

Romans
The Sovereign Justice and Mercy of our Lord
Romans 9:6-18

Listen as we hear about God's extreme, total radical sovereignty. I'm going to read to you from Romans 9:6-18 for context and will be focusing on verses 10 to 18. Listen to God's Word...

⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." ⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. ⁹ For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son." ¹⁰ And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— ¹² she was told, "The older will serve the younger." ¹³ As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

¹⁴ What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." ¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion,^[a] but on God, who has mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." ¹⁸ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

Let's pray one more time, Lord, give us, we pray ears to hear all that you're saying. We receive your good word about your justice and your mercy. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated.

A few years ago, there was a man named Dave who was in college. Dave is an athletic sort of guy, and he would play anything, and he was throwing a Frisbee around with his friends one day, and the director of intramural sports noticed him throwing the disc well and said, you know, you should enter our intramural league here at, you know, Iowa. And on a lark, he did, and they won the league going away. He was gifted at throwing and catching a disc, running in traffic, and playing this game. And before long, a fairly or maybe even very elite team got Dave to play for them. They were at a disadvantage because they're from Iowa, low population state. They came essentially from Ames, Iowa City of about 60,000 people. The core of the team was the track team of Iowa State. That's great. But they were up against other teams when they got serious, which they did, that were from places like Chicago, LA and San Francisco and New York that had millions of people to draw upon the elite teams. And here they are from a town of

60,000. So they came up with a strategy. They would go to tournaments and they would pick off the strays, people who came from places in America and Canada who were also from small towns and couldn't practice. They practiced, in other words, at the regional, national and world championships. They never practiced in person. They practiced at the championships and in the end their team won a world championship.

The year was 2010, but before that, before that, they picked up on this coed team, a woman named Abby, who was also from a small city and was the outstanding player from that city. And Dave and Abby met at the 2006 World Championships. And Dave said to Abby, hey, can we spend some time together? And she said something like, well, we're spending time together right now. And he said, no, I mean, a different kind of time together. And she said, you're not a Christian and I don't date non-Christians. And he said, I'm thinking about it. There were a number of players on the team who are believers, and there's nothing like a little nudge from a beautiful believer. They got married a few years later, had some children.

It's a strange way to become a Christian, isn't it? To enter an intramural sports league on a lark, find out you're good at something you had no idea you were good at, and somehow or other, in God's providence, come not only to be good at Frisbee, but to marry a wife and have children by her. God works mysterious ways.

He calls people to himself. Now, if we look at what Romans 9 says, we would say God elected and called in Romans 8, predestined Dave to come to himself. John Calvin said, God's sovereignty is a labyrinth from which no man can extricate himself. If ever I stand before you and think how can I possibly do justice to this text, today is probably the day, so all I can do is tell you what I'm pretty sure is true. For the next while, and hope and hope that we can lay hold of God's sovereignty and his justice, and his mercy and his compassion and the call to believe in him.

Now, as people think about God's election and all believers believe in it because the word election appears about 50 times in the Bible, and predestination appears maybe 20 times or so, you got to believe in it. But they describe it in different ways. And we're going to put a little something up on the screen so you can follow along, if you will.

- God elects some, bypasses others and graciously calls the elect to Himself using his several means of grace (PCA).
- God elects and redeems the church, through the appointed means of grace, above all participation in the sacraments (Roman Catholic Church).
- God offers the gospel to all and elects some, on the basis of his foreknowledge that they will believe. People elect themselves by believing (Arminianism)
- God elects all; all are redeemed unless they resist (Lutheranism).

If you care about these things, we would say in the Presbyterian Church in America, reformed Christians would say it like this God elect some and bypass this others like Esau and Ishmael,

which we read about and graciously calls the elect to himself, using the several varied means of grace to do so, including the word, but also Christians He puts in our life.

Now the Roman Catholic Church says that God election redeems the church through the appointed means of grace, above all participation in the sacraments. If you want to be elect, participate in the sacraments, confess, go to mass, and so forth are minions who follow a man. Roughly speaking, name Jacobus or Jacob.

Arminian say God offers the gospel to all and elect some on the basis of his foreknowledge that they will believe there are many, and would not say what I say last here, but it's a fair summary. People elect themselves by believing.

And finally, there are Lutherans. Just to round off the story, who would say God elects everyone and all are redeemed unless they resist? Now you don't have to worry about the details here. The point is that Christians don't exactly agree on what election means, but certainly we have to study together what we think, what we believe as best as we understand it.

What Romans 9 says is that God elect some and not others. The reference in the beginning of our passage to a child coming to Sarah is a reference to what Paul talked about earlier. And what's clear in the book of Genesis, and that is that God gave Abraham two sons. One was Ishmael, born to the slave woman, and Isaac, who was born to Sarah. God said, it's true that I'm going to work through Isaac. My people will be found, will be named, will call on me.

And then, of course, in our passage, we see another striking instance that we have a woman, Rebecca, who had twin sons, Jacob and Esau. And what could exemplify God's sovereign will more than this, that one becomes a believer and is loved, and another. We'll talk about it more later. Esau is hated so says the scriptures. Now the big theme is that God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy. He has the right to show mercy on sinners and the right to harden rebels.

Let us say, humans do not stand before God in their innocence. It's not as if God says, I think I'll choose this person, not that person. Everyone, as Romans 1-8 says, everyone stands before God as a sinner and some sinners He calls to himself with his sovereign mercy and compassion, and others like Esau he lets go their way.

What that means is that when we think about God's electing love and mercy, God is unjust to no one and he never violates anyone's will and never makes anyone do something they don't want to do. This is clear in the beginning of the church's life. In the book of Acts, you may remember that in chapter one, the Lord Jesus after resurrection ascended into heaven and then the Holy Spirit came as promised, and sermon broke out spontaneously in the temple precincts. Peter was inspired to proclaim what had just happened, and among the things he described were the life, the death, the resurrection of Jesus. And when he talked about the death of Jesus, he said these words. He said that Jesus' death followed God's plan and foreknowledge, and God raised him up. And you with wicked hands killed him. It was God's plan that Jesus would die for

our sins as an atoning sacrifice on the cross and raise him up, but you freely killed them, and he called them to repent. They said their hearts were cut to the quick, and they repented. That day because they did choose to do what God also ordained that they would do.

Then when we read about God's elect and grace, it's not some abstraction. If you listen to what Paul says in other places, we're not just elect. We elect to live a life in Christ. If you call on Jesus today, you are not simply called to believe. You're called to find union with Christ. This is what Paul says. God chose us in Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will. That is, God calls us into Christ, into a holy life with Christ, not some abstraction. That means that election predestination is personal. It happens through the word of truth, the gospel that Paul proclaims. Now we do have to wrestle with the fact that Jacob and Esau, twin sons of Isaac and Rebecca, did not have the same life, the same fate.

If I can read Hebrews 9:1-12 again it says, when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, those who were not yet born had not yet done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works, she was told. The older will serve the younger, the older was Esau. Now at that time, for many, many, many years, there was a principle of life and the principles called primogeniture. The firstborn son will lead the family after the parents die. So Esau should lead the family. That was the rule that that son of Esau would receive God's blessing and would receive a larger portion of the inheritance. But God says, I'm going to upend the normal ways of humanity. I'm going to declare that the older will serve, the younger Jacob, the second born son, will be the one. Some people say that, Jacob, you know, was a more spiritual person because he wanted his father's blessing and he wanted the inheritance and it's really not quite the way the Bible describes it, because while it's true that Esau was a violent and impulsive man who had no interest in his father's blessing or really God's blessing, it's true that he had a taste for wild game and sold his birthright for a meal. It's true that he ran after pagan women. It's true that he wanted to kill his brother at one point. It's not as though Jacob was a superior soul. Jacob duped Esau, made a bad trade with him, defrauded his brother, connived against his uncle, connived with his mother to deceive their father - His father. He was not a good man. And when God began to call him at first he resisted after he had essentially defrauded his brother and deceived his father and deceived his brother. Esau said, I'm going to kill him. And Jacob ran off. And as he ran off, described in Genesis 27, he was sleeping on a rock. And we have what we call the stairway from heaven scene, and angels are going up and down. But what counts is not that LED Zeppelin made this into a song a number of years ago, or the picture you have in your head about, you know, children watching angels go up and down. What counts is what God said. What God said to Jacob is, I'm calling you. I'm bringing you to myself. He said. I'm with you. I'm going to bless you. The covenant is going to happen through you. And Jacob did not respond in faith. Jacob said, if

additionally, if God will be with me, if you will keep me in peace, then the Lord will be my God. In other words, God, you better come through with these words. I'm not going to believe in you now you got to produce. And if you produce, I believe in you. And he lived that way for another five chapters of the Bible, deceiving, conniving, trying to make things work out his own way. And finally, when he had to go back to his family and facing again Esau, whom he thought would kill him, he finally wrestled with God and God wrestled with him and held on to him, and he held on to God until finally says, Lord, you have to bless me. I'd rather die than live without your blessing. It took years and years of God pursuing Jacob until eventually he came to faith not by force, but of his own volition. God's purpose of election remained firm.

Now, if you're a Christian here today, it's because God pursued you. You may say, well, I don't remember becoming a Christian. You may not. God was pursuing you in the womb when your parents were praying for you, when you were still unborn, before you were even in the womb. Your parents and grandparents and friends were probably praying for you, and God pursued you even in your childhood, making you tenderhearted toward him. And if you became a Christian in stage of 8 or 10 or 15 or 27 or 44, God pursued you in love despite your objections and said, I'm going to bring this man, this woman, to myself, not violating your will, but working in the circumstances of your life. And not only that, but if you believe in the Lord, God also wants you to reclaim the covenant and reclaim his mercy and compassion over and over again. Not to say one day I believe the gospel, but to say every day I believe the gospel. And when you stray and wander in your life is out of order to say, the Lord pursued me, and I came to faith in him, and I affirm my faith yet again.

Now, one of the hardest things reading the Bible is this line Jacob I loved and Esau I hated now. Every language has its idioms and its ways of speaking, and one of the idioms of the Bible is to say love hate often means love less. So, Jesus, in Luke 14 says, if you're going to follow me, you must hate father, mother, sister and brother. He doesn't mean we literally should hate our parents and our siblings. He means that our love for the Lord should be so great that it would seem, at times almost like indifference or dislike to our family. And sometimes when people follow God's will painfully, maybe moving to another continent at God's urging, something like that, or not entering into the family business because of some other call from God. People say you don't love us anymore and we say, no, we love you, but we love the Lord more. Let me illustrate a different way.

When my children (I have three daughters) got visitors of the male persuasion to take them off to do dating types of things when they were in high school, I would ask them questions if they came a little bit early, and some of them were very benign, like, you know, tell me something great about your father. But there was a trick question I asked them, and my daughters quickly told the boys who came. The trick question was this, and they knew it was coming. Question number one do you hate the New York Yankees? And in case you're wondering, the appropriate answer is yes, because we're living in Saint Louis. Saint Louis Cardinals, of course. Right. And the Yankees try to buy their way to success. And the next question, which is like unto it is, do you

hate the New England Patriots? Because same story in there. Leaders are all obnoxious. And do you hate the Duke University basketball team? Because I almost went to North Carolina, finished high school in North Carolina. Do you hate Duke's basketball team? You don't have to hate their football team. Do you hate their basketball team? And the young men knew that the answer to all these questions were yes, yes and yes. Now, let me ask you this. Do you think I personally actually hate the Yankees, that I wanted them to actually hate the Yankees? Of course not. I wanted them to be thought little of and for other teams to be grander in their sight. Right. So we speak this way. We don't mean actually hate. We use hyperbole.

The Lord didn't hate Esau. The Lord let Esau go. Esau was a rebel. He wanted nothing to do with God. And God said, have it your way. What that means then is that when we face a question like, am I elected or not? Even as we sang a little while ago, we should not be concerned about the question am I in or out. What is God's will? Is he going to consign me to death forevermore? The question is, have you heard and responded to God's Word? In fact, the very somebody asked the question am I elect or not, the very fact you're asking that question proves that God is pursuing it, that God has put you in the way of his Word, is making you, guiding you to think about eternal matters. And so God is speaking to you, and your responsibility is to believe the promises and believe the covenant and trust him.

Well, this does lead to the question Is God unjust? And it has to be faced. The Lord puts it to us Is God unjust? Is there an injustice on God's part? Now, when people ask that question, the first thing we have to say is the Lord lets these questions surface because they arise in our minds. The second thing we should say is that we hear Paul say no, by no means no way. The third thing we have to say is it a real question.

Now, C.S. Lewis, a number of years ago, I'll just quote his words.

The ancient man approached God (or even the gods) as the accused person approaches his judge. For the modern man, the roles are quite reversed. He is the judge: God is in the dock. He is quite a kindly judge; if God should have a reasonable defense for being the god who permits war, poverty, and disease, he is ready to listen to it. The trial may even end in God's acquittal. But the important thing is that man is on the bench and God is in the dock.

— C.S. Lewis, God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics

Now, the Bible certainly doesn't view it that way, but it does acknowledge that there are people who do think that way. So the first thing we might say is we wouldn't even have the ability to think about justice if God were not just had not woven principles of justice into the world. If all we had was the world would be right. Whoever had the power would have the power. And just as bears eat mice and foxes and wolves, other creatures and eagles eat sparrows, we would just say that's the way it is. But the very fact that we even ask the question proves that God has woven principles of justice into this world. The fact that people like Vladimir Putin invades Ukraine and says, but I have a good reason. I'm doing the right thing. Even despots say that. And

that's because God has imprinted on humanity a sense of justice, because we're made in his image. Still, it's worth giving an answer. Is God unjust? The answer is no.

Now, part of the issue is that we have confused ideas, a variety of ideas about what justice is. The most basic definition of justice is to give someone what is due to him or her. Certainly, God gives everyone their due, but there are other meanings of justice. One is retributive justice. That is to say, God either punishes or doesn't punish correctly. God certainly is tribute. Just there's moral justice, kindness and goodness and treating people well and liberty and not being prejudicial. And God means that there's legal justice that's to make and keep and enforce laws. But when people say God is unjust, what they're referring to is what people sometimes call distributive justice. And that is the idea that some people have that everyone should be treated exactly the same. And if that's your definition, which doesn't come from the Bible, if that's your definition of justice, then then it's true. God does not distribute identically to everybody. If I had you all stand up, it would be immediately obvious that some people are taller than others. And if we had a test for your skills, it immediately becomes clear that we have different skills. Praise God for that. It would be a pretty boring world if we were all absolutely identical, wouldn't it? But it's still true that some people are born in a nation that might be a little more preferable than another. Some people are born in Angola, very poor nation, some are born in Argentina, kind of middle rank, and some are born in America. And there are privileges in being born in a place like American. God does not treat everybody exactly the same way. But that doesn't mean you have a right to accuse God of injustice. I'll give you a parable.

So, my professorial life sometimes classes get a character, maybe a few really hardworking students are very visible, and the whole class becomes hardworking and they live up to the highest standards and other classes don't. So, I'm going to ask you to imagine I have a class one year that is led by slackers. And these slackers were all working just a little. And that that's the norm today. And so up comes the midterm. And I've given the same midterm exam for years. I know the average score for 20 years has been 87%. And this class comes in and takes the exam and their slacker nature shows. And the average score is 67%. And I think to myself, what am I going to do? I mean that's, that's a, that's a D to D plus I guess but that doesn't feel much better. So what am I going to do? And I decide, you know, what I'm going to do to just to raise the grades. I'm going to add 30 points to every woman's score. And so, the average score for the women goes up to 97%. Some have 114, some have an 88. But all the women are soaring. I announced my decision to make the grades come up a little bit and all the women say, behold, you are the most wondrous professor we have ever known. Thank you for your excellent judgment. And the men say...That's not fair. Because I didn't distribute the same favor to everybody. But there's one student who has been going along with the slacker nature of the class with guilt feelings the whole time. And he stands up and says, he is our professor and he is not unfair to us. We didn't study. He told us about the exam. The average score is 87. Over the year we didn't work. We got to 67. That's what we deserved. There's no unfairness in it. We should not object.

This is the point of my little parable. We should not object if God gives us what we deserve. The beauty is that God has compassion on whom he has compassion and mercy upon whom he has mercy.

God gives us more than we deserve. We stand before God as sinners, whose only hope is God's grace, and God pours out his grace on many. What does the Bible say a little bit later? Chapter 9:29, Paul says, quoting Isaiah 1, if the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and Gomorrah if God hadn't given us grace. If God never give us children a continuity spider rebellion, we'd be as extinct as the city of Sodom and Gomorrah. That's what people deserve. But God gives us more. He does ask the question, who are you oh man to answer back to God, to question God. That question runs through Romans 9 later on. Now the point we have to get from it is who are who to question God? The point is not you can't ask any questions. In fact, there are hundreds of questions that people have put to God in the Bible, and he often answers them, but not always. Job never got exactly an answer to his sufferings. We learn that God is powerful and that God loves him, but he didn't say why. We have every right to ask God questions, but no right to demand answers of God because he is the sovereign judge, and we are not. We call upon him for his compassion. We ask our questions gently. If we ask or demand justice, we ask poorly. What does it mean when God says he has mercy, in whom he has mercy and compassion, on whom he has compassion? Compassion is the feeling of identifying with someone in sorrow and distress. Compassion is looking at someone who's got a family member in the hospital and they're young. They've got a problem, a disease, an illness that's dreadful. And we our heart goes out to them. And Paul's telling us that God's heart goes out to those who are broken hearted. And then mercy is doing something. The mercy of Christ is shown when he heals people. So mercy is God's action that's based on his sorrow. God grieves with us and he helps us. He did not offer that saving grace to Esau. He didn't owe it to Esau. It's mercy upon whom he has mercy. He does offer it to Jacob, and He offers it to us. The vast majority of us here receive God's mercy, and we should keep on thanking God and praising God. And if you haven't received that mercy yet, as we sang, God's mercy is offered to us forevermore by faith in Christ.

But please again, don't think of it as a one time event. We should come back to remind ourselves of God's mercy again and again and stop thinking that, you know, I've performed well. I've done well. God is kind to us throughout. Now the question comes up again, are you sure God's not unjust? I mean, didn't he harden Pharaoh's heart? Isn't that unfair?

I invite you today, if you would, to read Exodus 1 -12. What you find is this -- Pharaoh who was an autocratic ruler and believed that everybody and his entire nation was his slave. That was the ideology and believed that he himself was a god. Maybe some pharaohs believed that, maybe others didn't. It's hard to tell, but that was the official ideology. And so he had no problem whatsoever enslaving Israel. And God said, well, you've enslaved my people, and I want you to let my people go. He said, well, no. And God said, actually, yes. You're going to let my people go. And if you refuse, you're going to taste the consequences. He said, bring it on. God started off

very gently with them. It's almost like it's a joke. It's so mild, he said, you know what? I'm going to send you frogs and lots of frogs and that'll teach you to repent. He said, nope, I'll send you gnats. Nope. I'll send you flies. Nope. Eventually he began to relent a little bit, but every time he relented, it says that he then hardened his heart. Let my people go. Okay, okay. No. Actually, no. If you read through Exodus over and over again, it says Pharaoh hardened his heart. Pharaoh hardened his heart. Pharaoh hardened his heart seven times just in chapter 7 & 8 alone. And then in 9 it says, God hardened Pharaoh's heart. God doesn't hardened the heart of people who want to come to him. He does seal people in their rebellion. Romans 1 says, eventually God gives up on people. He gives them over to their sins. If we have a loved one who's far from God, we should pray that God would not harden their heart, that they would not harden her heart, that God would not give them over.

Now, there's no question that when Pharaoh hardness heart toward God, God's actions were the ultimate cause. But God didn't make him hard. He chose to be hard. He chose to hold on to his reign, to hold on to his ideology, that he owns everybody, that he's God over the land of Egypt. He didn't repent.

Now the warning here is clear, and we have it in striking places. In Isaiah 6, the Lord calls Isaiah, and we like the first part you know me? I'm a man of unclean lips. And how can I be your prophet? But eventually Isaiah accepts the call. And then God says to Isaiah, here's what your ministry is going to be like. Jesus quotes it in Matthew 13. Go and say to these people, keep on hearing, but do not understand. Keep on seeing, but do not perceive. Make the heart of these people dull and their eyes heavy and blind their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and here with their ears understand with their hearts, and be healed.

God is saying, listen, they've been hardhearted toward me for years and years and years now. Some people in Israel repented, there's no question. But many heard more. And the more they heard, the less they liked it, the more they hated God. And God told Isaiah, this is the result. They're going to get harder and harder. They will not see and hear. Jesus quoted it and said, on the day when he had cast out demons for a man demon possessed, and declared that this is the proof that the kingdom of God has come. On that day, the leaders of Israel, who should have been waiting for Jesus, said he cast out demons by the spirit of demons. And Jesus said, you've hardened your hearts, and from now on I'm speaking you in parables. You wouldn't listen to plain speech, and so you don't get plain speech. I'm going to hide myself. Praise God! Some of the Pharisees repented one day, but most did not.

Now what do we say to this? We say to this we are not Pharisees. We're not Pharaoh. You are not Pharaoh. You can soften your heart. The vast majority of you are here from a posture of faith. Your heart is soft and keep your heart soft. Don't let these questions, these doubts God. Just come back in. Focus instead on God's mercy that's known to us in Christ. What you've tasted taste again and again. And then more broadly, you need to follow what God prompts you to do throughout life.

Last week I told you about Amos, my pastor friend. He had a terrible judgment error and was stricken and decided he was unfit for pastoral ministry because he made this error. But he also made three like it. Not sin -- he was investigated. He did not sin. He made mistakes that had consequences. He said, "I have to leave the ministry. What I didn't tell you is that one day I was walking when I lived in Saint Louis, in a park and maybe a two mile walk, and the main part was over and I'm just walking. And as I walked, I had suddenly an immense sense that I needed to call Amos. Now he's my friend. But he was far away. We don't talk all the time. We can easily go nine months without calling. It might have been a year since I talking to him. Spoken to him and I felt God told me to call. And so I called him and I said Amos. It's Dan. Amos said, why are you calling? I said, I don't really know, but, I'm pretty sure God ordered me to call you. And he said, it's nice to hear from you, but what really counts is that God told you to call me because I'm in the middle of it. I'm as low as I can be. I think I need to leave the ministry, and I'm glad you called, but I'm glad that God knows my suffering and told you to call me. And he laughed and cried in joy and thanks that somebody called him. What if I'd said no? What if I said, this is just a weird sensation. Why would I call Amos? Because God nudged me to. If God nudges you not only to believe, but to keep, to do something new, to do something radical, to heed a call, some kind. Don't harden your heart to his voice and hear his voice in general about your sovereignty.

When things come your way, be tender to him as he guides you today. Somebody gave me a book about, I don't know, six weeks ago by now, and I just started reading it eight days ago, and some of you have already heard this twice, because there's a line in the book that struck me so hard that I can't stop thinking about it. And it's a book that describes, among other things, God's sovereignty and his governance of our lives and of our time. And there's this line in the book for me and you and all the people who live by to do lists and all the people who answer the question, did you have a good day by saying, yes, I got a lot done. But people who say good day, yes got a lot done often resent their to do list because they feel like slaves to their to do list and they don't get to do they're not true to live the life they want to live. And so I say, I don't say, but sometimes I think I spent my day on the to do list, not my list. So this is what the book said on page five. *Our lives are best seen not as time spent, but as time offered.* And I thought, wow, I stopped right there. I said, that's perfect. I should stop thinking about my life is spent on things. I should think of it as a life offered to people. It's really helpful. And I stopped and I thought about that for a while. But then I decided I should probably read the next sentence. In the next sentence said, actually, the author doesn't mean time you offered. It means God offered you time God offered you all the time he wanted to give you. God gave you every single day that he chose to give you. Don't worry about how much you get done and how long you live, and whether you can accomplish that or not. God gave you. God offered you... the creator of time, created you in time to offer you all the time in the world that he has for you. And that's why you can offer to other people.

That's the beauty of believing God's sovereignty. God sovereignly offers you a life and you can live it and offer it to others. I believe in God's sovereignty has many other beautiful implications for us. But the first of these is this I have loved you as God loved Jacob. I've had compassion on

you. I've had mercy on you, and I've called you into my family, and I want you to live within that love in union with Christ Jesus our Lord, in whose name we'll pray together.

Heavenly father, we thank you for this astonishing and perplexing doctrine. That's too rich, too strong, too deep for us. Lord, we hope to grasp part, part of what you're saying to us. To receive it, to rejoice in it, to not question you, but to delight in you and in your love, your mercy and your grace. Keep us in that love we pray. Hear our song. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.