

Wrestling with the Sovereignty of God & the Freedom of Relationship

Introduction- His Strategic Purpose

I have learned above anything else that I am curious. I want to know about the world that we live in right now and the lives that people are leading. Are they ecstatic, are they growing, are they struggling, and if so why? Sometimes I wish that I could know everything about people. I wish I could know exactly how everything works together and who everyone is. I want to know about people in India and how they feel everyday as they wake their sleepy eyes. I want to know about people in Asia and what they fear more than anything else. I want to know about people in Africa and where their hope lies. I want to know everything I can about people and the journey of their lives, still being written. The more I think, the more I change my mind about how things operate.

All of this curiosity makes me want to do big things and learn throughout the process. I want to go to different countries and visit orphanages. I want to keep my passion on the edge and ready to lunge. I want to do more things than I can. I don't want my world to always be the same. I want it to constantly be changing and going in directions that I couldn't even explain. I want to break out of the world I come from and shape the one I will live in tomorrow.

What is it my daughter has grasped that I suspect MANY of us have lost
The more I think, the more I change my mind about how things operate.
All of this curiosity makes me want to do big things and learn throughout the process.

Last year we embarked on a year long exploration

* Narrative approach to scripture – single contiguous Story

Brian followed that up with an awesome 8 month study of the continuation of that Story in the NT through the Book of Acts

With that back drop, we hopefully have a much better foundational grasp of the Narrative

We should also have seen a pattern if you will of more consistent ways of understanding God and how He interacts with us

Unfortunately in one hand we hold these new threads of viewing God

And in the other we hold onto our personal theological view of our faith and God

And MOST unfortunately few of us ever take the time to mush the clumps of mud together from each hand to see if they actually mix well

That is what I am going to suggest we do

I am going to ask you to be willing with me, to have a strong enough ego and deep enough trust in God's grasp of us to loosen your own personal grasp of understanding

Box of rocks

To be willing to "pour out your box of rocks" before God and one another

To somehow try and relook for the MOST CONSISTENT view of God you have TODAY based upon what we see ACROSS the Narrative

Looking thru a view box at the text versus letting the text consistently speak

I realize there are non-negotiables...God is Sovereign, God is All-wise, God is Good and Gracious, God is the Creator

These are things we know unequivocally

But this is not the case across the board

We treat areas as non-negotiables and miss the consistency approach all the time

* Let's take God changing His mind as an example

Since the time of St Augustine, and it was actually borrowed from Socrates and Plato and company, God has been seen as immutable (unchanging) and yet, as we saw last year and will again look at this morning, God changes His mind ALL THE TIME in the Narrative

In fact, there are 39 EXPLICIT places in the Bible where God changes His mind
And there are over 200 IMPLICIT times where God changes His mind
There are over 30 DIVINE REPENTENCE TEXTS

And yet for most of us this has been a new concept
And most of us don't realize where this Theology of Augustine came from
It is by nature a GREEK concept
For hundreds of years after Christ the founding Church Fathers did not believe this
This thinking also led folks to believe that God is perfect
And to be perfect AND unchanging meant that God didn't or couldn't suffer or even feel
THAT is not the most consistent way to look at the text
We looked at this ALL of last year following an introductory talk remember?

So, what do we want to accomplish?
How predetermined is The Story?
If The Story is completely rigid and already all figured out, then what is the point of trying to interact with it
But on the other hand, if it is completely random, then how are we assured this Story will actually happen
I believe to properly understand the Story and God, we must assume both are true
The Story is both Predetermined and Random all at once
Or put in another way...
GOD IS BOTH RIGIDLY STRATEGIC AND RANDOMLY TACTICAL

Unfortunately, I think the church has adopted a very imbalanced approach to HOW MUCH is predetermined
I personally now believe that much, if not most, of the decisions that are made by God and us are actually open
I believe that much of the future as far as our lives are concerned is open
What I am going to ask over the next bunch of months is something I have NEVER asked an audience to do
I am going to ask you for a level of trust based upon our history together
Trust to take you back thru The Narrative to see if you might possibly see something very different than you currently hold onto
And again, if you are unwilling to pour out your sacred understanding rocks, this will be a waste of time at best
My goal is NOT to convince you
But rather to get you to think...to MUCH your hands of understanding together to come up with the MOST CONSISTENT approach to understanding God
I will share with you that my understanding of God, His text, and Theology changes radically over time
I looked at a couple comments I made a year ago in my notes and I wouldn't say it that way now
That might be unsettling to you, but not to me...it is reassuring
And this will all be a precursor to Romans 9-16

So, let's look at a short road map

- Strategic versus Flexible – in detail, OT and NT sweeps
- Genesis 1-3 – to see how the chess game was designed to begin with
- Philippians 2 – what is the most basic nature of God
- Salvation itself & how this process works
- Romans 1-8

And the questions we want to answer before we get into Romans are:

1. God is Sovereign – But what does this mean? (pg 63 Calvinism)
 For most of us it means “in control”
 Personally, if He is it sure looks like He is doing a lousy job
 On top of that Satan is described as the ruler of this present world
 I personally don’t think The Narrative say this
 So what does it mean to save He is Sovereign, and HE IS by the way
 Can God’s will EVER be thwarted?
 Are there things that God cannot do? (pg 238-)
 Is everything predetermined?
 Does God really elect ahead of time individuals?
2. God is the Creator
 He determined how the “play” evolves – i.e. He determined the rules of the chess game, whatever these rules may be
 But what are those rules and how much input do we really have
3. The Bible is our authoritative view
 We are simply ever looking for the most consistent understanding from what we know today (pg 58, 60 Calvinism)
 But I would submit to you that we do not take the text at face value
 We say we do, but really we look at it through a view box of personal theology rather than for consistency
4. God is Omniscient
 But Omniscient about what...and why, because He has ordained everything to happen already and somehow is outside of time
 I am going to suggest that he in fact knows everything about the past, everything about the present, CERTAIN things about the future, and all possibilities and probabilities about the future

So, are you in? Let’s start by going back thru this concept of if/how much God changes

We said last year when we looked at the Narrative that sometimes God is rigidly strategic about certain things

So what is God RIGIDLY Strategic about?

I. God’s Strategic Purpose

What did we learn last year, is God’s goal after the fall?

To Build a Bride for Himself...to Redeem mankind

Do you remember where the GREAT passage is where God enacts His plan?

Genesis 12

What were the elements of the covenant with Abraham?

What was the real goal behind this plan?

Has God backed off this plan?

This is the most obvious example on a macro level

God tells Abraham He will build a Nation through Him

And through this Nation ALL NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED

In the end, despite Israel’s unfaithfulness, God redeems and BLESSES mankind through Israel in the person of Jesus

Jesus, a Jew, redeems and blesses mankind on behalf of Israel making God faithful to His covenant

HIS STRATEGIC PURPOSE WILL NOT BE THRWARTED

But this is not all there is in the Story

Over and over and over again God displays a Tactical Flexibility

A willingness to ebb and flow, to dance relationally with humanity

In fact in a few weeks I will go back to Genesis 1-3 and show that as Sovereign Creator he DESIGNED IT like this

And though He has a Goal of redemption that He will not let go of

More often than not, we see a different side of God...the flexible One

So for the next couple of weeks we are literally going to work thru the entire OT and NT