

Ballast for the Soul: God Is an Absolute Sovereign

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I know that some of you have had the privilege of visiting Plymouth, Massachusetts. And you have seen the replica of the kind of town that our pilgrim forefathers built and in which they lived in the 1600s after arriving on these shores from Great Britain. And most likely, those of you who've been to Plymouth went aboard the Mayflower 2, an exact replica built from the very original plans, the original drawings of the Mayflower 1. And if you did a thorough tour of that ship with a guide or on your own, you went down into the belly of that ship, and there you saw a strange sight. You would have seen a number of oak barrels standing rim to rim all throughout the lower part of that ship. And if your guide was explaining things, or if you read one of the explanatory plaques somewhere posted there (I was trying to reconstruct that from my memory, and I'm not sure, but I believe it had an explanatory plaque somewhere near to the visual sight of those barrels), you would have found out that they were performing a very necessary function in that very hazardous transatlantic journey in that ship that we now wonder how in the world did 120 people make that journey for weeks cooped up in that thing and land safely on our shores. Well, what you would have found out about those barrels is that they were essential to that journey. Before they took the journey, they filled them with potable, good drinking water, the water that they would use for their cooking and for their refreshment, that commodity without which they could not have lived in that journey. But then every time one of those barrels was emptied of the drinking and cooking water, they filled it with sea water, because the barrels fulfilled a second function. They were ballasts there in the bowels of that ship. Now, you kids know what ballast in a ship is? That's heavy weight put in the lower part of the ship to give it stability. Once it gets out to sea and meets something more than little rippling waves and begins to know something of the turbulence of the sea, without ballast the ship could be capsized; it would be difficult to keep in on course. And the ballast, that weight down in the belly of the ship, is what enables it to make it through the turbulent sea, to keep on course, and to arrive safely at its destination. Well, for some reason, as I was prayerfully considering what to bring as an appropriate last of the year and New Year's meditation, the imagery of ballasts came so forcefully to my mind.

What do you need, and what do I need as we, in a few hours, will set out on for what for us is the uncharted sea of the coming year? When those people left Britain to come to Plymouth, they at least had what we would now regard as crude navigational charts. But they had some clear sense of direction, some definite sense of what they were doing when they cast off and made their way to the New World. But you and I are embarking upon an uncharted sea. The Scripture says we don't even know what one day will bring forth. "Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth [let alone 365 days]." And as we are let loose in a few hours and go out to sea in this journey that is the new year before us, I want to lay before you the principle that we desperately need, those old oak barrels there in the bowels of our souls. And we need them for the same two reasons that those pilgrim forefathers needed them. If the seas are smooth and not at all turbulent, I don't care how fair the weather, how smooth the seas, you're going to need water to live. And these are the truths

that the child of God must constantly drink into his soul if he is to live in any way what the Bible would describe as a Spirit-filled life. And then it is certain that for most, if not all of us, the coming year will hold some period of a turbulent sea. And we know that because Jesus said, "In the world, ye shall have tribulation." And the Apostle Paul in exhorting young believers (Acts 14) said that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when we hit those turbulent seas, if we don't have ballast in our hull, we're going to capsize, we're going to be move off course. And its too late to get your ballast when your in the midst of the turbulent sea. It's time to fill up the barrels now before you set out in this uncharted sea. And what I propose to do because I have not preached a sermon on barrels of ballast in the belly of your soul, I think we'll cover two of those barrels tonight; then two of them next Lord's Day as a communion meditation. And what are those Biblical truths? Nothing new to many of you, but as Peter said, "Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance." Perhaps expressing them in a different way, God will enable us to lay hold of them with fresh dimensions of understanding and the response of faith.

Well, into barrel number one goes this very refreshing, substantial, essential truth, and I'm stating it this way: God is on His throne governing all things in this universe as an absolute sovereign. What truth do you have to have deep in the depths of your soul as you embark upon the coming year? I'm saying this it the most foundational of all truths, that God is on His throne governing all things in this universe as an absolute sovereign. Let me take a moment to explain the choice of several of those key words. The word "universe" refers to the totality of all things that exist, the cosmos. From the subatomic particles in every cell of your body right out to the particles in the farthest star in a yet undiscovered galaxy, God is on His throne governing all things in this universe, that is, everything that exists outside of Himself, every created reality from the macrocosm out to the microcosm within. And that's what I mean by asserting God is on His throne governing all things in this universe as an absolute sovereign. And I'm using the word "absolute" in its first and second meanings in the dictionary. Absolute is that which is perfect and complete. I came into a room and found it in absolute silence. What do I mean? There wasn't any noise of any kind whatsoever. We usually say in such situations the silence was deafening. All you can hear is nothing. If someone were to snap a match, you'd hear it--absolute silence, total silence, complete silence. And I'm using it also in the second sense, not limited or restricted. We speak of an absolute monarchy. What do we mean? It is a rule in which the king has total authority and power. There is no parliament with which he must consent. There is no populace whose consent of the governed he must wait upon before he executes his will and sends out his decree. And what I'm asserting is that the Bible teaches, and we must grasp as a present reality facing the coming year, that God is on His throne governing all things in this universe, and that as an absolute sovereign, one who is supreme in rank, power, and authority. Now that's what I mean by saying this is what needs to go into the barrel of your soul and mine, and must remain in there. And when it begins to be used up or leaks out, don't seek to fill it with sea water. Fill it again with this pure, refreshing truth from the Word of God. Psalm 93 begins with the simple words "The LORD [Jehovah] reigns." Now, notice what it says. It doesn't say, "Jehovah reigned" (past tense--but we don't know who's in charge now), Jehovah shall reign (future--we have hope, but we sure don't know what's going on now). Nor does it say, "Jehovah may reign." It's not subjunctive, it's not past tense, it's not future; it's indicative--"Jehovah reigns." You don't need to be a philosopher or theologian to understand those two words. Jehovah, the one true and living God who says, "I AM THAT I AM [I AM THAT I will be. All that I have ever been I AM, and all I AM I ever shall be. I reign]." Jehovah reigns. Now notice how that simple assertion is picked up several more times in these Psalms. Psalm 96:10. This is not a truth to be whispered in the corner when you're in the presence of people that understand and believe the doctrines of

grace. It's contraband goods; you only share it with the right people. No, notice what the psalmist says: "Say among the heathen that the LORD reigneth." The same assertion. And this is not something to be whispered in secret with the initiate. This is something to be heralded among the nations. But you say, "Pastor, people don't like to be told God is in charge." That doesn't make any difference. The reality is God is in charge. And let every single human being in the world get together if they could in one place and vote to assert that something else or someone else reigns, it doesn't change reality. "Say among the nations, Jehovah reigns."

Psalm 97:1: "The LORD reigneth." And what is to be the response to this? Some kind of a trembling spirit of bondage? No, "let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof." There's nothing to rejoice in if there's no sovereign holding the reigns of the universe. How do we know some meteor will come crashing upon earth and knock this little planet in to a billion pieces? Because there's a God who reigns and says, "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." And this earth as we now know it shall remain until Jesus comes and in flaming fire takes vengeance on His enemies, and God renews this world by fire and ushers in the new heavens and the new earth.

In Psalm 99:1, he says it again: "The LORD reigneth." Now the call is not to rejoice but, "let the people tremble." There is a darker side to this reality. God is in charge, not you. Let your whole life be witness to the fact that you believe in the depths of your soul that it is indeed Jehovah that reigns.

Then the two chapters we read together from Revelation 4 and 5. We go back to them for just a few moments. I've already hinted at their significance. Before John is given to see visions and hear voices with respect to things that are and are to come. He is given this vision in which the throne is central. As soon as heaven is opened and that voice has summoned him to come up hither. Now notice verse 1 of chapter 4: "I will shew thee things which must be hereafter." And what does John see of things which must be hereafter? Nothing. The text says, "And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne." Before the things which must be hereafter, John is given this magnificent vision of a throne. And on the throne is not some impersonal force, but the majestic, glorious, living God. Jehovah sits upon that throne. The God celebrated by the psalmist in those kingship psalms--John sees Him here. And as I mention, in this chapter and in the next, 17 times the phrase "the throne" is mentioned. "John, I want the seven churches to get the message. You're sending to them My word." In two cases, no word of condemnation but only commendation; in five cases, greater or lesser degrees of rebuke and condemnation as well as calls to repentance. And the overall picture of the life of those churches is the picture of churches beset with the enemies of false doctrine, of heterodoxy, of people turning the grace of God into license, of opposition, of persecution. And what's the first thing God wants these churches all to know after the risen Lord has given His specific word to each one. He says, "I want you to see a throne." Whatever is to come, it's administered by one who is an absolute sovereign. A throne, a throne--that's what John sees.

So as we seek to peer, as it were, into the new year, and we see that all is shrouded in uncertainty, the unknown, like a ship that's set out to sea and suddenly is enveloped in fog and can get no bearings from the pole star, no sense of east, west, north, or south--what direction are we going? You and I need to have a new sense of confidence, that every single thing that transpires in the coming year--at the end of the day, it's very simple--it will be the revelation of God's secret decree as a result of His sovereign action. Everything that unfolds in the

coming year will be nothing more or nothing less than the revelation of His secret decree as a result of His sovereign action. And there are texts upon texts in Scripture that cover the whole gamete. And I want you to just look at several with me here.

There is that well-known statement in Daniel 4. It covers activity in heaven and upon earth, spoken by a king who thought that he was an absolute sovereign. He walks by the grandeur of his Babylonian kingdom, and he swells with pride and spreads his peacock-like feathers in his soul. And God says, "I'm going to humble this man and let him know who the real boss is." So God deals with Nebuchadnezzar. And at the end of his lengthy period of madness when he lived like an animal in the open field, and his fingernails grew like bird's claws, the Scripture says. Look at Daniel 4:34-35:

"And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured Him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven [those unseen heavenly creatures, angels, seraphim, cherubim, archangels], and among the inhabitants of the earth [even the proud, boastful Nebuchadnezzars who think somehow at least they have some niche on some sphere of independent sovereignty. 'No, no, my understanding has come back to me. I now see reality. It is Jehovah God, the one true and living God who does according to His will among the inhabitants of the earth]: and none can stay His hand [literally--strike His hand], or say unto Him, What doest thou?"

When God stretches out His hand to do what His decree has purposed, who can slap God's hand and say, "Hands off, don't You touch that person, don't You touch that nation, don't You touch that economy, don't You touch that person's looks, don't You touch that person's health." Who can strike God's hand and say, "No, no, You don't do that, God." Nebuchadnezzar asked a rhetorical question. The answer of which is obvious. None can stay His hand or say unto Him, "What are You doing?" That's a statement of God in His posture upon His throne administering and governing all the affairs of the universe as an absolute sovereign.

And you have the sweeping declaration of the prophet Isaiah. And this is only a teaser. These are only some of the Biblical testimonies. And I was embarrassed with riches. Which ones shall I read and barely quote upon, and which ones to pass over. Isaiah 46:9-11:

"Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done [why can God infallibly predict the future? Because He plans and executes what to us is future], saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure: calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth My counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it." Very simple. God says, "It is in My heart to do it, and I will accomplish what I purpose to do."

Then you have the ordering of the elements. Why did we get dumped with that pile of snow. Well, the meteorologists on channel 2 and 4 and 5 and 7 and 9 will say,

"Because there was moist weather system forming down off the Carolina coast, and because of the movement of the jet stream, etc. and the vapors rising from the ocean, it was drawn up

this way. And then there was a cold front coming in from the northwest. And that all met, and it hung over us."

Yes, I fully understand. I've seen your weather maps; I've heard your explanation. But Mr. Weatherman, I've got a question. Why did that bit of moisture get formed? "O, that's because it went...." Yes, fine. And why was it there to do this? And ultimately, you see, you're driven back and back and back to where you say, "It just happened." Or you think Biblically. And to think Biblically is to bring our minds to a passage like Psalm 135. The Psalm begins with a call to praise the Lord. Those who stand in the house of God in the courts of God sing praises to His name. Verses 5 and 6: "For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places." And how did He do it? Did He do it like the God of the deist? Did He just put forth certain laws and principles and weave them into the texture of the world and walk away and let them work out themselves? No, look at how specific He gets. Verse 7: "He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; He maketh lightnings for the rain; He bringeth the wind out of His treasuries." You say that's poetic language. Yes, it is. But it's poetry not conveying nonsense and non-truth, but reality. Why is it that the clouds are forming from vapors rising from the earth? God causes it to do so. The Scripture says that our Lord Jesus upholds all things by the word of His power. And in Colossians, "By Him all things [literally not consist but adhere. They hold together]." With all of that potential energy in every atom, why doesn't it just break off and cause perpetual atomic explosions? In Christ, they are held together. These are not distant, detached laws of nature that operate on their own. God is eminent and active in the exercise of His absolute sovereignty in His world.

The expansive statement of Daniel, the sweeping declaration of Isaiah, the ordering of the elements right down to that little bird that is flying and thinks your picture window is open space. And whop--he hits it and falls dead in your shrubs. Where was God? Turn to Matthew 10:29: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father." You mean God was there superintending the flight of that bird, allowing that little bird's brain to think, "This is open space", when all the while it was double-pain glass. Yes. Rule God out of the sphere of that bird, then you can rule God out of the sphere of anything. God is either sovereign over all the universe; in all that makes it the universe, or you will eventually exclude Him from the whole. Even the most wicked deed ever perpetuated by mankind was sovereignly directed by Almighty God. He is not responsible for the sin, but the sin did not operate in a no-man's land. What was the most wicked deed ever perpetrated upon earth? It's the deed for which you and I are most thankful, the crucifixion of our blessed Lord. And how did the people of God view that most wicked of all deeds? We see how they viewed it when they prayed in Acts 4. The servants of God have been opposed and threatened, and they returned to their company, either the company of the apostles--it's not definite--or all of the people of God, or a group of the people of God, and they have a prayer meeting. And their prayer meeting begins, not with this laid back conversational so-called prayer: "Hey Lord, I got a little bit of trouble. Thank you. You hear us." No, no, their prayer had the elements which a lot of people would say is stuffy and formal. It began with high theology. Look at it. Acts 4:23-27:

"And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, Thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is [we come to You as the mighty creator of all that exists in this universe]: who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered

together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for [to do whatsoever the devil stirred them up to do, and Lord, there's nothing You could do about it. No] to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done."

God's hand and God's counsel foreordained what wicked Herod did and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and the people of Israel. False accusations, mockery, spittle on His face, buffeting Him, bruising Him, taunting Him--yet not one hand could have been raised to strike Him; not one nail could have been placed on His hand and driven through if God's hand and counsel had not foreordained that it come to pass. That's in your Bibles, folks. Don't give this any human label: "O, you're preaching something-ism." No, no, this is what our Bibles teach us. And this must become something more than a theological tenet to which we occasionally point and say, "O yes, I believe that." It must be in the soul like the barrels of water in the bowels of a ship, so that no matter where we are taken in the will of God in what to us is a sea shrouded in mist and fog, we can say at any point, "God is on His throne. God is governing everything in His universe as an absolute sovereign." And then we bring that to bear upon the specifics of our own circumstances.

I was struck in my recent reading and then listening on my treadmill to the book of the Revelation, one of the most striking passages. Turn to Revelation 17. Here in this passage, those forces that are likened to a beast and to a scarlet woman, the combined forces that are to oppose Christ and His people. We read in verses 13 and 14:

"These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb [these combined forces of evil come to one mind in their insidious, demonic determination to war against the Lamb], and the Lamb shall overcome them: for He is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with Him are called, and chosen, and faithful."

I've got to preach a sermon on that sometime. All His people are the ones effectually called. And why are they called? Because they've been chosen. And how do we know they've been called and chosen? Because they are faithful. Verses 15 and 16: "And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire." Why do they do all of this, these evil powers doing evil things? Look at verse 17: "For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil His will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled." Are you offended at that? God did put it into their hearts to do His mind. God says, "I'm running the show. And at this point at the unfolding of the drama, I want you and you and you to get your powers all together and see what you can do to defeat My Son." Now, does God create the evil disposition? No, He cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempted He any man. He is of purer eyes than to look upon iniquity. We guard the statement with the rest of Scripture. But I will not blot out this and say there must be a wrong translation. "God stood back and let them." No, it says God put it into their hearts to do His mind. By allowing their evil powers to cut a given course, God is putting it into their hearts to do His mind and to accomplish His will. If you don't have a God who is in charge of evil and the devil, I wouldn't want to trade places with you. He's sovereign even in these matters. So, my dear brethren, as you and I set out to sea, may I exhort you as I exhort myself, fill barrel of your heart with this basic conviction: God is on His throne governing all things in His universe as an absolute monarch.

Now, what practical effect will the settled faith in Him produce? Now notice, I didn't say faith in this doctrine. That's impersonal. I said the settled faith in Him. Faith in the God who is on His throne. And He's not on His throne to give the appearance of a monarch. He's on His throne administering His will in absolute sovereignty. So what's the difference? What's the big deal? Well, let me suggest several things.

First of all, under God, this will produce stability in the face of the most radical upheavals and disruptions around you and in the world. I commend to you Psalm 46. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." What God? The God whose hands are tied, the God who must always be wringing His hands wishing and hoping He could do something, but because He must respect man's so-called freedom, He cannot touch the situation? No, read Psalm 46. The psalmist says even though the mountains begin to play leapfrog with one another and end up in the sea, I'm going to say to myself, "Be still, and know that He is God." He's on His throne. That's why we don't go around nervously biting our nails wondering what will the president's next cabinet appointment be? Will they get approved? If they get approved...? My friends, loosen up. He may be president, but I've got news for you, the White House doesn't house the Monarch of the universe. And the people that meet in the halls of government, congress, the House of Representatives, the Senate--they don't hold the reins of government, nor does Putin, nor does any other earthly monarch. We know who the Monarch is. And while we in obedience to the Scriptures pray that there will be stable governments; we pray that God will end the horrible oppression of these dictators in countries that thought independence from colonial powers would be something next to heaven, and they've had a living hell for decades--millions slain, people starving--and we cry to God, "O God, end this horrible stuff; bring stability (1 Timothy 2). Yes, that's our prayer and our yearning. But at the end of the day, whatever may collapse, whatever may look like a mountain today, that ends leapfrogging another mountain and ends up buried in the sea, God's throne hasn't twitched a bit. And God's not scurrying about for plan B. All of His counsel, all that happens in history, is but the exegesis of God's decree administered by His own sovereign power. And you see, that stability of a Christian in the midst of the crises that impinge upon all men around us is a marvelous testimony to the fact that the God we know and whom we profess to serve is not the little God who can be stuck in your hip pocket. But He's the awesome, glorious, all-powerful God of the Scriptures.

Secondly, it will produce submission in the face of crushing, negative providences. I didn't know how else to describe them and make sense of them. No providence is a negative one. We know all things are working together for good. But you know what I mean when I talk about crushing, negative providences. I was stunned when a couple of years ago I listened to a sermon I preached at a Legionier conference in February of 1997. They had ask me to preach on the sovereignty of God over nature. And so I sought to preach on the sovereignty of God over nature. I opened up a number of passages. "He hath His way in the whirlwind, and the storms and the clouds are the dust of His feet"--some of these passages in the Psalms. And then when I got to application, one of the applications I made was, what's part of nature? Your physiology, your body, the seeds of death in it--that's part of nature. And part of the results of the fall is that there has been worked into the fabric of the gene pool certain predispositions to certain diseases, and there are certain toxins, and all of the rest. Then I said, "What are you going to do when you go to the doctor and you've had that biopsy, and a few days later you hear the dread C word? Little did I know that three months later I would have the biopsy, and I would hear the C word. What do you do if you don't have in the belly of your soul this barrel full of the ballast. God was not vacating His throne when that strange influence caused these aberrant cells to begin to multiply. Either God was there, or He's no where. Child of God, this has got to touch you at the deepest level of the darkest providence that may break upon you in

the coming year, or you're never going to sit with Job and worship. Ten kids dead in a day, all of his accumulated wealth gone in a day--and it says he fell upon his face and worshipped saying, "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." I'd rather have a universe ordered by God even when that God orders the death of my ten children and takes away all my wealth and possessions than have a universe at the mercy of pure chance. Child of God, is this where you're living? It better be. Set out to the sea with that conviction, and you will be a monument of God's stability in the midst of upheaval and disruption. With submission in the face of crushing providences, Romans 8:28 will be something more than a plaque on the wall. When some thing or some things come to bear upon you that seem to drip with the smell and the flavor and the sight of evil, for you to look at that as a man or woman of faith and say, "All things are working together for good. My loving, sovereign Father has brought this upon me for good. I don't have a clue what the good is, but I do have a few clues about the God who says all that He brings is good, and He's worthy to be trusted." That's why I have no sympathy for this health, wealth, and prosperity nonsense. It misrepresents God and what the life of faith is like.

And then confidence in the face of danger. What is it that gives a child of God confidence in the face of danger? In that passage we quoted from Matthew 10:29, that comes right on the heel of Jesus telling these men whom He has commissioned, "You're not going to go out and be welcomed as citizens of the year everywhere you go. In fact, there may be some who threaten to kill you. In fact, some of you may actually be killed." So what are you to do? Matthew you 10:28: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Well, who is He? He's the God who doesn't allow one sparrow, insignificant as it is, to fall to the ground without His sovereign will and His sovereign purpose for that little sparrow. That takes the most timid, shy, fearful man or woman and makes him/her a rod of courage. That's what happened with Paul. In Acts 18, he knew what the Jews would do when they got angry with him and rejected the Gospel. And he comes to Corinth, and sure enough, they're there, and they're opposing and blaspheming. But Paul shakes out his raiment and says in verse 16, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean; from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles." He goes to the house of one Titus Justus, and Crispus the ruler of the synagogue believes. And the Lord knows his servant, and He comes to him in verses 9 and 10: "Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city." Now let me ask you something. If God is not sovereign over all the plotting and over all the plans of evil men with their evil intentions, how can He make such a promise as this? God has Gospel purposes, so Paul with Gospel boldness stays on for another year and a half ministering the Word of God in that city confident in the face of danger.

Boldness and largeness of petition at the throne of grace. If the God to whom we pray is indeed on His throne governing every thing in His universe as an absolute sovereign, then He can say call upon Me and I will show you great and mighty things which you no not. He says through the prophet Jeremiah, "Behold, I am the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?" That's what gives us hope. Some of you have sat here as hard as flint for another whole year. And the Gospel has been taught and preached, and you've been pleaded with. And with holy cajoling and urgency and in every way, we sought to bring you to Christ. Why don't we just say phooey on you--go to hell if you want to? No, we pray to a God who can take all your smugness and all your smart ellic indifference and break it in a moment of time. So we pray to Him who holds the hearts of men in His hands. We pray to a God who can restrain the most adamant evil-minding man or woman purposing to harm the child of God. It's a simple statement--some may call it a trite--but I find it a great comfort that, as a Christian, I'm

invincible until my work is done. And I don't want to stay around three seconds beyond the time my work is done. There aren't enough demons in hell; there aren't enough evil men on earth to thwart the child of God from fulfilling the will of God against the purposes of God. They can't do it. And that's the source of boldness and confidence in the face of danger. With boldness at the throne of grace, we pray as Jesus said, "Our Father who is in the heavens." What's the significance of being in the heavens? Psalm 115:3: "But our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased." He is in the heavens, not as a king whose simply got a crown and a scepter but doesn't wield any authority. He's in the heavens; He does whatsoever He has pleased. Those are just a few of the implications. You see, this truth that God is utterly, absolutely pervasively sovereign in this world is not an abstract, philosophical concept. It is not a detached theological proposition. It's the ballast in the soul of the child of God. May God grant that the opened barrel of your soul will be filled afresh.

Now very briefly, let me take the second barrel, because much of what we've already established pours into this second barrel, and it is this: the crucified, risen, and exalted Lord shares that throne as the administrator of all things leading to a glorious consummation. And where do I get that idea? Well, from a number of passages. We go back to the Revelation passage. John is given this vision of God upon His throne: creator, sovereign, holy, eternal. And then in chapter 5, John says, "And I saw in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne...." He sees some being upon the throne that is God. He has in His right hand a book written within and on the back close sealed with seven seals.

"And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof."

The person who is worthy is identified as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, a lion, the king of beast; the Root of David. He is of the line of David. He is David's root as well as David's stock; David's Lord as well as David's Son. He has overcome to open. There was an overcoming that uniquely qualifies Him to open this book and the seven seals. Then John sees in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures in the midst of the elders a Lamb standing as though it had been slain. What a strange vision. When you try to conjure up in your mind what did John see, what does a Lamb look like that's standing, but it's a Lamb standing as if it had been slain? Apparently, it's stained with blood. Maybe there's a gaping wound on its throat. It's grotesque when you try to actually visualize what John is describing here. A Lamb having seven horns and seven eyes. What a grotesque looking Lamb. We'd never take that home or say Mary here's a little lamb that you can take and follow you wherever you go. No, seven horns, seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits or the sevenfold Spirit of God sent forth to all the earth. And now the Lamb comes and takes the book. How did He do it? Well, most likely, if a lamb takes something, he'd have to take it in his mouth. Now, it doesn't say the mouth, but trying to listen and see what John is describing, I see a Lamb as though it had been slain, and it's standing. Then that Lamb that's in the midst of the throne, comes to the very right hand of the one upon the throne, and He takes that book that is sealed out of the right hand of Him who sits upon the throne. And as soon as He takes the book, the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders fall down before the Lamb, each one having a harp. Linski suggests the term "zither." But one thing is clear, there's going to be instrumental music in heaven. Each one of them has a harp and golden bowls of incense, which are the prayers of the saints, and they sing a new song saying, "Here's the one who has

been singing and worshiping Him that sits on the throne, holy, eternal. This is the one who created all things. He did it because of His own will and for His glory. Now they are caught up and they're singing a new song addressed to the Lamb:

"Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for [this is what constituted Him worthy to open the seals of that book] Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth."

And then John sees all of these other creatures taken up into praise: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." Verse 13: "And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." All of the worship that is focused upon the enthroned God in chapter 4 is now focused equally upon God and the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne. What is God saying to us? Well, whatever else He is saying to us, and whatever our peculiar conviction may be about the precise significance of this book written within and on the back close sealed with seven seals, as you see the Lord Jesus opening up seal upon seal (verse 1 of chapter 6: "And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals), it is evident that it is the outworking of God's purposes in the great redemptive scheme of things in this constant warfare between the devil and the Lamb and the people of God and the enemies of God. It is Christ as the Lamb who was slain, who conquered, who now in His exalted position has this unique responsibility. This is why I used the terminology of being the administrator of all things leading to a glorious consummation. Because He was willing to humble Himself and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, God has highly exalted Him, giving Him a place at His right hand--and not just a position to be admired. But God has deposited in Him this unique privilege and responsibility of being the administrator of His sovereign will and purpose leading to a glorious consummation. That's why Jesus could say subsequent to His crucifixion and resurrection just before His ascension, "All Power [authority] is given unto Me," not "All authority has been Mine as the eternal Word." That's true, but that's not what He says in Matthew 28. He says, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth." With what reference in particular? "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." All authority in heaven and earth deposited in Jesus the resurrected Christ, the soon to be exalted Christ with peculiar reference to administering the purposes and plan of God leading to the consummation.

In Ephesians 1, there's a similar emphasis. Paul says he's praying for these Christians, that God would give them understanding and illumination and insight concerning three specific things. And one of those things he identifies with this language. In verse 19, he's praying that they might know the exceeding greatness of the power of God to those who believe. And what is the measure, the standard of that power?

"...according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church."

Christ is given this particular administrative responsibility with reference to His church. And in the interest of the cause of His church, He is given a place of sovereignty over all things. And what is that consummation towards which His administration is leading to? Well, turn to 1 Corinthians 15 for a specimen passage. We could look at many passages, but here's one that's explicit. Verses 20-28:

"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For He hath put all things under His feet. But when He saith all things are put under Him, it is manifest that He is excepted, which did put all things under Him. And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all."

I don't have time to attempt to open up the significance of that last verse. I know your mind fastens on it, but get the overall picture. Christ must reign, He is reigning, and He shall reign until the last enemy is destroyed. And what is the last enemy with reference to His people? It's death, death that has taken them to the grave, the grave that has taken them to dust, dust that has been entered in the earth and nourished plants and flowers; bodies eaten by lions--and you can think of all of the things--but the grave doesn't have the last word. Christ is reigning with a view to the consummation when that which He secured in His resurrection. He did not die a private person, He was not buried as a private person, He was not raised as a private person, He was not exalted as a private person. As Adam was a public person, He stood as representative and head of all humanity. So Christ was head of all of His seed, all of God's elect. And as surely as Christ died, in His death was their death, death to the condemning power of the law, death to the dominion of sin and the power of the devil. So when He was raised, His resurrection not only secured their spiritual resurrection (Romans 6), but their literal, physical resurrection. And as sure as Joseph's borrowed tomb was empty Easter morning, when you put me in my grave, say to that grave, "You're going to cough him up someday." As sure as Christ is at the right hand of God, I must be raised. "Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." Don't ever quote that at a funeral. The grave does have a temporary victory. It swallows up the remains of our loved ones, those dear to us; wrenches them away from us. But it doesn't have the last word, because the crucified, risen, and exalted Lord shares that throne of sovereignty. He must reign. And He shares it as the administrator of all things leading to a glorious consummation. That consummation for us as God's people will be the resurrection. For this world, in the language of Romans 8, will be delivered from this bondage to which it was subject because of our sins. And it yearns and groans. "And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (v. 23).

Then Peter tells us in 2 Peter 3, that the returning Christ will purify the existing cosmos by fire. And there will be ushered in the new heavens and the new earth. And we will then join the chorus which we read about in Revelation 5: "Worthy, worthy is the Lamb." Child of God, this has got to become the stuff in the barrel of your soul. As we face the coming year, not only to be persuaded afresh and remind ourselves every day that God is on His throne, and on that throne He is governing all things in His universe as an absolute sovereign, but as a

crucified, risen, and exalted Christ shares that throne as the administrator of all things leading to a glorious consummation.

I'll tell you what the next two barrels are going to be that we're going to try to fill. The enthroned God is our loving, patient, principled Father. And the enthroned Christ is our intercessor, life, and constant companion. So we're going to go back to the throne, but view that relationship in its more interpersonal dimension. But the order in which I've given them is the right order. You start with an enthroned God and an enthroned Christ. Then you draw some comfort from the relationship of Father, advocate, intercessor, and companion. But that will have to wait, God willing, till next week.

I close with this simple incident that I read in a book I hope a number of you will get when we get a batch of them in the bookstore. I had the privilege of reading it and filling out the recommendation form. It's a book on a very straightforward, helpful, non-complicated commentary on the book of the Revelation by Dr. Vernon Portress. And in the introduction, trying to clear away the misconception that you've got to be some kind of an astute theologian and have great imagination and a lot of other things to even hope to begin to understand the book of the Revelation, he shared an incident about some seminary students. I think he said they were in a gym somewhere playing basketball. And they saw a janitor over in the corner reading. So these these seminary students went over and said, "Sir, what are you reading?" And he said, "I'm reading my Bible." They said, "Where are you reading?" He said, "I'm reading the book of the Revelation." "Well, would you like some help to understand it?" He said, "No, I understand it very clearly." They said, "You do?" He said, "Yes." They said, "Well, tell us, what it is teaching?" He said, "It's very simple. There's a war, and Jesus is going to win." That's it. There's a war, and Jesus is going to win. That's what I mean by Christ is sharing that throne all heading to the consummation. And unlike your favorite football team that you may want to watch and root for on Monday, the outcome of this one is already settled. You don't need to wait for tomorrow's news to find out if they made it to the step in the playoffs? It's all settled. And that needs to become the stuff that's in your soul. And when it appears that the devil and sin and wickedness are on the throne, you say, "No, Christ is on the throne; He is reigning." And the time is coming when the whole created order will be one united hallelujah chorus. And my voice is going to be there with the second tenors, and yours is going to be there. And some of you who can't carrying a tune in a bucket are going to sing like nightingales. And it's certain. Now, why in the world are we going around dragging our feet and our chins on the ground when God's given us this stuff. This is not Pie in the sky, by and by, folks. This is the stuff of Biblical reality. May God help us to fill up the barrel of our souls with it when we embark upon the New Year.

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