

Is God Fair?

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[0 : 00] All right, good morning everyone. My name is Elliot. I'm one of the pastors here at the New Bern site. So good to be with you this morning.

And as Lisa said, we are indeed, we've just wrapped up a long series of Nehemiah. And we're starting a new series today. And so what we're going to do, basically for the rest of the summer, is we're going to do this series called Believable, in which we're going to attempt to answer some of the tough and common questions that come up in the faith.

So as Christians, like if you have endeavored to follow Jesus, you learn pretty early on in that that there are some things in it that frankly are just a mystery, right?

Like if you think about something like the virgin birth or incarnation or the Trinity, you're never going to get what's a satisfactory explanation for how that works.

There are some things just based on the nature of who God is that are too deep to know. And so if you're following Jesus, you are signing up for some mystery. But even though there is some mystery, that doesn't mean that there aren't things we can't know.

[1 : 14] And it doesn't mean that just because something in Scripture is difficult or hard to understand or seems to make us uncomfortable or be a tension point, that we can't explore it.

Like there are actually some really good and helpful answers to some of the more difficult questions we might ask. And so over the next few weeks, that's what we're going to endeavor to do.

Now the way we selected these, you can imagine as pastors, we get a lot of really hard questions, right? Some of them are like big about God and about the world issues.

And some of them are very personal to people and what's going on in their lives. And what we try to do is take some of the most common ones we get, not everything, but some of the ones we hear a lot and really just work through them in this series.

So some of these are, again, kind of big picture ideas about God, like is God unfair in the way he does things? Why is there suffering in this world?

[2 : 11] How can a good God allow things like evil? Things like that. And then there's going to be some others that are things that are more kind of practical and sort of more prescient to our day-to-day lives, right?

Like why is it that Christians seem to be so focused on things like gender and sexuality? And how do we as followers of Jesus navigate our relationship to our neighbors and our government and like our political sphere?

Or like is it right to even try to push our beliefs on others at all? We're going to kind of work through some of those things as well. And honestly, our intent here is really just to be of some help, to try to be of some help.

And so we're hoping in this series to start, if you're someone that these kind of things fill with doubts, we're really hoping that that will be of help for you. Like I don't think it's an understatement to say that faith sometimes can be really hard.

And I know for some people in here that it actually feels like it's impossible to be a believer when I kind of question, when I think about some of these questions, it really shakes my confidence that this is something I can really even be a part of.

[3 : 20] And so if that's you, we're hoping that we'll address some of those questions and hopefully that you'll see actually people have been thinking about this for a long time and there are actually some helpful and really good reasons to believe.

For everyone else, we're kind of hoping that maybe you'll just gain a little more confidence and courage in what you believe. Or maybe just say it this way. What if the places of tension in Scripture, like the things that actually make you question your faith or the questions you're kind of

scared to ask, what if instead of something that shakes your faith or something you just want to avoid, what if those could actually be places that make your faith stronger? Like what if that tension could actually be something that makes you fall in love with Jesus more? And that's what we're going to try to do. In 1 Peter, Peter encourages us to endeavor to do this. He says, you should always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect. It's an important thing to remember the end of that.

And I would submit to you that it's actually a lot easier to tell somebody what you believe in gentleness and respect if you're not insecure about it. Like if you're not worried about what you believe.

[4 : 42] And so that's what we're going to do. A couple other housekeeping notes before we start on a series like this. So number one, these are the topic, these type of topics by nature that there is no way we can cover this comprehensively in like one sermon, right?

Like I'm not going to outlay 2,000 years of Christian thought in one sermon and you probably wouldn't want me to, right? So some of these you can consider kind of a primer to show you there's some good answers and maybe lead you into some further study.

The other thing is when you do a series like this, it is likely that there are some topics we're going to hit on here that just are really important to you. Like it's something that you've thought about for a while that you're wrestling with and you're just locked in.

And then it's likely that there might be some other topics where you're like, you know, I'm not really fussed about that. I just don't think about that a whole lot. And that's natural. I would encourage you if we get to a week where that's the case for you that you would still lean in, particularly as, you know, a way to encourage those around you who may be struggling with this because God's Word matters and it can speak to us in all things, right?

And so today, launching the series, I'm going to start with this question is of, is God unfair? And really the crux of what this question is trying to get at is you don't have to read a lot of Scripture.

[6 : 08] To get a picture very quickly, that as far as the Bible is concerned, God is in charge. He is the one that initiates. And it seems like He just plans out a lot of stuff for a lot of people's lives without them having any say in it.

He decides a lot of stuff regardless of how we act. Kind of theologically in church history, that's really revolved around these two big ideas. One of them is called election, which is just a very specific term that means God chose me in Christ before the foundation of the world.

That was His choice. The other one's this idea of predestination, which is just a general term for God's sovereignly ordaining things. And that can certainly apply to people, but it can apply to events as well, right?

I mean, if you think about it, anywhere you read in Scripture where it talks about a prophecy, right? Like, you will have a child. This thing will come to pass. I mean, that's saying in advance something that's going to happen, whether you want it to or not.

Now, before we kind of dive into the tensions of these things, I think it is interesting to note that throughout Scripture, and particularly the early church, what you really see is this idea about who God was didn't cause believers to fret or be anxious.

[7 : 31] It was actually a great comfort to them to think that God might actually be in control. In Acts chapter 4, verses 27-28, there's this place where early believers are kind of reflecting on everything that's just happened with what happened to Jesus and what's happening in the early church, and they said, 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 people of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

In other words, they were crushed by what happened, but they took solace in the fact that all the forces that came against Jesus, Herod, Pontius, everyone, they didn't do that unless you allowed them to, unless you ordained it.

You're in charge. There's another one that I really love in the Psalms, and this is in Psalm 139, and it's part of this verse where the psalmist is talking about how before anyone on this planet knew you, God was lovingly crafting you together in your mother's womb, like he saw you.

And as part of that, he says in verse 16, Your eyes saw my unformed substance. In your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet none of them had happened.

And so for many of us, I think it's appropriate, like there's still obviously great comfort for believers in the idea that God is involved, and he's controlled, and we are not at just the random whims and mercies of the impersonal universe.

[9 : 11] But there is another side to that thought that can be difficult, and it goes a little something like this. If God's in control, and he's deciding everything, then does anything I do really matter?

I mean, if God is going to decide what's going to happen, if he's going to choose things before I have a chance to act, how's that even fair? Right? Like, why do some people get a good hand, and I get a bad hand?

Like, why do some people get chosen and not? How is that fair? And then this really gets contentious around the idea of how does someone come to be saved?

Like, how is someone rescued? And it's fair to say, I think that that debate, that conflict, is probably one of the doctrines in church history that's caused more division and confusion than just about anything else.

And so before we move forward, I do think another question that's worth asking is, why should we even talk about this? Like, you know, when we wade in these waters, especially when it sounds like this is really just some academic debate around some philosophic or religious idea, like, why should we even bother with this if it's just going to divide people?

[10 : 24] And I think the answer is twofold. First, so I've been in church long enough to know that in a crowd this large, this question's bothering somebody.

It's frustrating their faith. I mean, they're thinking, or as they go through and they try to follow Jesus, you're thinking, how can I trust God if He seems to condemn people before they have a chance to do anything?

How can I follow a God like that? Or they're thinking, I mean, does anything I really do matter?

God's just going to do whatever He wants. Or, what if I'm not one of the chosen? Like, what if God didn't choose me?

And we want to speak in love to them today. That's one of the reasons we want to bring it up. And secondly, and maybe even more importantly, is it's in the Bible a lot.

Like, you can't just get around it. This isn't one of those things where this is like some obscure verse that like we have to deal with once in a while. Like, literally, everywhere you go in Scripture, there are verses pop up that give you this question.

[11 : 28] And we could pick limitless ones of them, right? Like, one of the ones that probably comes to mind is one from Ephesians chapter 1 where it says, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms, even as He chose us in Him 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. I mean, we could camp out on a verse like that all day, right?

And that's everywhere. So I think what we're going to do today is we're just actually going to go to possibly the most explicit and difficult chapter in the Bible about this, which is Romans 9 because, I mean, if you're going to swing, why not swing for the fences, right?

And it is, to say the least, a difficult and humbling chapter to our sensibilities. But I think it's also a good chapter to pick because what you're going to see in this chapter is it is not set against the backdrop of apathy, right?

Like this is not an academic exercise for Paul. There's a very real concern for people in it. I think it's important because what Paul's going to do is he's going to show you that this idea of God choosing, this idea of election, is not something he just pulled out of the hat in a New Testament.

[12 : 50] He's going to connect it to the Old Testament. And I think Romans actually sets up pretty well to have this discussion because Paul does the book of Romans in a lot of places in kind of a Q&A; type format, right?

Like he lays out the argument he wants to make and then he tries to answer the question he thinks you have. He says, you're going to say to me this and then he follows up, right? So that's where we're going to put our flag down today.

And we're going to jump into Romans 9, verse 6. This is after Paul makes an opening statement about how much he cares for the salvation of his countrymen, of the Israelites.

And then he says this in Romans 9. But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel. And not all are children of Abraham because they're his offspring, but through Isaac your offspring shall be named.

This means that it's not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise that are counted as offspring. For this is what the promise said. About this time next year I will return and Sarah shall have a son.

[13:57] And not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and they 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, she was told, the older will serve the younger.

As it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. So what shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means.

For he says to Moses, I will have mercy on who I have mercy and I'll have compassion on who I have compassion. So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy. For the scripture says to Pharaoh, for this very purpose I raised you up that I might show my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth. So he has mercy on whomever he wills and he hardens whoever he wills.

So you will say to me then, why does he still find fault? Who can resist his will? But who are you, old man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to the molder, why have you made me like this?

[15:06] Has the potter no right over the clay to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make his power known, has endured with much patience the vessels of his wrath prepared for destruction in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory.

Even us whom are called, not only from the Jews, but also from the Gentiles. This is God's word. All right. So difficult verse.

And I think the thing to do with it is just to jump right into some of the difficulties. And the first thing to say, I think is simply kind of what the whole message is about, which is we struggle with election because it doesn't sound very fair.

We really like, particularly in our cultural moment, the idea of fairness. It's a huge cultural value. And let me just say as a general thing, that's a good thing.

Like as a blanket statement, it is good. And scripture affirms that we should do this, that you seek fair and just outcomes, that you look to be fair in how you operate.

[16:23] But the problem with that general statement is, what it doesn't say is we get to presume that we're in a good position to judge fairness when it comes to the weighty things of God.

Or really that he's even looking for our opinion on the matter at all. In Isaiah chapter 55, God says this, For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, declares the Lord. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts are higher than your thoughts. God says to us that, look, you don't think, you don't act, you don't move in the same way that I do.

And then as if to put an exclamation point on it, he says, and my thoughts are like outer space higher than yours. Like not just like you're down here at the ground level and I'm kind of on a hill or a mountain, like literally Saturn, the Milky Way, as far as you could go.

And that's not the only place in Scripture that God gives us that message. There's, in the book of Job, after Job has experienced this terrible calamity where he's lost his family and his fortune and his health, and he's endured all these false accusations of his own unrighteousness, he spends most of the book of Job, like the biggest part of it is Job venting his thoughts and his bitterness and asserting his desire to talk to God, to vindicate himself before God.

[17:58] I did nothing wrong here. And so at the end of the book, God actually shows up. And when God shows up, it's really interesting, he doesn't start by comforting him in his sorrows, he does that later.

And he doesn't start by answering any of Job's questions. He comes and he starts to ask him a few questions of his own. As a matter of fact, he shows up and the first thing he says to Job is this, Job, dress for action like a man and I will question you.

Put on your big boy pants, Job, and we'll have a talk. And then the first question he asked him is, where were you when I laid the foundations of the world?

Tell me, because surely you understand that, right? And then he goes on to talk to him about oceans and the earth and animals and plants and Job's just really got nothing.

Like God pauses a few times, you know, like Job, what do you think? And Job's kind of like, you know, maybe I should just sit this one out. And so God goes on and Job starts to realize that he's just in no position to comment on what God does or what God doesn't do.

[19 : 20] And don't make a mistake, this isn't like just some cruel lesson, like this isn't God feeling like he needs to flex on Job to like show him what's up. God shows Job tremendous compassion and grace at the end of his journey.

But it is important, part of the journey, for Job to understand who God is and who he is. And that's just not something we're naturally inclined to like.

That we just, as much as you want to go into it, you're not God and you're not as big as him and you don't know as much as him and you don't get to question him. It's probably worth another little side road to note that even if at this point you want to say, you know what, I don't believe that.

Like I, if you decide to believe that God is not the great chooser, it's not like that those options are any less hard, right? Because then it's like, well, even if God doesn't do the deciding, he still allows people at minimum to be born into different life circumstances and different places and different times where there's just a much higher likelihood that like they'll believe in him, at least to us, you know, or what they're going to do in their lives.

We all have different dispositions, experiences, hard things that come into our life, intellects, like all of that stuff plays into it and none of that stuff seems fair either, right?

[20 : 45] And so Paul has the task of kind of speaking into these questions and objections and what's interesting is what he really doesn't even try to say is, you know what, this is really fair, like it's fair, trust me, and you just can't see it.

What he does is go on and make the argument that God has the right to do what he wants with what he's made. And in some ways I think that's even tougher because then that means we also struggle with election because it's really humbling.

Back in verse 19 he says, well, you'll say to me then, why does God still find fault? I mean, who can resist his will? But who are you, old man, to answer back to God?

Well, what is molded say to the molder? Why have you made me like this? Has the potter no right over the clay to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable?

You know, it occurs to me that these aren't really the type of verses that anybody puts on a throw pillow, right? Like nobody has Romans 9 like on their bed. But God put it here and he put this metaphor here and we should be willing to accept it as much as the others we find in Scripture.

[22 : 00] And here's what I mean. So throughout Scripture, God gives us these images of what it's like to be in relationship with him, how he feels about us. And because, as we might expect, like he's describing the relationship between finite people and an infinite God, he doesn't have just one picture.

Like he can't do that in just one relationship. And so he gives us all these different images and things we can relate to in our daily lives. And some of them are really encouraging and really pull our heart in, right?

Like he says sometimes that like he's a teacher and like you get to be like a literal student. You get to learn from the one who spoke the world into creation, who lovingly looks over your life.

Like you get to learn from him. And then another place it says like Jesus actually considers us friends. And don't make that something watered down. I mean that's like Jesus with you enjoying each other's company like you do your friends.

And like friends, he tells you things that he doesn't tell anybody. He brings you into his confidence. And then beyond that, there's this picture image he gives that I don't even really think we can fathom where he says there's this way in which like my people are like a bride and I'm their groom.

[23 : 15] And if you think about like all the intricacies of like the intimacy between a husband and a wife and what they share and what they mean to each other and how they relate, that should make you want to praise God.

Like those are amazing things. But then there's these other places in scripture where he gives other metaphors and because they strike our pride we don't gravitate towards them as much.

Like sometimes God just says, hey, I'm the king. I am the master and you are the servant which means you have to do what he says. In other places he takes that farther and says, you're like sheep that need a shepherd.

Like sheep can't even understand what the master wants sometimes. They have to be guided. It's not a flattering picture. And then kind of at rock bottom down there there's this picture of you are the clay and he is the potter.

I mean if you think about that like clay doesn't have any volition. Clay gets absolutely no say in what its fate is going to be. The potter gets to do whatever he wants with the clay.

[24 : 24] And that is incredibly humbling. Now this metaphor like this picture like the others is actually a gift to us because it's going to force us to trust the other things we know about the Father's heart if we're going to move through it.

And we'll say a little bit more about that in a minute but I think this image of potter and clay also leads us to one kind of final thing we've got to know about election that's difficult and it's that election isn't based on fairness.

Election is based on God's will. So this is one of Paul's main points here, right? God is God and does what God wants.

And then the examples he gives are wild. So in Romans 9 again reading back the first one he says is not all are children of Abraham because they're his offspring but through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

This means that it's not the children of the flesh who are children of God but children of the promise for this is what the promise said about this time next year I will return and Sarah will have a son.

[25 : 33] The example he goes back and grabs is he says hey remember when I made a promise to Abraham that he was going to bear a son and through that all people were going to be blessed and Abraham doesn't wait for the promise he gets anxious and so he tries to fulfill it himself instead of through his wife Sarah he impregnates his servant and she has a son named Ishmael and then later God gives him Isaac completely apart from his efforts and so the picture that the Bible gives you is this picture of Ishmael representing man's efforts to fulfill God by his own effort and Isaac is this picture of God's initiative and his intervening Paul reaches back to nearly the beginning of the Bible and he says like that that's what I'm talking about God doesn't choose based on will or effort but by his power and his mercy and then as if he hasn't hit us enough like if that's not scandalous enough he just pushes the throttle all the way down and gives us this next example in Romans 9 verse 10 he says and not only so but also

Rebecca when she conceived children by one man our forefather Isaac though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad in order that God's purpose and election might continue not because of works but because of him who calls she was told the older will serve the younger as it is written Jacob I loved Esau I hated now to be fair the translation of the word there that's rendered hate is a bit tricky and it doesn't really have the same connotation as when we use the word hate these days right so like when we say hate nowadays most likely you think of like I loathe somebody I despise them I want to see them hurt and that's not really what this verse or this particular word means it's actually a lot closer to like when Jesus is teaching some people and he says hey if you don't hate your father and your mother and your children and your wife then you can't be my disciple

I mean obviously what Jesus is not saying there is go home and despise your mother like that's a really bad idea don't do that okay but it is still difficult because it has this very strong element of God choosing something for these children favoring one before they've done anything good or bad and so I think the next thing that happens is our mind kind of naturally goes towards well I mean God knows everything and so we want to go look at their lives and we're like it'll show in their lives that God knew what he was doing and like you know it'll turn out virtuous and the problem is like neither one of these people live a particularly righteous life like Esau certainly makes some bad mistakes some of which are held up in scripture as kind of the perfect picture image of trading the eternal things of God for the worthless things of the world but Jacob is no less of a scoundrel Jacob uses guile and deceit and manipulation his entire life to claw his way to where he wants to go and we've all if you've ever known someone like that that is not the kind of person you preference yourself to be around

God shows him mercy later in life and breaks him of that but it wasn't because Jacob was a good dude and Paul is saying God had a plan for these guys that had nothing to do with what they were going to do so deep breath where does that leave us like if it is based on God's will then does that mean my faith really is useless what am I to do with that and that's a very honest question what role do is at this point we can now start to kind of look around Romans 9 and think of some of the other verses around it that give it context right because remember Romans 9 is written it's not done in a vacuum it's part of one letter and so before it is Romans 8 and after it is Romans 10 and in Romans 8 and 10 you have all these verses that speak so fact over just in the next chapter the same Paul that's writing Romans 9 is going to write this in Romans 10 if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved I mean did you just lose the plot like halfway through his argument so no and what we really get to do here now is we zoomed out to the 10,000 foot view we are really just going to zoom in for a minute and talk about how God works with us right I think Douglas Moo the commentator gives us a good entry way into this he says look divine sovereignty and human responsibility and salvation do stand in some tension with one another but they're not logically contradictory to be true truly biblical!

[30 : 53] We must Both are given their full weight. And so as we start to process these verses, one of the things we can do is go back and look at, there's some things in here we might have actually missed when we were dealing with the hard things.

And in particular, one of the things I think that gets laced through Romans 9 that is really easy to miss is this. Election may not be based on fairness, but it is based on mercy and compassion. So in verse 14 he said, What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means. For he says to Moses, I'll have mercy on who I have mercy, and I'll have compassion on who I have compassion. So then, it doesn't depend on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy. He has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whoever he wills. It's really easy in those verses to get focused in on God being the one doing the choosing and miss the fact that the real driving force behind everything God's doing is mercy and compassion.

[32 : 04] And as a matter of fact, this comes up over and over in Scripture. Whenever you see the idea of election or God choosing, you always see it mingled with mercy and grace.

That's the driving factor. In Ephesians chapter 2 it says, But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love which he loved us, even when we were dead, dead people can't do anything. Even when we were dead in our trespasses, he made us alive in Christ because by grace you have been saved. I don't want to discount all the difficulties when I say this next statement, but in a real way, some ways the real mystery isn't that everyone doesn't get chosen.

Like, the real mystery is, why do any of us get chosen? I mean, if it's not for God's mercy, none of us have any hope. And that's what this verse is saying.

It's saying, it's not based on us. It's based on him. And that's important because he is faithful when you are faithless. And so when you see this story in the Bible unfolding, what you start to realize is, what's really unfair is not that God chooses things for people's lives.

[33 : 19] The most unfair thing in Scripture is who God chooses to punish for all of our failures. I mean, the only innocent person who ever lived is the one who is punished for everyone.

And if you're thinking, man, that doesn't sound fair, it's not. When we get to heaven, like, the only person who's got any scars left is the only one who was ever innocent.

The most unfair moment in the history of the world is at the center of God chooses how God is handling saving us. And like, we may not understand all of that, but one thing you can't say is that God doesn't care.

That he's driven by something other than love. And so, what I want to do to kind of close this out, what I want to touch on before we leave is, thinking through, okay, if this is true, like, this is a lot of weighty stuff, what should that produce in my life?

Like, why did God put this in here? How do I handle this? And I think that's a really good question to land in. The first thing I would give you is this. I think if nothing else, a truth like this should make you profoundly humble and grateful.

[34 : 41] I mean, election makes us humble because it means you can't claim your salvations on your own merit. Ephesians 2, 8 and 9, for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of your own doing.

It is a gift of God, not of works, so that no one may boast. No one will stand before the Father and say, I deserve to be here.

And I think if you let that truth in, it can also make you worshipful, right? Like, God, I don't deserve your love. Like, if you think about all the songs and great hymns that have been written over the years, like, they weren't anxious about the idea of election.

They said things like, thank you, Lord, for your amazing grace that could save a wretch like me. We don't have to understand everything about it to be grateful for what God's done.

I think another kind of common fear or kind of common worry that comes up when we think about these things is, if I believe that, won't it just make me worry all the time?

[35 : 58] Like, won't I live in fear about this idea of whether I'm chosen or not? Like, whether I'm in the club or out of the club? And I don't think that's the truth either because, again, while we may not understand all these things, one truth that does show up in Scripture over and over is that no one has ever stayed lost who really wanted to be found.

So, I mean, if this is true, like, what if I'm not chosen? And it's understandable that that is the question we would have, but the interesting thing is that is never the question Jesus asked anybody.

Jesus always asks you something much more personal. Like, when Jesus comes to you, the question He asks you looks like this. Do you want to come?

Do you want to come? And it's really easy in something like this to get lost in it, like an intellectual exercise and just miss the really clear call of Jesus right in front of you.

Like, if you have a desire to come, Jesus says you're welcome. When you watch Him walking through His earthly ministry, right, what you don't see is Jesus saying, okay, now we come to the portion for those of you who are fully convinced and revealed to your election, please come forward.

[37 : 21] Jesus says, whosoever will, come. If you have ears to hear this, then hear it and come.

And so, like, whatever else you believe about, like, kind of this big topic we're talking through today, if you don't hear anything else, whatever questions you have, I would invite you to hear this because it is crystal clear in Scripture.

If you want to come, if you're thirsty and you want to have a drink, if you want to be healed, if you want to be saved, you can come.

Jesus says come. And then I think that leads us to kind of a final thought, which people, I believe, think is a temptation around this, which is, I mean, if I believe this, if I believe that God is sovereign like that, won't it make me just really apathetic to the people around me who need Jesus, to the suffering in the world?

And I don't think that's the case at all because actually, I think this should make you want to tell everybody about Jesus. You know, the motivation that a tension or a difficulty in Scripture can produce in you is often really surprising.

[38 : 39] So like, moving back in Romans a little farther, in Romans chapter 5, Paul makes this really, again, magnificent argument where he tries to convince you that the grace towards us in Christ can never be defeated by your sin.

Like, no matter how much your sin increases, grace will always increase more. The love of God, the blood of Jesus, will never be conquered by how much you sin and how bad you are.

Like, the more you sin, the more grace overcomes it. And then in verse 6, he asked the question, the first verse in verse 6, he asked, what he thinks his audience is going to ask.

He says, so, should we then just keep on sinning so that grace can abound? Or if I was going to put it in like modern North Carolina vernacular, it's kind of like, so you're telling me that I can just sin all I want and Jesus is going to...

And Paul's answer there is no. But the way he says it is basically like this. If you really knew what grace tasted like, you wouldn't be able to ask that question.

[39 : 52] Can I go on sinning? That's not how someone who receives grace acts. Like, if someone gives you a really good gift, does it make you immediately just want to go take advantage of them more?

Because you know you can. Or like, if you did something really awful to someone and they choose to forgive you, to let that be restored, to free you from it, does that make you just want to hurt them again?

Or does that inflame your heart for them? And it's really kind of the same thing that he's doing with election here. He's saying, if your belief in election leads you to a place of apathy for others knowing Jesus, then you miss the plot.

Paul's controversial words in Romans 9 are surrounded by verses that show a broken heart and an incredible hope that he has for all.

So back in Romans 9, the part we didn't read, he says this, he says, I am speaking the truth in Christ. I am not lying. My conscience bears witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in his heart talking about his fellow Israelites who had not accepted Jesus.

[41 : 09] And then in the first verse of Romans 10, he says, Brothers, my heart's desire and my prayer to God is for all of them to be saved. I mean, he wrote those words in Romans 9, but look at what he's doing.

He's still praying. He's still believing. He's still hoping. He's still working. Like, Paul is not sitting around wondering who's elect and who's not elect.

He is in anguish for those that don't know Jesus and he says, As long as I am here, I'm going to pour out my heart and my life to that. And then in Romans 10, he pens this.

He says, For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And how will they call on him if they've not believed? And how can they believe if they've never heard it?

And how can they hear it if someone doesn't go and preach it to them? And how do they preach unless people are sin? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news.

[42 : 11] That is not a doctrine that led someone to apathy or inaction. It led him forward. And I don't think it's a mistake that right after this passage on God's sovereign choice is a message that salvation's for everybody.

Because if it's based on grace, if it's not on merit, that means anybody, no matter what you've done, could be saved. Praise be.

As the band comes up, a couple of ways we can respond to something like this. If you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus, I think I would just hold out to you the same thing that Jesus holds out to everyone.

If there is any part of you that wants to be healed, if there's any part of you that wants to come, maybe even if inside of you you're thinking, you know what, I don't believe, like that can't be true. Like you just can't bring yourself, no one can fix what's wrong in my life, but I wish somebody could. If there's any part of you that wants that, Jesus says you can come. You don't have to worry about all the rest. There'll be a prayer on the screen that might be a way you can express that. You can express it in your own words to God.

[43 : 27] Jesus says if you want to come, you can come. If you are a follower of Jesus, this is a lot to take in and certainly there could be more to say, more to wrestle with, but hopefully if nothing else what you've seen is this question, this truth can lead us to a place of humility or gratefulness or being secure, making us eager to pursue Jesus.

And I would say if He's highlighted one of those things for you today, this is a good opportunity to lean into that, to just do what He's asked you to do. We're going to come to the communion table for those who have decided to follow Jesus and you can go to these tables and take the elements back to your seat and partake.

And when you're doing that, again, I don't think it's inappropriate. You don't have to understand everything to say, thank you Jesus for choosing me. I don't understand that and I don't deserve it and I certainly pray, I pray that everyone that doesn't would, but thank you for saving me.

You can commune with Him. You can fellowship with Him today. Father, we give this moment to you. We come and declare that you are the great and sovereign God, that you do as your will pleases, but God, we are so grateful that your will has pleased to make us sons and daughters. You gave the most precious thing you had and we give you glory for it. Holy Spirit, give us the grace to let these things drive us to a love of the Father.

[45 : 11] Settle into this moment. We just ask that you will give what only you can give. We ask it in Jesus' name. for this moment