

This weekend, our theme is "The Only Sovereign".

It is our goal and hope to give you just a taste of who God is
And what it means that He is sovereign
And what that means for your life.

Charles Spurgeon said, "The Sovereignty of God is the pillow on which the Christian rests his head."

What he means is that even though we live in a crazy world,
It is the knowledge that God is in control of all things
That allows us to have peace and rest anyway.

Now, you may be looking at me tonight and saying,
"What the heck is sovereignty?"

And that's ok, that's exactly what we want to show you this weekend.

And to do that we're going to look tonight and again tomorrow morning at
Acts 17.

Just a little background.

- The book of Acts shows us 3 missionary journeys that the apostle Paul took.
- On **Paul's 2nd missionary journey** God directed him into the region of Macedonia
- In a Bible sense, this is where the **Thessalonians** lived and the **Philippians**
- Today you know it as **Greece**.
- When Paul went, he had **trouble in Philippi** getting arrested for casting a demon out of a girl, but he had even **bigger trouble in Thessalonica** having to escape out of that town.
- He went down to **Berea** but the Thessalonians followed him and so he had to flee by himself and he **ended up in Athens**.

You are familiar with Athens

- Athens being the home of ancient **philosophers** like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. (all who had been dead now around 400 years).
- And you are likely familiar with **Greek mythology** and their various Greek gods like Zeus and Aphrodite and Apollo and Artemis and Poseidon

Well this is where Paul ended up.

Athens holds almost a romantic and sentimental place in people's history.
(People love the philosophy and mythology and sort)

But know this.

- Athens was a satanic city.
- Instead of truth they followed human reason.
- Instead of God they worshiped idols.

They were the most deceived people on the planet.

By their own admonition they did not know who the one true God was.

And that is what Paul is about to explain to them.

He is going to show them who God is.

I want to sort of give you the setting of his visit.

(READ 16-21)

That sort of paints the picture of the scene that is about to unfold.

"Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols."

In short, Paul couldn't handle what he was seeing.

- There were idols everywhere.
- People worshiping false gods everywhere.
- (And we won't even talk about what some of that worship looked like)

It was grotesque and sickening to Paul.

I think you'd almost have to liken it to a Christian's disdain for the Las Vegas strip Or Bourbon St during Mardi Gras.

It was vile, it was sinful, and just the sight of it offended Paul.

**But what likely offended him more than any of it
Was the fact that people were giving God's glory to false gods.**

Isaiah 42:8 "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images."

Isaiah 48:11 "For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another."

You've probably heard before that

The Bible says that God is a **"jealous God"**

- **Some people have balked** at this since jealousy is also called a sin in the New Testament.
- **How can God command us not to be jealous** when the Scripture says that He is jealous?

There's one major difference between our jealousy and God's jealousy.

**We are jealous for and desire what we do not deserve.
God is jealous for what He does deserve.**

**The Bible tells you not to be jealous out of envy
Because you want something you don't have,
But God most certainly deserves all the glory and He demands it.**

He does not share His glory.

And Paul is provoked with jealousy for God

And he cannot be silent about it.

- So he went *into the synagogue* and started preaching to the Jews,
- And he went *into the market place* every day and started preaching to the people of Athens.
- He was stirring it up.

And that's when some of the philosophers showed up.

(18) "And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities," — because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection."

- We won't get into the beliefs of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers,
- It's enough for you to know that they took issue with Paul and thought him to be a buffoon.
- "What would this idle babbler wish to say?"
- "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities"

We are told it's because Paul "was preaching Jesus and the resurrection."

- Certainly then we know Paul was preaching that Jesus rose from the dead and thus He is the **conqueror of death and the Savior**.
- But later as Paul goes deeper into his sermon you'll find that he was also preaching Jesus' resurrection as an indicator that **He is God's righteous standard of judgment**.

So Paul wasn't just standing in that marketplace
Telling people they could have eternal life.
Paul was preaching about judgment
And God's standard of judgment who is Jesus.

It is also clear that these people had no clue what he was talking about.

- This notion of resurrection and judgment was all **new to them**.
- (20) "you are bringing some strange things to our ears."

So these philosophers took issue with Paul and they challenged him.

- And they took him to the "Areopagus" to have it out with him.

Don't misunderstand, they aren't interested.

- The "Areopagus" was the same place **Socrates** was condemned.
- No, their goal is to **debate** him and **humiliate** him.
- If you've ever watched **News** station TV where they bring in people just to expose and humiliate them...that's what is happening here.

So Paul is in this worldly city that doesn't know God and is full of idolatry.

He has irritated the pagan philosophers.
He has been called to explain himself before the city.

And Paul's sermon will have 2 main points.

- 1) GOD'S DISTINCTION (why He is different from all your other gods)
- 2) GOD'S DECLARATION (what He wants from you)

But it is fitting for us tonight to begin our weekend
By seeing what makes God different
From all the other "gods" in the world.

So let's look at this first point.

#1 GOD'S DISTINCTION

Acts 17:22-29

In short, Paul wants to show them the God they know nothing about.

(22-23) "So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you."

Paul nails them right off the bat.

- He **acknowledges their spirituality** "very religious"
- He **exposes their ignorance** "an altar...TO AN UNKNOWN GOD"

By their own admonition they don't know all the gods.
By their own admonition they are ignorant of certain deities.

And so Paul says, "Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you."

And with that Paul is about to give what makes the God of the Bible
Totally different and distinct from every other god.

Do you want to know how the God of the Bible is different from Allah?
Do you want to know how the God of the Bible is different from Buddha?
Do you want to know how the God of the Bible is different from the 750 Hindu gods?
Do you want to know how the God of the Bible is different from Greek mythology?
Do you want to know how the God of the Bible is different from Loki or Thor?

Well Paul is about to tell you.

He will give you 4 distinctions,
These are the things that set God apart.

1) HE IS CREATOR, NOT CREATED (24a)

"The God who made the world and all things in it..."

TURN BACK TO GENESIS 1

Genesis 1 may be the most important chapter in the Bible.

• learn many things about God from creation.
(power, grace, redemption, transcendence, faithfulness)

**But of most importance is that being Creator
Gives Him first place in everything.
He is the Potter, everything else is the clay.**

Let's just read the first 5 verses.

Everything you see was created by God.

Moses says **"the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep"**

- **"formless"** is **TOHU** it means **confusion**
- **"void"** is **BOHU** it means **emptiness**.

"the earth was TOHU and BOHU"

- But God gives order to chaos
- God gives purpose to emptiness
- God shines light into darkness

God redeems what is useless and broken.

You literally have redemption in the first 2 verses of the Bible.

And notice the power of God.

How did God create light? (and notice light came before the sun; day 4)

He told it come.

- And it is the same throughout creation. (3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29)
- **God's word is the power for new life.**

In just 6 days God alone created everything.

And the Bible is very quick to remind its readers of that.

Isaiah 45:12 "It is I who made the earth, and created man upon it. I stretched out the heavens with My hands And I ordained all their host."

Isaiah 45:5-7 "I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun That there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these."

Isaiah 40:26 "Lift up your eyes on high And see who has created these stars, The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power, Not one of them is missing."

God created everything.

- He is the first, there are none before Him.
- He was not created, He is eternal.
- He has no beginning and He has no end.

No other god can make such a claim.

Isaiah 44:6-8 "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me. 'Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it; Yes, let him recount it to Me in order, From the time that I established the ancient nation. And let them declare to them the things that are coming And the events that are going to take place. 'Do not tremble and do not be afraid; Have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, Or is there any other Rock? I know of none.'"

Jeremiah 10:11 "Thus you shall say to them, "The gods that did not make the heavens and the earth will perish from the earth and from under the heavens."

**Paul could look around Athens and every single one of their deities
Was first imagined in the human mind
And then chiseled out of rock with a human arm.**

They were all created.

They were all invented.

But not the God of the Bible.

He stands apart as the Creator of all things.

- He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.
- The One who formed you and the One who will judge you.

That makes Him distinct from every other god.

He is Creator, not created

2) HE IS SOVEREIGN, NOT DESTITUTE (24b-25)

"since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since Him Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;"

- Paul looked around at all those temples that filled Athens.
- And he looked at all those worshipers taking their offerings in in order provide for their deities.

*To this day you can see Hindus shoving food
In the mouths of their statues to "feed" their deities.*

And Paul notes how small and puny their gods are.

You couldn't fit the **"Lord of heaven and earth"** in one of those temples.
The God of the Bible couldn't cram His big toe into that place.

Matthew 5:34-35 "But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING."

You say, "But didn't God have a temple?"

- Yes, but have you ever heard from the man who built it?

Solomon *the first temple and here is what he said when he finished it.*
2 Chronicles 2:5-6 "The house which I am about to build will be great, for greater is our God than all the gods. "But who is able to build a house for Him, for the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain Him? So who am I, that I should build a house for Him, except to burn incense before Him?"

**Solomon knew God would never be able to fit in this temple,
It was just a ceremonial place where worship could occur.**

Listen to this description of God.

Isaiah 40:12 "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, And marked off the heavens by the span, And calculated the dust of the earth by the measure, And weighed the mountains in a balance And the hills in a pair of scales?"

How big is God?

He's bigger than anything the people of Athens could imagine.

**And He most certainly
Is NOT dependent on people to provide for His needs.**

He is not **"served by human hands, as though He needed anything."**

Psalms 50:10-12 "For every beast of the forest is Mine, The cattle on a thousand hills. "I know every bird of the mountains, And everything that moves in the field is Mine. "If I were hungry I would not tell you, For the world is Mine, and all it contains."

*I can assure this that God is not some needy god
Depending on you or me for His well-being.*

Isaiah 40:28-29 "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary, And to him who lacks might He increases power."

*God doesn't need you to feed Him
Or take care of Him or let Him take a nap.*

GOD IS NOT DESTITUTE, HE IS THE SOVEREIGN.

"He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things."

- When was the last time you gave a second thought to **making sure God had food to eat or water to drink?**
- When was the last time you gave a second thought to wondering **if God needed your protection?**

We don't do that for Him, He does that for His creation.

Matthew 10:29 "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father."

- *It is God who provides for you.*
- *It is God who is keeping your heart beating at this very moment.*
- *It is God who sends rain on the just and the unjust.*
- *It is God who keeps this earth in orbit.*
- *It is God who sustains life.*

**All of these other pathetic gods in Athens
Needed someone to take care of them, but not the true God.
He is sovereign and totally self-sufficient.**

*He is Creator, not created
He is Sovereign, not destitute*

3) HE IS INVOLVED, NOT INDIFFERENT (26-28)

"and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.'"

I hope you notice how involved God is in every aspect of your life.

Do you see that God created every human being?

(26) "He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth"

God created you.

Do you see that God determined when you would live and where you would live?

(26b) "having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation."

**God sovereignly determined you,
WHEN you would live, and WHERE you would live.**

Psalms 139:16 "Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them."

YOU ARE NOT AN ACCIDENT,

- *You were specifically designed by the Creator exactly as you are.*
- *He formed every part of you.*
- *He inserted you into life at His divine time.*
- *He planted right where He intended to put you.*

**You are not an afterthought to Him.
He is not indifferent to you.**

None of those false gods created you, or ordained your days, or knows your name (mostly because they aren't even real)

- *Allah doesn't know your name*
- *Buddha doesn't know who you are*
- *The Hindu gods have no clue what you're like*

**But the Bible says the God who created you
Knows the number of hairs on your head.**

THE TRUE G KNOWS EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU

- Every word you've spoken
- Every thought you've thought
- Every deed you've done

Psalms 139:1-6 "O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all. You have enclosed me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it."

He is intimately acquainted with you.
He is not distant and He is not aloof

But why would God make me like this?

Why would God put me where He put me?

- Why am I fat?
- Why am I skinny?
- Why am I slow?
- Why am I sickly?

Why did God make me like He made me and put me where He put me?

Do you want to see the answer?

(27) "that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him"

You were intricately designed, meticulously created,
Purposely placed for one overarching reason,
AND THAT IS THAT YOU WOULD SEEK GOD.

- You were created **to know Him.**
- You were created **to fellowship with Him.**
- You were created **to be an instrument of His glory.**

Everything about your life was perfectly ordained
So that you might know and glorify the God who created you.

1 Corinthians 8:6 "yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him."

You were created by God and for God.
You were created to seek Him.

And here is what is remarkable.

- You aren't just supposed to seek Him,
- You are supposed to **"find Him,**
- And we are told that **He is not far from each one of us;"**
- He is not distant.

We call it REVELATION

If it wasn't for God choosing to reveal Himself we could never know Him.

*We live inside of space and time, He lives outside of space and time.
If He didn't want you to know Him you couldn't.*

But God has chosen to reveal Himself.

God has chosen to let you find Him.

Things like creation:

Psalms 19:1 "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands."

Things like the Scripture:

Psalms 19:7 "The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple."

Things like Jesus:

John 1:18 "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him."

God wants you to know Him.

He has revealed Himself over and over and over.

It is why you were created.

You can't say that about false gods.

(they can't reveal anything)

Psalms 115:4-8 "Their idols are silver and gold, The work of man's hands. They have mouths, but they cannot speak; They have eyes, but they cannot see; They have ears, but they cannot hear; They have noses, but they cannot smell; They have hands, but they cannot feel; They have feet, but they cannot walk; They cannot make a sound with their throat. Those who make them will become like them, Everyone who trusts in them."

*There used to be a Chinese restaurant in Lubbock that had a big Buddha statue in the lobby. I went in there once and slapped that Buddha.
Do you know what he did? NOTHING*

They aren't real and they can't reveal themselves to you.

But God created you to know Him.

To seek Him
And to find Him

Matthew 7:7-8 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."

He is not some distant god that you cannot know.

He is involved in every detail of your life.

(28) "for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.'"

We are actually created in His image.

His distinctiveness over other gods?

He is Creator, not created- He is Sovereign, not destitute- He is Involved, not indifferent

4) HE IS LIVING, NOT DEAD (29)

"Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man."

And Paul now comes full circle.

**He could look around and see all these statues
Of carved idols and painted gods
And Paul says, the real God IS NOTHING LIKE ALL OF THESE!**

HE IS FAR ABOVE THEM ALL.

Isaiah 40:18-25 "To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him? As for the idol, a craftsman casts it, A goldsmith plates it with gold, And a silversmith fashions chains of silver. He who is too impoverished for such an offering Selects a tree that does not rot; He seeks out for himself a skillful craftsman To prepare an idol that will not totter. Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been declared to you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. He it is who reduces rulers to nothing, Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless. Scarcely have they been planted, Scarcely have they been sown, Scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth, But He merely blows on them, and they wither, And the storm carries them away like stubble. "To whom then will you liken Me That I would be his equal?" says the Holy One."

God asks, if you were to carve an image of Him what would it be?

Because whatever you pick would be a slap in the face to Him.

*Would you really compare God to an ox or an eagle or even a man?
Any image you make of Him is a tremendous insult to Him.*

He is higher than all of that!

Jeremiah 10:1-16 "Hear the word which the LORD speaks to you, O house of Israel. Thus says the LORD, "Do not learn the way of the nations, And do not be terrified by the signs of the heavens Although the nations are terrified by them; For the customs of the peoples are delusion; Because it is wood cut from the forest, The work of the hands of a craftsman with a cutting tool. "They decorate it with silver and with gold; They fasten it with nails and with hammers So that it will not totter. "Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field are they, And they cannot speak; They must be carried, Because they cannot walk! Do not fear them, For they can do no harm, Nor can they do any good." There is none like You, O LORD; You are great, and great is Your name in might. Who would not fear You, O King of the nations? Indeed it is Your due! For among all the wise men of the nations And in all their kingdoms, There is none like You. But they are altogether stupid and foolish In their discipline of delusion — their idol is wood! Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, And gold from Uphaz, The work of a craftsman and of the hands of a goldsmith; Violet and purple are their clothing; They are all the work of skilled men. But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, And the nations cannot endure His indignation. Thus you shall say to

them, "The gods that did not make the heavens and the earth will perish from the earth and from under the heavens." It is He who made the earth by His power, Who established the world by His wisdom; And by His understanding He has stretched out the heavens. When He utters His voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, And He causes the clouds to ascend from the end of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain, And brings out the wind from His storehouses. Every man is stupid, devoid of knowledge; Every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols; For his molten images are deceitful, And there is no breath in them. They are worthless, a work of mockery; In the time of their punishment they will perish. The portion of Jacob is not like these; For the Maker of all is He, And Israel is the tribe of His inheritance; The LORD of hosts is His name."

This is the real God.

**We could spend so much more time on every one of those realities,
But I simply tonight want to give you a brief picture of what we mean
When we say that GOD IS SOVEREIGN.**

He is the Creator

He is In control over all things

He is Involved in your life

He is Living and the source of life

And He refuses to give His glory to any other made up god.

- *He refuses to let some other god take credit for your life.*
- *He refuses to let some other god be the object of your worship.*

He created you to know Him and to worship Him.

**And I'll tell you that the biggest sin of humanity
Is that the creature (us) whom God formed out of the dirt,
Would dare to defy the God who created him.**

Romans 1:18-23 "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."

God demands glory from all of His creation, and that includes you.

**And since He is the God who created You,
And who is intimately acquainted with all your ways,
It is wise that you do so.**

Tonight I just want to begin by stretching your understanding of God.

- *He is not some secondary thought to your life.*
- *You were created by Him and for Him.*
- *Tonight for the first time perhaps you should consider that.*