



SIX SANE TRUTHS FOR A CRAZY WORLD PART 2: Who's in charge here?

*Jeff Peabody
New Day Church
Federal Way, WA
February 13, 2005*

We're on our second week of looking at six sane truths for a crazy world, trying to find some points of clarity in the middle of the chaos. What's sure? What's solid? What gives us hope and peace in a world where nothing lasts, nothing is 100% dependable?

So we're looking at God himself, who stands alone as being rock solid. What in his character can we cling to when everything gets wild? Last week we talked about God being constant and how that matters. He never changes. Anybody remember what the letters of the word SAME stood for? We saw he stayed the same in his Solid Character, his Amazing Word, his Mighty Power and his Endless Grace. We said he is consistent all the way through and all the way along.

There are other qualities of God that are equally important in a crazy world. Today I'd like to look at what textbooks call the Sovereignty of God. It's an old world that says God is in control of the situation. He's in charge.

Have you seen the commercials for Allstate Insurance? A man comes on screen and begins telling a terrible story. In one he talks about Thanksgiving turkeys that catch houses on fire. In another commercial he talks about drivers who may be waiting to intentionally cause an accident for you. He uses the classic advertising technique of creating fear and doubt in your mind about your own safety. And then he always ends with the same question: "Are you in good hands?"

That's one of our biggest questions in life, isn't it? Are we in good hands? When you boil it all down, here's the nagging thought in the back of our minds: In a world of tsunamis, in a world where September 11ths happen, where's God? With all that happens in my life that feels unfair and undeserved, how can I believe God is in control? John Mayer has a song that says, "Is there a God? Why is he waiting? Don't you think it odd, when he knows my address?" If he's out there and in charge, why is all this stuff happening?

It would be wrong of me to say that we're going to completely solve the mystery this morning. There are some things that the Bible is completely silent about. And as Winnie the Pooh would say, I'm a bear of very little brain. I can't wrap my mind entirely around some "why" questions.

But the Bible does talk quite a bit about God being in control, and the things it has to say provide comfort and a peace about not having all the answers. We can know enough about God to live with the questions.

Like we did with Isaiah 40 last week, we're going to be using one text as the backdrop for our discussion today, and it does a great job for us. As I said before, we're not just looking for logical proof of who God is – we're wanting to talk about him in a way that really draws us into worship. And that's exactly what our passage this morning was written to do.

Psalm 33

*Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him.
Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.
Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy.*

*For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does.
The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.
By the word of the LORD were the heavens made,
their starry host by the breath of his mouth.*

*He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into storehouses.
Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him.
For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.
The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples.
But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever,
the purposes of his heart through all generations.*

*Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people he chose for his inheritance.
From heaven the LORD looks down and sees all mankind;
from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth —
he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do.*

*No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength.
A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save.
But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him,
on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,
to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.
We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield.
In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name.
May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you.*

This chapter never mentions the words control and sovereignty, but you get the impression in reading it that God is definitely in charge. There's no question about who is calling the shots. The Psalmist does a beautiful job of capturing the idea in poetic language. But there's more there than meets the eye.

I've always loved Disneyland. I think I must have gone at the right age when I was a kid, because it has always had this magical appeal to me. I love the experience. After all, it's the happiest place on earth.

So a nice bonus about going to college in L.A. was that I could go to Disneyland pretty often. And I felt like a little kid again when I'd go.

One time, I went with a friend who used to work at Disneyland, and he began to open my eyes to some of the inner workings of the Magic Kingdom. He pointed out areas that were accessible only to employees that visitors never even notice. To prove the point that security is fairly tight if invisible, my friend gave me a demonstration. We were on one of the boat rides when he said, "Watch this." He stood up in the boat while we were inside a mountain. Suddenly a voice came over a loud speaker. "Please sit back down."

I had never even given it much thought that there had to be all these back passageways and mechanisms in place to keep things running – the show behind the show. I had enjoyed the visible surface of Disneyland, but now I had the chance to be impressed by what was beyond the surface. Suddenly the place was even bigger than I realized.

Psalm 33 is like Disneyland. It's a fun read. You have this theme park that shows God's activity as king. You have these creative images, like the idea of God putting the sea in little jars. But behind every word there's much more going on than you see on the surface. There's a show behind the show. When we know what we're looking for, we suddenly can see all this depth. And there's a whole additional layer of understanding to unpack about what it means to say that God is in control.

Psalm 33 shows us five key truths about God's sovereignty. Picture God holding the world in his fingertips. We could think of Psalm 33 as describing each finger of God's hand – essential pieces to his control of the world. Each of the five has a unique role in what God does. Let's go back and look at one of the first sections of the psalm to see what I'm talking about.

*By the word of the LORD were the heavens made,
their starry host by the breath of his mouth.
He gathers the waters of the sea into jars;
he puts the deep into storehouses.
Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the people of the world revere him.
For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.*

When we say God is in control, one of the first things we mean is this:

His place is undeniable.

According to the Bible, God is the source of the entire universe. He is the creative mastermind behind everything. We're not just the accidental result of the big bang. Michael Behe, who is a professor of biochemistry at Lehigh University, wrote a book

called, “Darwin’s Black Box.” In it, he comes to the conclusion that somebody put some thought into how the universe is put together. He writes,

...the straightforward conclusion is that many biochemical systems were designed. They were designed not by the laws of nature, not by chance and necessity; rather, they were planned. The designer knew what the systems would look like when they were completed, then took steps to bring the systems about. Life on earth at its most fundamental level, in its most critical components, is the product of intelligent activity.

The Psalmist identified that designer as God. He created everything out of nothing. No one else can do that, but he could.

Certain rights go along with creating anything. You have the right to control that creation. You own it. Whether you write a song or paint a picture or invent something, whatever you produce is yours, and you have the right to control how it is used. The same is true for God. as the sole Creator, everything that exists belongs to him, and he has the right to control it.

Psalm 24:1-2

*The earth is the LORD's , and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;
for he founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the waters.*

Casey and Kelly Shurm started their own business called Dinners Done Right. I’ve talked to Casey several times about it because starting a business has a lot in common with starting a church. It’s hard work and they have invested a lot of themselves in it.

Let’s say that one day, one of their employees has an idea. She wants to change the business name to Lunches Done Light and make it a mobile truck that takes healthy lunches to people at their offices. Then another employee thinks it would be a good idea to branch into breakfast with candles, calling it Breakfast Done Bright. And let’s say those employees try to push ahead on their own with their ideas. They wouldn’t be able to really get anywhere, because it isn’t their company. And unless Casey and Kelly felt like it fit the business plan, no matter how good an idea is, they are under no obligation to pursue it. It’s their business and their decision.

As much as we may wish it were otherwise, we’re not really in charge of our own destiny. God created us and so he has ownership rights. Not only that, as 1 Peter puts it, we’ve been bought with a price through the death of Jesus, so we’re doubly God’s. He can do as he sees fit with all of creation because it is his. He can do with my life as he sees fit because it is his.

When we talk about whether or not God is in control, we have to begin by accepting the fact that he has the right to be in control. We might not like what he’s doing, but we step out of line when we think we know better.

Romans 9:20-21

Who in the world do you think you are to second-guess God? Do you for one moment suppose any of us knows enough to call God into question? Clay doesn't talk back to the fingers that mold it, saying, "Why did you shape me like this?" Isn't it obvious that a potter has a perfect right to shape one lump of clay into a vase for holding flowers and another into a pot for cooking beans?

If we're going to talk about God being in control, it has to be with the recognition that he has the right to be there.

Secondly, the Psalmist points out that God is in control because

His plan is perfect.

Take a look at the next section of Psalm 33:

*The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples.
But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever,
the purposes of his heart through all generations.*

God's plans and purposes are perfect. And they don't change around. They stand firm through all generations.

We'd be in a world of hurt if I was in control of everything. I was one of those kids who growing up had some different plan cooking all the time. My dad would make comments about how I could never seem to stick with one of these plans, and sometimes that was a good thing. One of my favorite plans was that when I grew up I was going to open a ventriloquist shop and sell dummies and ventriloquist supplies. Some dreams die hard.

But God is a much better planner than I am. And I find several things encouraging about that. First, it's encouraging just to know that there IS a plan. Although life may appear haphazard, although much of the time I can't discern exactly what God's big picture is, knowing that he has one makes everything a little more bearable.

Second, God's purpose can't be broken. If it is what he wants to happen, it will get done eventually. Nothing can override his plan.

And that poses a problem for us because it sure looks like things are interfering with God's plan. We know we can't say that sin is from God and part of his purpose, but what do we do when sin causes frustration and pain and wars and death? Isn't that stopping God's purposes? Not everything can be according to plan.

It brings us to the third thing the Psalmist tells us about God's planning, which is that it lasts for generations. We may not be able to understand what he's doing in our short life spans, because his plan extends over all of time. Sometimes we're in the right spot to see

everything come together, but when things don't work out, it may just appear that way because we can't see how things will play themselves out over multiple lifetimes.

J.I. Packer uses a great illustration to make the point. He says suppose you're standing on the railway platform, watching the trains come and go. You can begin to make some calculations to figure out some details about the train schedule. But you can't possibly piece together all the information about the routes from that location. However, if you were invited up to the signal box, you'd see a large map on the wall with a complete diagram of the train tracks, with little blinking lights indicating where all the trains were, and suddenly everything would make much more sense because you'd have the perspective of the people who control the trains.

We're not supposed to have the whole plan figured out – it's a plan that is far bigger than we can see from where we stand. Thank God that he only shows us what we can handle. But it is good to know that God does have a plan. He is fully in control, and his purposes will one day be completely fulfilled. His plan is perfect. Not only that – we can know that it's a plan that in the end is good for us as well. Listen to those famous words from Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

The psalm writer goes on to observe something else about God.

*From heaven the LORD looks down and sees all mankind;
from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth —
he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do.*

When we say God is in control, we mean

His perception is clear.

God sees me. He sees you. He is fully aware of our situations. There is nothing that slips past him.

Have you ever felt like God didn't notice you, that somewhere along the line you dropped off his radar? Could he really be aware of your life and not intervene to change what was happening?

That was what haunted Job. One bad thing after another happened to him and God was not saying a word from heaven. All his friends had theories of why he was being punished. His wife told him to just curse God and die. What was the point in believing anymore if God didn't see?

Finally at the end of the story, God enters the conversation. He never tells Job directly why he allowed everything to happen to him, but he makes it clear that at no time was anything happening that he didn't see. And in his own time, he stepped in, put an end to it all and restored Job's life to an even better place than where it had been.

We make some of our biggest mistakes thinking that nobody's watching us. Either we fall into despair because we think nobody cares about what happens to us, or we figure we can get away with whatever we want because it will go unnoticed.

But God is thoroughly aware of our lives in a way we rarely appreciate.

Psalm 139:1-4

*O LORD, you have searched me
and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
Before a word is on my tongue
you know it completely, O LORD.*

Nobody else sees us that clearly. Nobody else knows us that well. The God who sees the big picture and has a plan for the universe is intimately concerned with my life and yours. When you're lying awake in bed because you've got too much on your mind, God sees you. When you're not sure how you're going to get out of the mess you're in, God sees you. When you're so overwhelmed you want to give up, God sees you.

Not only does he see you and your dilemma – He is looking in order to help. When you know God sees, you can know he will come to your aid.

2 Chronicles 16:9

For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.

God is aware of your plight, and knowing he's aware, you can know he will act. His help may take a different form than you expect, but God doesn't abandon his people.

God is in control because it's his place, he has the perfect plan and he perceives everything that's going on. Another point we can observe about God's control is that

His power is unmatched.

Let's go to the next section of Psalm 33:

*No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength.
A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save.*

*But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him,
on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,
to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.*

God can have all the rights of being Creator, all the wisdom to have a good plan for the universe and the best eyesight to see everything. But if he doesn't have the power to change anything, then he doesn't fully have control.

God is powerful. We looked at that a bit last week, mentioning that his power never runs out. What's amazing to see is how much of that power goes into saving his people.

You would think that the act of creation was God's finest moment of showing his strength. What a fantastic display of power. But you know what? The Bible describes the act of creation as God's handiwork, which could almost be translated "finger work." As awesome as the universe is, it barely tapped into God's strength to get it done.

On the other hand, when we read of God rescuing his people, we read about his mighty arm. He flexes his muscle to restore his creation.

Isaiah 52:10

*GOD has rolled up his sleeves.
All the nations can see his holy, muscled arm.
Everyone, from one end of the earth to the other,
sees him at work, doing his salvation work.*

God is fully capable of fighting for us. And he's the only one. The Psalmist talks about how it is vain for kings put their faith in armies and horses. But we all have armies and horses that we turn to – places we hope to find strength to win our battles. Friends, Money, Drugs, Work, Working out. Whatever. And they may help temporarily. But in the end, they won't be enough, because it takes God-like strength to fix the problem, to get my world back on track.

The hugely encouraging piece of news is the final point. Because not only does God have the power to change the world, he desires to channel that energy on our behalf.

The final section of Psalm 33 says this:

*We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield.
In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name.
May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you.*

One of the most joyful aspects about God being in control is that

His passion is strong.

Twice the Psalmist says that God's love for us is unfailing, so we can trust him with control. He does what he does out of his deep love for us.

I've been told a story about my great aunt. She lived on a farm with a river or creek that ran through it. One day, one of her small children toddled over to the bank and fell in. They were swept downstream and became caught in the water underneath a foot bridge. My great aunt saw what happened and rushed to the water. She was a very small woman, but she was so consumed with the desire to save her baby that she reached out and single handedly picked up that bridge, which freed her child and saved him from drowning. Afterwards, when other people tried to repeat what she had done, it took two full grown men to pick up the bridge it was so heavy.

I picture myself as the toddler in that story, walking along and before I know it, slipping and finding myself in water over my head. I'm terrified. I'm so trapped I don't know what to do and the situation looks helpless. Then I look to the shore and God is running as fast as he can to my rescue. He's so consumed with such love for me that he doesn't hesitate to act. Then he does the impossible – he lifts the bridge and sets me free. Then he scoops me up out of the water, overjoyed at the rescue.

Maybe you're under the bridge this morning. You are looking around feeling like there's no way God is in control. You can't see any way out. But God sees you and he is passionate about saving you. He has the power to do it and he has a plan for doing it.

That's what Christ's death was all about. God demonstrating his power and his passion for his people. He was determined to rescue us. It is that intense level of love and the way he acted on it that lets us know we can trust him. The love is so deep and unending, that when the rest of life makes no sense, we can still have faith that God will work out what's best for us. He has already proved beyond a doubt that he's passionate about us.

As I said at the beginning, there will always be why questions we can't answer when it comes to God's control of the world. But maybe those questions are just distractions from the more personal ones we need to be asking. Such as these:

1. Am I accepting God's place? Am I fighting to take control away from God, to determine what's best for myself? Or am I trusting that as the creator, he knows what's best?
2. Do I believe God acts with purpose? I read this week that a comparison was made between Christians in affluent countries and Christians who were living under persecution. In hard times, the well-off Christians typically pray, "Oh Lord, take this problem away," while those under persecution more often pray, "Oh Lord, give me strength to make it through this." Do we believe God has a plan for what he allows in my life?

3. What are my armies and horses? Where do I turn when I feel out of control? Nothing else has the power to save like God. No one else has the passion – the intense love – to sacrifice everything for our rescue.

R.C. Sproul once said that God does nothing that's irrational, but much that's mysterious. When it comes to his control of the world there is mystery we won't solve this side of heaven. But praise God he's revealed his character. We can know who he is, and that he's powerful and good enough to be trusted with complete control.