

“THE HEART OF THE KING.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden

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Sermon Text: Proverbs 21:1-2, 30-31

Introduction.

Today is Reformation Sunday, the Sunday before October 31, the day credited with marking the beginning of the Reformation in 1517. On this occasion we celebrate the providential goodness of God for the history and heritage that is ours because of His great grace.

This evening I want to focus our attention on one of the great and central pillars of what it means to be Reformational and Reformed people. The sovereignty of God.

What metaphor would you use to describe the sovereignty of God? It is the bedrock of Reformed Theology. It is the foundation and the pillar of Reformed Theology. It is the shining crown jewel, the heart, the head waters, the continental divide.

It is affirmed from Genesis to Revelation in countless texts. Let's consider one together, one that happens to be a personal favorite for some very practical reasons.

Proverbs 21:1

Proverbs 21 begins and ends with two verses about the sovereignty of God.

Proverbs 21:1-2 The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will. 2 Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart.

Proverbs 21:30-31 No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can prevail against the Lord. 31 The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord.

Solomon captures the extent and power of God's sovereignty using the strongest illustration he can think of, an illustration he is well acquainted with. Solomon was the greatest king who ever lived, the wisest, richest, most powerful, ruling over a vast kingdom.

Kings were the highest and greatest and strongest among mortals. Their wisdom and might was unassailable. Whatever a king decreed was done. They had no checks and balances to deal with, there were no laws hindering them from doing whatever they wanted. Who could resist the will of a Pharaoh or a Caesar or an Emperor, they held in their hands the issues of life and death? The wrath of a king was the most fear-producing thing on earth. Read the book of Esther or Daniel for some examples.

Solomon contrasts how strong God's sovereignty is, God holds absolute sway over the greatest and strongest and most irresistible of all wills, the hearts of absolute monarchs.

How hard is this for God? Like directing the course of a stream of water. Picture a farmer making little waterways in the dirt by hand to direct the flow of water for irrigation. The water is completely under his control and discretion. He turns it wherever he pleases.

And what is being directed? The heart? What is that? The heart is the center, the place where plans and purposes originate, the center from which everything begins and flows. Out of the heart the mouth speaks. Out of the heart all good and evil flows.

The God who makes kings and makes their hearts has no difficulty directing their will and plans.

The God who makes rivers and streams and directs their course, finds it no hardship to direct the direction and flow of a king's thoughts.

Go ahead and think of the most powerful person you can think of in our world today. They are in the hand of God. In the palm of His hand. With His finger he directs not just their every action but their every thought.

People talk about the separation of church and state. God knows no such thing. It's all Gods. He has His hands in politics up to His elbows, He has His hand in every political plan and decision, every backroom deal and covert operation, every boast and threat, every Twitter tweet, every Grand Jury and Supreme Court decision, every military action, every election.

God is the maker of all things and the doer of all things.

In nature and on inanimate things, God acts by physical force.

In senseless animals, God acts by instinct and appetite.

In intelligent beings, God acts by motives and desires.

In redeemed people, God acts by the influence of His grace.

God is the active ingredient in the universe, the active agent behind all things.

God controls and directs thoughts, motives, agendas, strategies, plans, purposes, desires, decisions, ambitions, intentions, successes and failures, from the greatest to the least.

Illustrations from Scripture.

Are the hearts of kings really in God's hands? Does He really direct them wherever He wills? Does He hold absolute sway over their thoughts, motives, desires, wills, plans and decisions?

God who kept Abimelech from sinning against Sarah (Genesis 20:6).

God turned Pharaoh's heart favorably toward Joseph (Genesis 41:35-47).

Later God stirred up the hatred of Pharaoh in the days of Moses making his heart hard and then finally relenting, but then hardened again (Exodus 7-14)

The Babylonian kings showed kindness to Daniel and his friends.

The Persian kings were inclined to assist the Jews and the rebuilding of their temple.

Remember King Ahasuerus's sleepless night that led to some late-night reading that completely change the fate of the Jewish people in the days of Esther (Esther 6).

Remember Caesar Augustus in faraway Rome deciding to decree a census of the entire Roman world for his own purposes of taxation. What was the purpose behind that purpose? To move an unheard of, insignificant, young pregnant couple seventy miles south (John Piper).

Were not all the counsels of the rulers of Jerusalem turned against the Lord's Christ. Did not the saints of the early church believe and confess their confidence in the sovereignty of God?

Acts 4:27-28 "for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place."

Revelation 17:17 God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.

Do we think somehow such things are confined to the pages of Scripture?

What about our own history and heritage in the great Reformation?

A young monk's tormented soul finding no works sufficient to satisfy a holy God, stumbling upon the righteousness of God in Paul's Romans, and Martin Luther was set free.

A young French lawyer intent on a good career in law, redirected to Geneva, Switzerland and John Calvin became the spiritual and intellectual tour de force of the Reformation whose writings and influence God is still using for His glory.

Henry VIII in attempting to have his first marriage annulled and being denied by the Pope, unintentionally set off the English Reformation with the separation of the Church of England.

Who of us is anxious in our day of the actions of kings and presidents and prime ministers and tyrants and dictators, whether they be good or godless?

Jesus is the King over all kings, Lord of all lords. He is ruler of Kim Jong Un of North Korea and Bashar Hafez al-Assad of Syria and Hassan Rouhani of Iran and Justin Trudeau of Canada and Donald Trump and Nancy Pelosi and Governor Jay Inslee.

Every one of them unconsciously and unwittingly and unintentionally doing the will of God.

Proverbs 21:30-31 No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can prevail against the Lord. 31 The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord.

Nothing in the mind and heart of man can prevail or stand against the Lord. Every thought against the Lord is a vain thought. No opposition can stand against the will of God. Every adversary is utterly overmatched. I recall preaching on this topic years ago and wanting to paraphrase the playground taunt for a sermon title, "My God can beat up your god."

Who can strive with his maker and hope to win?

How many times have wicked adversaries sought to kill Christ and destroy His church and erase Christianity from the face of the earth? And how often has the blood of the martyrs been the seed of the church. Where is the church prospering today? In the very places where it is most threatened, China, Iran, Africa.

What blindness and folly it is for any man, any ruler to think he is the captain of his soul, master of his fate and state. How can they never consider that their every thought is known before it is known to them, and all of their affairs and actions completely seen before set in motion.

Does no one consider He is the potter and we are the clay, He holds the nations in the balance, they are all as a drop in the bucket, that behind every secondary cause is a first cause? Like a stream of water, moved wherever he will.

Objection.

Someone will always object, human flesh and pride resist this doctrine. Doesn't this make us all puppets or robots, they will protest? What about our human dignity and autonomy and free will? And even some Christians feel the need to guard God from the accusation that He is responsible for evil and wickedness, and or that we are absolved from being responsible for our own actions?

Should we dignify the objection with an answer? Do we need to defend God from being God?

Paul didn't feel the need to in Romans 9:19-21. He simply said who are we to question God.

Have any of us here ever felt for even a moment as though we were a helpless, innocent puppet on a string? And have not everyone us felt the sting of our sin and the guilt of our own consciousness before a holy God?

As the farmer exerts his will over the water, but doesn't change the nature of the water, so God's providence doesn't change the freedom of man's will but directs it to serve His own purposes.

The Bible affirms divine sovereignty and human responsibility together without contradiction.

How does all this work? It's a mystery. This is where we fall back on Romans 11:33.

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

In the mystery of God's perfect wisdom and will and ability, He so directs the thoughts and motives and purposes of the king's heart without compromising the human responsibility and moral agency of the king.

Implications and application.

What difference does this foundation and pillar of the Reformation and Reformed Theology have on your life and the life of our family and our work?

Just as Proverbs 21 begins and ends with God's sovereignty, so does all of human history and all of our history. Your life, your family, your children, your grandchildren, your career, your future, your salvation, your perseverance, your health, it all begins and ends with God's sovereignty. There are no mistakes, no detours, no plan Bs, no surprises in the eternal wisdom of God. Nothing can threaten His good purpose, nothing can thwart it. Not your oncologist, not your financial adviser, not your spouse, not your kids, not your teachers, not your best friend, not your boss, not your president, no one.

Does it feel to you like your life is about as crooked as that creek on the screen? Does it feel that chaotic or out of control? Remember the life of Joseph or Moses.

The shortest distance between two points in geometry is a straight line, but not in God's math. God draws straight with crooked lines.

The sovereignty of God means that in times of *fear and anxiety* we can rest secure in the power of God. This was how Jesus could sleep through a storm. He had absolute and total trust in His heavenly Father. The sovereignty of God means you can have that kind of peace and confidence in the midst of your storms.

The sovereignty of God teaches us in **adversity** to be patient for all things must work according to the perfect and good counsel of God for our salvation. It will all be spiritually profitable.

It teaches us in **prosperity** to be humbly thankful and grateful. All that we have is grace, it comes directly from God's hands. There are lots of people out in the world who are lots smarter and who are working harder and have a lot less.

Jesus said, His will is to do the will of His Father. As Christ-followers our heart's desire should be the same, to be utterly and completely surrendered to the will of God. It's why we pray, thy will be done, not my will. May He be the potter to our clay. My joy is found not in me being me, but in me being surrendered to Him, filled with Him, used by Him, for Him.

I began by saying this text is a personal favorite for practical reasons. It's my prayer before every sermon, before every teaching, before every meeting. It is my heart's desire that He take every thought captive to His glorious will and purpose and eternal plan.

Trust in the absolute sovereignty of God and take eternal comfort in the absolute sovereignty of God because it is why you are saved, it is how you came to be followers of Jesus, it is how there is a church of Jesus Christ on earth, it is why there is the blood of martyrs, it is why the earth is full of the glory of God even as the waters cover the sea.

The sovereignty of God is cause for joy, cause for gratitude and thanksgiving, cause for comfort and peace, cause for the highest and deepest and richest worship.

The Lord is in His holy temple. May we be a people who love our sovereign God and love the sovereignty of God.

Prayer: Holy Father, we affirm you can do all things and no purpose of yours can be thwarted, your purposes will always stand, you work all things according to the counsel of your will and for your pleasure and our eternal good. Comfort our hearts, strengthen our faith and give us boldness and courage to face whatever the future holds knowing you have everything in the palm of your hand.