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Series: Proverbs: Living Wisely in a Fallen World
Message: Our Great God

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I imagine most of you have heard the name Charles Spurgeon. He was called the prince of preachers. He was the best known preacher in England in the 19th century. He made this statement about the focus of our study this morning. He said, "No doctrine in the whole of mankind has more excited the hatred of mankind than the truth of the absolute sovereignty of God." So said Charles Spurgeon. I can't think honestly of a better way to look back on this decade and this year and look forward to 2020 and the whole decade that Lord willing is ahead of us, than to take time this morning as we open the book of Proverbs again in our series of Proverbs and look specifically at this matter of the sovereignty of God.

AW Tozer is the one who made that familiar statement, "What comes to our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." What comes to our mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us. He also went on to say, "History certainly shows us that no people, no civilization, no nation has ever risen above its religion and no religion has ever risen above its idea of God." The psalmist agrees. Psalm 115 says those who make idols become like them.

We open our Bibles to the book of Proverbs. If you've been with us for these months together you know that as we've gone through this book we have encountered week after week after week very practical, just simply down-to-earth truth and teaching and statements about life. One of the dangers, and we've talked about this before, is that it would be easy to conclude that these things that we've been learning are just that. They're just lessons from the school of life. Anybody could make observations like this. This is after all a life of hard knocks. This teaches you these things. This is practical earthly things. But if we take that view of the book of Proverbs in particular we really miss the whole point of the book. The whole point of the book is saying to us we need to align ourselves, we need to align our minds, we need to align our hearts with the

wisdom of God and the truth of God and the teaching of God. With that in mind then we step into these practical realities. We step into these lessons that life teaches us. But it really is God's school that we're in. It is not just a school of hard knocks. It's the school of life that God has matriculated all of us to be in and to be a part of. As we do that, then God's wisdom becomes the basis by which we make these life choices.

This morning we'll see that the foundation of skillful living begins with the knowledge of God. Fact number one that we're going to focus on is we need to know that God is sovereign. So let's start off by looking at three essential features, three essential truths related to the sovereignty of God. I want you to think of these literally has three foundation stones that we're going to lay as we build this doctrine from the book of Proverbs on the sovereignty of God. The first one is that God is omniscient. God is omniscient which simply means that God is all-knowing. He is all-knowing. Proverbs 15 verse 11: "Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the Lord. How much more the hearts of the children of man." You turn over a page to Proverbs 16 and verse 2: "All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes but the Lord weighs the spirit." And then over to Proverbs 21 and verse 2: "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes but the Lord weighs the heart." So the idea that God is omniscient, that He's all-knowing simply reminds us that God knows everything. He knows everything about us. He knows everything that we have ever done. He knows everything that we have ever said. He knows everything that we have thought about doing. He knows everything that we have thought about saying. He literally knows everything. He is an omniscient God. That's why someone has rightly observed that secret sin is open rebellion against God. We hide nothing from Him. We think we're doing something secretive something not known to God. It is as if we're out in the oval in front of our church announcing to the world what it is that we're doing. Such is the knowledge of God about each one of us. God's knowledge is perfect. It is exact. It's complete. That is one of the reasons why when we study the book of Proverbs, one of the life principles that is to guide us is that we are to be people of integrity. We're to be people who are open. We are to be people who are honest and transparent. Such is the teaching of the book of Proverbs because God knows everything.

Secondly, the second foundation stone is God is omnipresent. God is omnipresent which is simply to say God is always everywhere. Or we might say it this way. Everywhere is in the presence of God. God is everywhere present. We can never envision or imagine being out of the very presence of God because He is omnipresent. Listen to Proverbs chapter 5 and verse 21: "For a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord and He ponders all his paths." Back to chapter 15 and verse 3: "The eyes of the Lord are in every place keeping watch on the evil and the good." It is not possible to step outside of the presence of God. That's why the psalmist in that wonderful 139th Psalm is reflecting and thinking about this very truth about God, about the omnipresence of God. He says in that 7th verse: Where can I possibly go and flee from your presence? I remember if I go up in the highest heavens You're there. If I go to the lowest parts of the earth below, even there You are. So he's just reiterating and reminding us that God is omnipresent.

The third foundation stone for this doctrine of sovereignty is God is omnipotent. God is omnipotent. God is all-powerful. Question. True/false so you have 50-50 shot. God can do anything. True or false. God can do anything. It's about a 50-50 split in here in answer to that. I'm going to say God can do anything because those of you who said God can do anything I know what you were thinking. God can do anything that is compatible and in keeping with His character. That is what you were thinking. Those of you that said it was wrong I know what you were thinking. There are things that God cannot do. You're right. There are things that God cannot do. God cannot violate His own character. God cannot violate His word. God cannot let anybody in to His eternal presence apart from trust in Christ alone. So you'll all get a 100 on that first quiz of the last Sunday of the decade. It must conform with God's character because He is omnipotent. He is all-powerful. God can only do those things. So when we say he is omnipotent we're really saying God is free. He is self-existent. He is independent. He relies on nobody. I love this word. Theologians call it the aseity of God. It comes from the Latin phrase which means to be free and self. So He is free within Himself. There is nobody like God in that way. He is omnipotent. He relies on no one. So we go back to Proverbs chapter 3 and verse 19 and listen to what it says: "The Lord by wisdom founded the earth. By understanding He established the heavens. By His knowledge the

deeps broke open and the clouds dropped down the dew.” And then way back again in Proverbs 21 and verse 30 and 31: “No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lord. The horse is made for the day of battle but the victory belongs to the Lord.” There is no plan that can succeed outside of what God has determined. He has, according to Proverbs 3, he's the one who governs the universe that He made, that He called into existence. He is the all-powerful one. Remember Martin Luther in that wonderful hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is our God”. He unveils those different truths about this omniscient God, about this omnipresent God, about this omnipotent God. He brings into focus this cosmic battle that is going on between good and evil, between God and Satan. What does he say? One little word will fell him. That's all it takes from the all-powerful God. It is just one little word that would cause the enemy of God to fall. All of this points to the fact of God's sovereignty.

So let's look at the sovereignty of God that is revealed to us in Proverbs. We're going to start off by looking simply at the meaning of this phrase – the sovereignty of God. What do we mean when we talk about the sovereignty of God? We've laid the foundation stones. God is omniscient. God is omnipresent and God is all-powerful. So what about this the word itself? The word “sovereign” simply means supreme. It means He's the chief. It means He's the ruler. He's the highest of all authorities. I'm going to give you a four-word definition of the sovereignty of God. The fact that God is sovereign simply means God is in control. God is in control. When we talk about the sovereignty of God we mean that God is the one who is in control of this universe. All of these things that are happening within our universe, this vast universe that we have just scratched the surface in understanding what all is out there. God's holding it all together because He's omnipotent. It means that what's going on within our country, God is absolutely aware of and governing over. Within our own individual lives, God is the one who has ordained and is providentially at work and controlling. In this sense, in all of the details of our life nothing happens outside of the knowledge of God. Nothing happens outside of His presence. Nothing happens outside of His power. There is not one thing that has ever happened that takes Him by surprise. That's what I believe the book of Proverbs teaches. That's what I believe the Bible teaches.

Over the course of about the last 25 years, there's something called open theism. Open theism has honestly gained ground within evangelical circles such as our own. There are now those that are teaching and theologians who are pressing this truth about what it is that God knows at any given time. I think a part of what they're dealing with and struggling with is what we all deal with and what we all struggle with. Why do bad things happen to good people? This most pressing issue of evil and sin and bad things in our world has caused people at different times to press into areas that the Scriptures don't seem to agree with, at least in my opinion. So in trying to come up with some better answers, they have given us what is now called open theism, where God's exhausted knowledge does not include future free will choices by mankind because they have not yet occurred. In this view of God and of His sovereignty, they say God knows everything but He doesn't know everything about the future because He doesn't know what choices we're going to make. Again it brings together these hard things about free choice, free moral choice, free will. The answer, I believe, falls short.

The four main tenets of this view are that God is love. Again, you come back to this problem of evil and bad things and what we do with that. Well, they answer that by saying God can't have anything to do with those things because He is love. They stress the fact that man is free and his will is unaffected by the fall. That sounds a lot like Pelagian who said the same thing and went off on a very bad path. The third thing they say is God does not know the future. In that sense, they talk about the fact that God is a risk taker. Some of you men have read books by a guy who talks a lot about God being a risk taker. The very first time I read that I thought what does that even mean? God is a risk taker. How is it that the omniscient, all-knowing God, the ever present God, the all-powerful God – in what sense is He a risk taker? I could never put that together. He is not claiming open theism, but the language that he uses is if God is a risk taker He must not know what's coming. I don't think that's the case. And then finally they say that God learns. All of those things as I look at that deny the sovereignty of God. Proverbs says to us God is in control. God is in control of our universe. He is in control of what's happening within our world, our country, our individual lives.

Let's look at the extent of this. What is the extent of God's sovereignty? Let's look at a couple of things that Proverbs talks about when it brings this matter in a practical

way into our day-to-day experience. The first thing I want you to see that Proverbs says is God is sovereign over the plans of man. He is sovereign over the plans of man. The 19th chapter and verse 21: "Many are the plans in the mind of a man but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand." You have two contrasts here. You have the contrast of many. Many are the plans of man. Why are the plans of man many? Why do we have many plans? Why do we have plan A and plan B and maybe plan C? It's because we don't know the future. We don't know how things are going to unfold. Those of us who think about something that we want to do or some direction that we would like to go, we often times develop the mindset that says if that doesn't work we'll do this. And we do that because we simply do not know. Because our plans are uncertain and because they're subject to change and tentative, we have many. Look what it says in contrast. There is one plan of God. In fact, he says that in this way: "But it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand." It alone will stand. It exclusively will stand. It is absolute and it is final. Go over to the 16th chapter. The 16th chapter and verse 1: "The plans of the heart belong to man but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord." Verse 9: "The heart of man plans his way but the Lord establishes his steps."

I can't think of any example in all of Scripture that better illustrates this, and you're very familiar with it. The life of Joseph. This man's life is a picture of the providence of God and the sovereignty of God at work in an individual's life like we don't have very often in Scripture. We know that the providence of God is always at work but Joseph's life is elevated in particular to shine the spotlight on it. You know the story of his life. You know the conflict within his family. You know the hatred that developed with his brothers for him. You know their plan to do him harm. Throw him into the pit actually to kill him. That plan didn't work out. It was one of their plans. Plan B evidently unfolded and they sold him into Egypt as a slave. It is hard to fathom. We read these stories and they're so sanitized in our head. It's hard to fathom what it must've been like for this young man to be hated in this way by his brothers. He was literally sold as a slave and potentially could never see his parents or his family again. Yet you remember in that story as he stands there before his brothers, his heart having been changed by this very truth of God's sovereignty as he came to process it and understand it, was able to say to them you guys meant it for evil. For evil. You meant it for harm. God however meant

it for good. My friends, that's the answer to the struggle that we have a hard time wrapping our head around with regard to sin and evil and bad things happening to good people. It isn't open theism. The answer isn't to shrink God down to where we can manage Him so that He doesn't have all these conflicting problems that we can't understand. It's to allow God to be God as He has revealed Himself and we find our rightful place in submitting to His truth even when we can't understand it. That certainly was the case with Joseph who had to have come to a totally different perspective to be able to say that to his brothers.

It's the Westminster confession that says, "God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of His will freely and unchangeably ordain whatever comes to pass." All things are a part of his divine plan. God is always in control? God is always in control of everything? Scripture goes out of its way to say He is not the cause of sin. He is not the cause of evil. But within the sovereign work of God, He is in control of even bad things. Let me ask you. what is the most evil thing that humanity has ever perpetrated against humanity? The most evil thing. It is right before us visually this morning. Listen to what Peter said. This is so interesting. On the very first opportunity that Peter had to preach the gospel at the beginning of the church in the book of Acts on the day of Pentecost. Peter stood before that crowd of thousands and he said, "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him in your midst as you yourselves know – this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." The cross was not an accident. The cross was not a detour. The cross was the very determined will and purpose of God to bring about our salvation. The most heinous thing that has ever been done to another human, the perfect Son of God, Peter stood under the inspiration of the Spirit of God and spoke and said Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified ... There is that tension. You did it. You did it willfully. You did it without coercion. You did it, but still it was a part of God's plan.

Notice secondly, God is sovereign over the rulers of the world. God is sovereign over the rulers of the world. Proverbs 21:2 – "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it where ever He will." I know a lot of you have memorized

that verse. I know a lot of you turn to that verse on occasion just to be reminded. This is such a picturesque verse. It doesn't take a lot for our minds to think of a channel of water. We've all seen the channel of water get redirected or changed. God, being sovereign, being the omniscient one, being everywhere present, being omnipotent, the king's heart, the president's heart, the dictator's heart is like a stream of water in the hand of the Lord. He turns it. All you have to do is read the pages of Scripture to see that. The mighty kings all through the Scriptures did the bidding of God, did the purposes of God. That is why we're commanded to pray in 1 Timothy 2. Why do we pray for our leaders? Why do we pray for those in authority over us? Because their hearts are like a channel of water in the hands of a sovereign God.

I'll never forget 1992. I'll never forget that summer being in Russia, being in Eastern Europe just a relatively short time after they had come out from underneath the dominion of the USSR. I remember on one Sunday evening, this particular church where I was, was longer than ours – one center aisle and very long seating areas. I don't know how many people sat across each one. Twenty at least. One of the largest churches in the city of Kiev, and it was packed. It was just packed. People were standing along the walls. Some of these people had never seen Americans and so they were coming to see Americans for the first time. As I preached that night, the Lord directed me to Proverbs 21:1. I don't think I've ever forgotten the look on the faces of those people as they followed me in this teaching about the heart of the king being like a channel of water in the hands of God. They had lived it. They had experienced it. Some of these people had prayed for decades, for generations, for the day that they were now trying to understand and take in for the very first time in their life. And yet that is exactly the extent of the sovereignty of God.

Thirdly and lastly, God is sovereign over the details of life. Chapter 16 and verse 33: "The lot is cast into the lap but its every decision is from the Lord." Do you see what he's saying? Even things that times seem arbitrary, that seem insignificant, that seem without meaning, that we may not understand the significance of at that point at all. Even those things are under the absolute control of the sovereign God. What is one word that I have asked you to take out of your vocabulary many times? It starts with an L. Luck. There's no such thing as luck. We don't need to talk as Christians about good

luck or bad luck. We sure don't need to be knocking on wood. This happens to be metal but we sure don't need to be knocking on wood. What does that even mean? What are we saying when we talk that way, when we act that way? We're certainly not acknowledging that God is sovereign over the details of life. This is the way that Barnhouse understands this verse. "Men throw the dice but God makes the spots turn up." He's not talking about the gambling table here. He's probably talking about the urim and thummim that the high priest had within his breastplate that we don't fully understand. It had something to do with the casting of lots. We don't need to cast lots anymore. We have the Word of God. We have the Spirit of God. We have each other. All of these are of help. Next Sunday, Lord willing, we're going to look at wisdom and the will of God.

But let's close this morning with what we take away with regard to the doctrine of the sovereignty of God and how this looks in our daily lives. First of all, it should cause us to trust Him completely. If we really believe these things that Solomon and the writers of Proverbs have said about our God, our great God, then Proverbs 3:5-6. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths. We are making a choice every day. We either are walking this path of trust and this path of wisdom and the path of the wise, or

Secondly, if we really believe this truth of the sovereignty of God and we really take it to heart, it should get our attitude about this present world system right. It should get our attitude about this present world system right. If God is sovereign and He is, if He's in control and He is, if He has a goal for history and he does, then it says to us that goal is not going to be realized within the structure and the parameters of this present world system which is under the dominion and domination of the evil one. It calls us to further examine our life and to see what it is that the world is offering to us and how passionately are we pursuing that as opposed to pursuing the things of God. Our pursuit of the things of this world, if we give ourselves over to the things of this world, is just for a moment. It is just for the present moment. There is more to life than this world ever has to offer us. There is an eternity to be investing in and the book of Proverbs and the Word of God shows us how it is that we can build a life on the wisdom of God. That's what we would want to choose.

Lastly, to believe in the sovereignty of God and take it to heart in a very practical way means thirdly that it should motivate us to worship our great God. It should motivate us to worship our great God. We started off the study of Proverbs in the very first chapter the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. It is a fool who despises wisdom and instruction. It is the fear of the Lord that causes us to bow before the sovereign Lord, to worship Him, to acknowledge who He is, to find our rightful place of submitting to that Lordship every day, and to living our life for His glory. We're going to continue in that very theme right now. I'm going to pray and then we're going to sing and then we're going to give and then we're going to share in these elements of the bread and the cup. We're going to do it in the presence of an awesome, great and sovereign God who loves us so much that He gave His Son for us.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, thank You for this remarkable truth about Yourself, about who You are, about how You work in our lives. Lord, I pray that each one of us will reflect on this divine providence that is so orchestrated and defined and directed and determined where we are even on this Sunday morning. To see the hand of God on our life in such specific ways, Lord, as we look back and see Your faithfulness. We thank You for that. We submit ourselves to You, Father. Lord Jesus, thank You for Your love and dying on the cross. Holy Spirit, thank You for giving us these truths and impressing them upon our hearts and minds. We are forever grateful. In Jesus's name, Amen.