited boundaries of my understanding." Because in one way or another, if you are a Christian, beloved, everything in your life God has intended to bring good to you in. It doesn't mean that he approved of the wrongs that people did. He didn't cause that to happen but he was so intimately involved in the orchestration of your circumstances that the current is bound to bring good to you in the end. If nothing else, you say, "How could that be?" If nothing else, I might have to go up on the second step to emphasize this point, if nothing else, those sins that people committed against you give you a contrast by which you can more greatly appreciate the grace and mercy and compassion of God on your life. "They harmed me here on earth but God is bringing me to heaven. By contrast, this is minor by comparison to the eternal weight of glory that God has appointed for me in Christ." If there is nothing else that you can give thanks for out of that, see the contrast between the holiness and goodness of God in the things that happened in your past and give God thanks for his goodness through it all.

Now secondly, in like manner and in a way that affects all of us even those of you that are hurting in the way that we talked about in the first one, look, we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, right? In this teaching is where you can find your rest from the regret that plagues your mind. "If only I had done it differently. Oh, you don't even know what I did to that person and they are dead now. I can't fix it." Come back here to this very point and just quiet your heart before the Lord and say, "God, you were sovereignly working even in that. Not only are you going to work out the wrongs that have been done to me, you're going to work out the wrongs that I have done to others. You carried my guilt on Calvary and so I'm already forgiven and I'm going to trust you for the consequences of what I did back there. I'm not going to repeat it. I hate what I did but I can't change it, God, and therefore I am just going to rest in you. Your word elevates your greatness and your goodness to such a level that it says you are reigning over sin, not just sin in general, not just sins done to me, but you reign over the sins that I have committed in the past and I cannot change and, God, I am going to trust you for that in response to your word. All I can do now is honor you by my response to your word, Lord, and I'm going to trust you even for that and I'm going to leave it there and I'm not going to keep bringing it up, I'm not going to keep talking about it. I'm going to change the subject of conversation and talk about the goodness and glory of Christ instead and that's where I'm going to rest my mind and my heart." Do you understand that what we're talking about here enables you to do what the Apostle Paul said in Philippians 3, "forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal of the upper call of God in Christ Jesus"? You can do that because God is over sin and God has been working out his good providence even in the midst of all things.

So the way that you think about this is you take yourself where you're at today, this is the point where you're at in life right now, this is one of the most important things that you could understand to live the Christian life: where you're at right now is what God has appointed for you. God has appointed your present life for you right now and the sum

total of everything that has happened in your past is part of the totality of what he has brought you to right now and the issue is not to go back and try to undo things that you can't change, the issue is to look forward and to now live in light of a better deeper understanding of the character of God and a more serious devout approach to his word, a more serious devout approach to living under the Lordship of our Lord Jesus Christ. This allows you to look forward and stop looking back. This allows you to relax. This allows you to say, "This changes everything. This takes the weight off of my shoulders and I'm just going to just like I trusted God with my soul for salvation, I'm going to trust him with all of that stuff and now move forward constructively in response to his word." It takes the fear out of the future. It takes the fear out of wondering what people are plotting against you. This is the key to unspeakable peace and joy inexpressible and full of glory. If you are a Christian, God has placed his hand on you and saved you and he is taking care of and is taking care of all of the sin that might serve to undermine the joy. You leave it with him and live with the mind that is fixed more clearly and fully on the goodness of his sovereign grace. This is not something to be resisted, beloved, this is something to be embraced. You can turn to Christ in humble faith and have peace.

Beloved, if I could get right into each one of you right in your eyes, I would look at you and earnestly tell you that what this means is that you need to let God work out his will for your life right where he has found you and trust him for the ultimate outcome of all of that stuff behind. You can trust him. Look, I realize this is urgent for many of you. There is a lot of stuff in a lot of your pasts. This allows you to be at peace with it. God was at work in it and now you pick up and you move forward in clarity and in obedience to him. This is a blessed doctrine that Scripture has given to us and it points us to a blessed God who rules over all, who rules over sin, and intends to manifest without fail his goodness to you in the end.

Would you bow with me in prayer? I want to give you just a moment to pray and just think through these things before the Lord. Beloved, what this means is that your heavenly Father has been, he is now and he always will be over all. If you love Christ, you have his word that he will cause it all to work together for good and take that thing from the past and that thing that you did and that thing that has been done to you and lay it before the Lord and say, "Father, in light of this truth from your word, I trust you and I can be at peace with it because my eyes are only on you."

Father, no man could stand up here and begin to sort out the consequences of the different things that are represented in the history of lives in this room. No man could begin to explain how this or that could possibly work together for good and that's why we humble ourselves before you and we look to you. Father, I pray that in ways that I could never do, that you in your sovereign work of your Spirit in our individual hearts, would bring us to a point of such confidence in these things that where regret and shame and fear and hurt have reigned, Father, it would be swept up in your peace and a confidence in who you are and what you are doing. Bless our people. Bless us to that end, O God.

And Father, I know that there has got to be people here that don't even know Christ, all this is foreign to them, Lord, I pray that you might show grace to them and help them to

see Christ on the cross as the only one who could save them from their sins; to cry out to him in repentance; to cry out to him in faith, "Lord Jesus, have mercy on my broken spirit. Have mercy on my sinful soul." Take these things, O Father, and apply them to each heart as you see fit and then bring us together this evening at 6:30 to celebrate communion and to remember the work of Christ on our behalf. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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