

Jason Upchurch - Mark 14:12-21 - The Good News of Comprehensive Sovereignty

Have you guys ever been reading along in your Bible and come to a passage and think, “Why is this here?” “What do I do with this section?” There are no commands or prohibitions or promises. It feels like random bits of information?

I confess to you when I first began working through this passage that’s what I thought of here: Why is this here? What’s going on here?

Whenever that happens I come back to a quote by John Calvin: “Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit...nothing is taught but what is [helpful] to know. Therefore we must guard against depriving believers of anything disclosed...” (Vol.2, p.924).

What Calvin is getting at is that everything God gives us in Scripture is helpful and necessary for us to know. Now, Calvin was actually talking about the doctrine of predestination, but really this is true about everything in Scripture. Even the parts where we’re not really sure why they’re here or what they mean - God has given them to us for our good.

Now, it turns out this section is actually an amazing section. And Calvin’s quote hits close to home because I think what we see - while not about predestination specifically - is about the comprehensive sovereignty of God. We see the sovereignty of God in the crucifixion of his Son.

And we see it unfold in all these little details here leading up to the Passover which becomes the Lord’s Supper.

This is Thursday, the day before Jesus is crucified. And Jesus is going to celebrate Passover. He’s staying just outside of the city and so he sends just two of his disciples into the city to meet some random guy who will show them a room where they’ll celebrate the Passover. Once they’re in there Jesus drops the bomb that there’s a betrayer. And then he condemns the betrayer, who we know is Judas.

Now, you’ve heard me say this before, I think it’s a helpful reminder from time to time: The chapter numbers and paragraph headings in your Bible are not inspired by God. They can be helpful. Chapter and verse addresses are great because they get us all to basically the same exact place in the Bible. Without them we’d spend 5 minutes trying to figure out where to go.

But we need to be reminded when we’re reading Scripture that the authors didn’t stop the story at the end of chapters. And paragraph headings can be helpful but I think often we see them and think “oh this is a brand new section disconnected from the last one.” But they’re not.

Really all of chapter 14 is one long story about the betrayal of Jesus. We saw the plan to betray Jesus last week. Here we see the announcement of the betrayal at the Supper. And then we see it unfolded later in the chapter. It’s all connected together.

And in this unfolding, we see God’s sovereign hand. God is bringing together all the details.

And that’s really the big takeaway this morning: God’s sovereignty is comprehensive. Whether that’s orchestrating the details of the betrayal of Jesus leading to his death, or whether that’s God orchestrating the details of our lives - good or bad - he is in control.

Psalms 147:8: He covers the heavens with clouds; he prepares rain for the earth; he makes grass grow on the hills.

The reason you have to mow your yard is because God himself causes the blades of grass to grow.

And we’re going to wrestle with some of the more common difficulties because they’re all right here. So let’s look at this sovereignty in the betrayal of Jesus that’s about to unfold.

1) Sovereignty uses means. **Read 12-15**

So the day before Jesus dies we have this very unusual section where Jesus sends his disciples into Jerusalem to find a room. The room will be ready for Jesus and the disciples to eat the Passover.

But there's a mystery to the situation. Jesus doesn't tell them where to go or who they're meeting. Instead he tells 2 of them to go into the city and there will be a random man holding a water jar who's looking out for them.

Remember Jerusalem is packed for the Passover. People from all over Israel and the Roman world are jammed into this place and they've got to go in and look for a random guy holding water.

We're told in Luke's gospel that it's Peter and John that go into the city. They're to look for a man with water who's also looking for them. Now usually women would carry water jugs, so a man with water would be an unusual thing but it's still packed.

Now, if you think about that, that is really odd. That's like me telling you, "Go to the Seahawks stadium and find a guy holding a gallon of milk. It's a 70,000 people and sea of green and blue, how are you going to find this guy?"

Maybe put it a different way: Why not just tell them where to go? Why not just give them the address? "Go to the north quarter, half way down Long Street to the house of Jacob?" or something like that?

Well, remember what happened on Wednesday? The Chief Priests and scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death. And Judas makes a deal with them to betray Jesus. Remember that word betray means "hand over." Judas is looking for an opportunity to get Jesus alone, or at least away from the large crowds so he can give hand over Jesus to the chief priests in private. The opportunity they're looking for to put Jesus to death.

Well, a small private Passover meal would be the perfect opportunity for a group of soldiers to bust in and arrest Jesus. They'd be all alone with their small group. They could arrest Jesus while everyone else is eating their Passover and he'd be taken almost without a fuss. All Judas would need to know is where the meal is being held and then checkmate.

But Jesus knows what Judas is up to. He knows a deal has been made. So rather than tell the group where they're going, Jesus has orchestrated this elaborate plan for a man to be watching out for 2 of the disciples and take them to his house.

Jesus and this unnamed man are the only ones who know where the location is because they know that if the group knows, Judas will lead the soldiers to Jesus. And Jesus still has work to do before he is arrested. He has the Passover to eat, the Upper Room Discourse to give. He'll be arrested, but not just yet.

Now, how did all this come about? Some people think this was all just Jesus having divine foreknowledge of the situation. In his divine omniscience he knew there was a guy who would happen to have an empty room who would be happy to have Jesus come and celebrate a small Passover.

Sort of this serendipitous turn of events. And that could be the case. But I think it's unlikely.

Jesus probably knew something about Judas and his plans. That was probably supernatural knowledge. Jesus may have had clues, but no one else did. Judas hid his betrayal well. So I think God probably revealed what Judas was doing to Jesus.

But here's the thing: I think the rest of this situation was likely just planned out by Jesus through ordinary means. This is Thursday. The day before - Wednesday - is a pretty pretty quiet day in most of the gospels. We don't have a lot recorded. Jesus could have easily planned this on Wednesday with this man in the city. He knew what Judas was doing and need a way to keep the location secret.

So although this could just all be sovereignly worked out, it seems that more likely is that Jesus just used simple means to ensure the purposes of God were worked out.

And God very often just uses normal means to accomplish his purposes in our lives.

1689 LBC (6:3): God, in his ordinary providence makes use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them at his pleasure.

What does that mean? It means God often just uses simple, normal methods to bring about history in our individual lives. We do believe he is sovereign - in control of all things and he could easily part the sea, he could raise the dead, heal the sick miraculously. But he's also in control of normal things, normal methods of bringing things about.

So a lot of times we're praying for God to open a door, or do some big thing in our lives and often the way God brings that about is not to part the sea or move the sun back 10 degrees or do some miraculous thing. It's usually just us doing the work we want God to accomplish in us.

God sovereignly uses means.

2) History Providentially Points to Jesus. **Read 16**

Okay, so many moons ago we talked about that this is Passover Week, or it's often called the feast of Unleavened Bread. They were celebrating the annual reminder how God rescued his people out of Egypt. While they were in Egypt Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites leave, and so God threatened to kill the firstborn of everyone in the entire country. But he would pass over those houses who killed a sheep or goat and painted the blood of the sheep or goat around their doors.

It was also called the feast of Unleavened Bread because part of the story was that the Israelites were to only eat unleavened bread the week leading up to the Exodus.

From the time the Israelites sacrificed the lambs to paint their doorways to the time they had to get up and leave would be very short. They had to be ready to leave the country at a moment's notice so the bread they made had no yeast at all. There was no time for the bread to rise. They had to be fully dressed, eat their meal quickly, and the dough they brought with them couldn't have any yeast because they needed to be ready to go and not worry about the dough rising.

What we find out later is that the actual Passover event looked forward to Jesus. The Jews thought that when they celebrated the meal they were looking back on what God had done, but in reality they were always looking forward to what Jesus would do.

Look at 1 Cor. 5. This is the infamous passage where there is sexual immorality going on in the church at Corinth. It appears a man is sleeping with his step mom, something so vile that Paul says even the pagans don't do this kind of stuff. But the Corinthians are cheering this guy on. Paul says that they should actually kick the guy out of the church. Why? Because he says that Jesus our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed and we rid ourselves of the leaven of sin. He appeals to Passover. **Read 6-8**

It's not just coincidence that Jesus was crucified on Passover. Paul gives us the whole picture that God was unfolding all the way back in Exodus.

The true Passover Lamb was Jesus. He died to rescue us from the wrath of God.

And that unleavened bread that the Israelites were to have, that actually represents us. Because what's leaven? Sin.

And just like the Israelites celebrated the Passover Lamb by getting rid of leaven, we celebrate the true Passover Lamb, which is Jesus, by getting rid of sin. We're unleavened bread. And Paul says part of that is making sure we don't allow sin to go on in the church. We don't celebrate sin, or coddle sin.

No; the way we celebrate what Christ has done on our behalf is to get rid of all the leaven in our lives. When God was unfolding the Passover in Egypt it always providentially pointing to Jesus.

Back in Mark 14 Jesus knows exactly what's going to happen. He knows the exact day he is going to die: Passover. He is the Passover Lamb.

It's not coincidence that Jesus was killed on the Passover. It's not like "Hey, that was awfully convenient." No.

Christ could have been crucified on Yom Kippur, the day of atonement when all of Israel's sins were cast upon the goat that was released into the wilderness and the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies only once a year. Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus is our High Priest. He opened the way to God by splitting the curtain of the Temple.

Jesus could have been sacrificed in a Jubilee year, a year when everything is set free and made right.

But God ordained that Christ would be sacrificed on Passover because he is the Passover. And not only do all these feasts and meals look forward to Jesus, but God ensures that Jesus actually dies on that day to make it clear what he is doing.

Remember the religious leaders actually want to wait until after the Passover, once the crowds have all gone home. But Jesus sovereignly orchestrates this whole thing so that the connection is absolutely clear.

Side: There's a lot of discussion on the timing of events in this passage. Remember this is technically Thursday. What day is Passover? Friday. So why are they eating the meal on Thursday if the actual event isn't until Friday? How does that all work?

Well, people have come with about 7 different ideas about how this timing works. Let me just give you a couple of them.

A) Jews celebrated Passover on 2 different days. One group on Thursday and one on Friday. There is some suggestion that different groups of Jews reckoned the calendar in different ways so that it would be legit to sacrifice some on Thursday, some on Friday.

B) Some believe that by the time of Jesus there were so many people celebrating that the only way to actually slaughter that many animals was to just extend the feast one additional day. They couldn't do it on Saturday because it was Sabbath, so they just added Thursday as time went on.

C) Says that this isn't technically a Passover meal, it's just a meal that is celebrated during Passover week. It was an added meal. The problem with that is that Jesus makes the meal - which is the Passover - refer to him as the Lord's Supper. So it's really hard to say that this isn't actually the Passover.

D) The view I think is most likely. Jews counted days from sundown to Sundown. So the Passover - 15 Nisan - began Thursday evening, and went on until Friday at sundown. So that Jesus could eat the Passover meal late Thursday night (technically Passover) and be crucified on Friday and the whole thing take place on the Passover. I think the passage actually makes that fairly clear in **Vs. 17. Read**

It's now evening. Peter and John went to go prepare the meal during the afternoon, came back to Jesus and in the evening time - which is technically now Passover - they come directly into the city to eat the meal.

Judas has no idea where they're going, no opportunity to alert the chief priests without letting on to what he's doing. The whole thing falls into place.

This seems to be the easiest way to harmonize what's happening.

And again, not just the feast, but the timeline, the unfolding of events, everything here is under the sovereign orchestration of God.

God sovereignly uses means.
History Sovereignly points to Jesus

3) Sovereignty doesn't negate emotions. **Read 17-20**

Have you ever heard the phrase "the frozen chosen?" That's often used of our Presbyterian brothers, but generally applied to Calvinists or anyone who holds to a robust understanding of sovereignty and predestination.

The idea is that if you believe that God orchestrates everything, then there's not a lot to get excited about in life. Why get all emotional when something good happens? Why get all emotional when something bad happens? I mean, if God is in control, what's the matter?

But actually that's fatalism. A cold, harsh belief that the Bible doesn't embrace at all.

The sovereignty of God never negates our emotions. It might help keep them in check. And it might help us to understand what our emotions should actually be. But it never negates them.

Here the disciples are beside themselves. **Read 19**

They're sorrowful. The original means severe mental or emotional distress. And actually the other gospels say that Jesus himself is sorrowful.

John 18:21: Jesus became troubled in spirit; he was deeply grieved, even shaking.

"What's the problem, Jesus? You know what's going to happen? Why are you sad?"

Because he still has to go through it.

When a kid knows they're going to get a spanking, knowing it's going to happen doesn't make it any better.

When you get pulled over by a police officer, knowing you're getting a ticket doesn't make it any better.

The sovereignty of God does not ever negate the real emotions we go through. It might temper them and give us the right emotions to feel. But never negate them.

Paul says in **Rom. 10** - just after his whole chapter on the doctrine of election - that his heart's desire and prayer is that the Jews would be saved. He deeply desire that God would rescue them from their sin.

He's not indifferent. He's not hostile. He's not happy they're on their way to hell. He deeply wants them to be saved. That's okay.

By the way: Isn't it interesting that when Jesus says someone will betray him that no one points to Judas. Levi is not over there whispering to James, "I knew it, I knew it the whole time. I knew that exorcism back in Galilee was fake."

No. They all point to themselves. Are they the ones who will hand Jesus over? Every one of them suspects himself. And if you remember in the other gospels even Judas plays along. "It's not I is it, Lord?" He's got to blend in, he's got to keep up the show.

But even now, hours before he comes after Jesus with the crowd to arrest Jesus, no one knows except who? Jesus. Jesus knows.

Jesus know who it is and actually Jesus is sitting right next to Judas. Judas is in the seat of honor at the table.

This revelation is an absolute shock to the disciples. They are completely blindsided. And Jesus never rebukes them for their response. They should be upset. They should be Grieving at the betrayal of the Lord.

You think of Job. All his kids were taken away, all his property destroyed, his health demolished. And he knew the sovereignty of God, but he still grieved. He said nothing for over a week. He sat in the dust in sackcloth and ashes. He mourned for 40 chapters. That was never a problem. It's when his grief led him to sin and to accusing God that God rebuked him.

The same is true with joy. Jesus says all the angels in heaven rejoice when one sinner comes to repentance. Can you imagine that? Someone hears about the death and resurrection of Jesus and that if they turn from their sins and trust in Christ alone they'll get eternal life. They believe and millions and millions and billions and billions of angels in heaven celebrate.

There's not this group over to the side going "Yeah, but they were chosen. What's the big deal? They were always gonna believe, this isn't anything to get excited about?"

Nope. Angels who behold the glory of God and know the eternal plan probably better than we do in some ways, praise God for every sinner who is declared righteous on the basis of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sovereignty never negates emotions.

4) Sovereignty doesn't negate accountability. **Read 20-21**

So we have the age old discussion of sovereignty and responsibility. On the one hand Judas was fulfilling Scripture. God had prepared Judas to fulfill this role as the betrayer of Jesus. It was written that Jesus would be betrayed. Judas is called the Son of perdition. Jesus knew who he was and knew the role he would play. God sovereignly worked all that out.

At the same time, Judas did that according to his own desires. It appears he was angry at Jesus for shaming him which is why he betrayed Jesus. He was also greedy and wanted a little bit of money, so he got his 30 pieces of silver.

So God used Judas, and Judas betrayed Jesus of his own desires. And Judas will suffer the consequences of his actions. **Read 21**

Woe to the man. It's better that he not been born. All of the good things that Judas experienced in life - food, sunrises, warmth and family - are nothing like the horrors of hell that he is experiencing for all eternity because of his sin.

It would actually be better that he never had been born. That he never existed than experience what he's experiencing now.

This is the fate of all those who reject Jesus: eternal conscious torment in hell forever.

Some people believe in annihilation. The idea that those who reject Jesus just blink out of existence when they die. They don't believe in a hell or lake of fire. The punishment for not believing in Jesus is just non-existence. But then Jesus's words wouldn't make any sense.

No, the Bible is clear that all those that reject Jesus are in torment forever.

And you say "Well, if God is the one who plans who is saved and who is not, how is that fair? How can God hold us accountable?"

And God says in **Romans 9**: "Who are you, O man, to answer back to God?" We don't get to challenge God on who he saves or doesn't save.

And at the very same time the Bible tells us that the eternal destiny of all people is in the hands of God, God also commands all men everywhere to repent and believe in Jesus.

I don't attempt to harmonize the infinite mind of God, but let me tell you if you have never truly trusted in Jesus, God commands you to repent - to turn from your sin - and trust in the risen Lord to forgive your sins and save you from sin and death and hell.

Trust in the sovereign God to rescue you from the same fate Judas, who even now, wishes he were never born.

Pray