

# “Whatever God Ordains is Right”

(Isaiah 46:8-13)

## Introduction

- This year’s Summer Sermon Series – “Sing to the LORD” – is a continuation of last years. We are preaching a verse/passage of Scripture using the lyric from a biblical worship song as our theme. So far, this summer, we have preached on the following messages: “Afflicted Saint, to Christ Draw Near” (Psalm 69), “My Sin, Not in Part but the Whole” (Romans 8:1), “A Christian’s Daily Prayer” (Romans 12:1-2), and “His Mercy is More” (Lamentations 3:22-24).
- Two of those songs are relatively new [“A Christian’s Daily Prayer” (2017), “His Mercy is More” (2016)], and two are old [“Afflicted Saint, to Christ Draw Near” (1782), “It Is Well with My Soul” (1876)]. The hymn that I have chosen for today’s biblical message is very (very) old. The original hymn was written in 1675 by a German school master and poet Samuel Rodigast (1649-1708). Translated into English (1863), the hymn was titled: “Whate’er My God Ordains is Right.”

Whate’er my God ordains is right: His holy will abideth.  
I will be still whate’er He doth, and follow where He guideth.  
He is my God, though dark my road. He holds me that I shall not fall.  
And so to Him, I leave it all, He holds me that I shall not fall.

Whate’er my God ordains is right: He never will deceive me.  
He leads me by the proper path; I know He will not leave me.  
I take, content, what He hath sent. His hand can turn my griefs away,  
And patiently, I wait His day, His hand can turn my griefs away.

Whate’er my God ordains is right, though now this cup in drinking  
May bitter seem to my faint heart, I take it all, unshrinking.  
My God is true each morn anew. Sweet comfort yet shall fill my heart,  
And pain and sorrow shall depart, sweet comfort yet shall fill my heart.

Whate’er my God ordains is right. Here shall my stand be taken.  
Though sorrow, need, or death be mine, yet I am not forsaken.  
My Father’s care is ’round me there. He holds me that I shall not fall,  
And so to Him I leave it all, He holds me that I shall not fall.

Words: Samuel Rodigast (1675), tr. Catherine Winkworth (1863); Music: Jeff Bourque (arr. By Zack Stanton) © 2012 Manicotti Music

- The central doctrinal focus of this hymn is the sovereign providence of God. By simply definitions, God’s sovereignty is His supreme power (might) and authority (right) over all things (i.e., the “invincible reign” of God), and God’s providence is the execution of His will over all things (i.e., the “invisible hand” of God).

More specifically, this hymn declares the righteousness and goodness of God even in the face of human trials and sufferings. That, whatever God does is right (no matter how it may look, or how we might feel). This not only states that God does not make mistakes, but it also affirms that God is never unjust.

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*Divine sovereignty is the “invincible reign” of God – His supreme power and ultimate authority over all things.*

*Divine providence is the “invisible hand” of God – His sovereign act to oversee, sustain, control, direct and rule all things according to the counsel of His will and for the purpose of His glory.*

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- The doctrines of God's sovereignty and providence are possibly the most common ways God is attacked by non-Christians, and even professing Christians, today – especially in the wake of personal loss or human tragedy. When sufferings come, God is often accused of being unjust, unloving, and/or powerless.

To be sure, harmonizing God's sovereignty with human suffering can be a confounding, and painful, dilemma for Christians as well (especially in the midst of pain and grief). For the doctrines of God's sovereignty and providence teach that God is ultimately in control of all things. Therefore, it can be very challenging to accept this teaching in times of difficulty and tragedy. Failing to embrace this teaching has led many to doubt God, or no longer believe in (the biblical) God, or declare that they are mad at God.

- However, we must not view God through the lens of human suffering. Likewise, our understanding of God must not come from human reason or secular psychology. Our understanding of God must come from His own revelation – “general revelation” (the creation of the world) and “special revelation” (the inspiration of the Word).

God's sovereignty – and His governance, control, and rule over all creation – is clearly and repeatedly declared in the Bible (see Ps.115:3; Prov.19:21; Eph.1:11). The fact that God is holy and just, perfect in all His ways, is also clearly and repeatedly taught in Scripture (see Deut.32:4; Ps.100:5; Matt.5:48; Rom.9:14; Jms.1:17).

While God is certainly confounding to us; His Word is never incorrect or contradictory. We must understand that the infinite mind of God cannot fit into the human brain. God knows infinitely more than we do, He is infinitely more powerful than we are, and He is infinitely better than we could ever hope to be.

**Ps 145:3** ~ “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.”

**Isa 55:8-9** ~ “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. <sup>9</sup>For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

**Rom 11:33-36** ~ “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! <sup>34</sup>For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?’ <sup>35</sup>‘Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?’ <sup>36</sup>For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

- While there are many biblically passages/verses to which we could turn for the sermon this morning, on the topic of God's sovereign goodness, I have chosen for us to study Isaiah 46:8-13. The book of Isaiah was written by the prophet Isaiah (1:1). Isaiah, whose name means “Yahweh is salvation,” prophesied approximately 700 years before the birth of Christ (from 739-686 B.C.). He was a contemporary of the prophets Hosea and Micah.

The central theme of the book of Isaiah is God's redemptive plan to save His people – even though they were sinful, obstinate, idolatrous, and hypocritical – through, His Son, Jesus Christ. Throughout this book, Isaiah called God's people to repent and prophesied about the coming Messiah. Isaiah is quoted often in the New Testament, and particularly concerning the Messianic identity and authority of Jesus Christ [e.g., Matt.1:23 (Is.7:14); Matt.4:15 (Is.9:1-2); Matt.8:17 (Is.53:4); Matt.15:7-9 (Is.29:13); Acts 8:32 (Is.53:7); 1Pet.2:22 (Is.53:9); 1Pet.2:24 (Is.53:5)].

- As we turn to the forty-sixth chapter of Isaiah, we see God's promise to save His people from their Babylonian captivity, and ultimately from their sins – if they would repent of their sins and renounce their idolatry. Mocking two of the most prominent Babylonian idols [“*Bel*” (or Baal) and “*Nebo*”; vs.1], God declared that all false gods (idols) are powerless to save. In fact, they cannot even walk or talk, and they are created by man not the Creator of man.

**Isa 46:1-2** ~ “Bel bows down; Nebo stoops; their idols are on beasts and livestock; these things you carry are borne as burdens on weary beasts. <sup>2</sup>They stoop; they bow down together; they cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity.”

**Isa 46:3-4** ~ “Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; <sup>4</sup>even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.”

**Isa 46:5-7** ~ “To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike? <sup>6</sup>Those who lavish gold from the purse, and weigh out silver in the scales, hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; then they fall down and worship! <sup>7</sup>They lift it to their shoulders, they carry it, they set it in its place, and it stands there; it cannot move from its place. If one cries to it, it does not answer or save him from his trouble.”

**Isa 44:9-20** ~ “All who fashion idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit. Their witnesses neither see nor know, that they may be put to shame. <sup>10</sup>Who fashions a god or casts an idol that is profitable for nothing? <sup>11</sup>Behold, all his companions shall be put to shame, and the craftsmen are only human. Let them all assemble, let them stand forth. They shall be terrified; they shall be put to shame together.

<sup>12</sup>The ironsmith takes a cutting tool and works it over the coals. He fashions it with hammers and works it with his strong arm. He becomes hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water and is faint. <sup>13</sup>The carpenter stretches a line; he marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house. <sup>14</sup>He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. <sup>15</sup>Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. <sup>16</sup>Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, ‘Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!’ <sup>17</sup>And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, ‘Deliver me, for you are my god!’

<sup>18</sup>They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. <sup>19</sup>No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, ‘Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?’ <sup>20</sup>He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, ‘Is there not a lie in my right hand?’”

**Ps 115:4-8** ~ “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. <sup>5</sup>They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. <sup>6</sup>They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. <sup>7</sup>They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. <sup>8</sup>Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.”

**Rom 1:20-25** ~ “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup>For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup>Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup>and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. <sup>24</sup>Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup>because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.”

- While idolatry in America today does not often come in the form of wooden statues or figurines, it is just as foolish and damning. Simply put, idolatry is any and every kind of false worship. Idolatry is worshiping a false god. An idol is something you worship instead of, or in addition to, the one true God. It is anything that is more important to you than God. An idol is something that promises to give you security or identity apart from God, or something that, if you were to lose it, would rob life of its ultimate meaning and value.

Popular and prevalent idols in America today include secular worldviews, political ideologies, sexual perversity and immorality, drugs/alcohol and addiction, money and possessions, self-image and self-esteem, social status or renown, social media following/influence, power and authority, entertainment and fame.

- The passage before us this morning (Is.46:8-13) is essentially a summary argument regarding the futility and folly of idols, and that there is only one God – God is the only true God – there is no one (nothing) equal to God; no one who truly rivals God; no one who can hinder or halt God’s will; no one who can defeat or dethrone God.

It is important to note that this is God speaking through the prophet Isaiah. This is God’s own self-declaration, His own self-disclosure, His own words.

**Isa 46:8-13** ~ “Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, <sup>9</sup>remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, <sup>10</sup>declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ <sup>11</sup>calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it. <sup>12</sup>Listen to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from righteousness: <sup>13</sup>I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory.”

- This passage highlights three glorious (marvelous) and unique (matchless) aspects of God’s deity.

## 1. God alone is **God** (vs.8-9)

- This passage starts off with a series of four commands (imperative verbs): “*Remember* [zākar] ... *stand firm* [ʾiš] ... *recall it* [šûb] ... *remember* [zākar]” (vs.8-9 [also “listen”; vs.3, 12; šāma]). All of these commands are directing the sinner – “*you transgressors*” (peša‘ [wrongdoer, lawbreaker]; vs.8) – to remember who God is and to (consequently) repent of their sins. Specifically, through the prophet Isaiah, God is speaking not to irreligious pagans (unbelievers) but to those (Israelites, 1:1) who profess to know Him as God, and yet continue to practice immorality and idolatry.

Today, such people are called “carnal Christians.” While they call themselves Christians (when it’s safe or convenient, or when they are in need), they live like non-Christians. Such people often (like the Israelites) consider themselves religious, but they are actively sinning against God and effectively standing in the crosshairs of God’s judgment/discipline.

**Matt 15:7-9** ~ “You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: <sup>8</sup>‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; <sup>9</sup>in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’” (Is.29:13)

- God commands that we repent of our sinful lives, and truly worship Him alone as God. Notice that God described Himself in two similar yet distinct ways: “*for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me*” (vs.9). First, “*God*” (ʾēl) is the only true God (“*there is no other*”). Second, even among the other (false) “gods”, “*God*” (ʾelōhîm) is unique (“*none like me*”).

These truths are repeated by God throughout the book of Isaiah, and the Bible. Here is just a small sampling:

**Isa 44:6** ~ “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.’”

**Isa 45:5-7** ~ “I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, <sup>6</sup>that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. <sup>7</sup>I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things.”

**Isa 45:18** ~ “For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): ‘I am the Lord, and there is no other.’”

**Isa 45:21-22** ~ “Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me. <sup>22</sup>Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.”

**Isa 46:5** ~ “To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike?”

**Ex 15:11** ~ “Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?”

**Ps 33:8-11** ~ “Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! <sup>9</sup>For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm. <sup>10</sup>The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. <sup>11</sup>The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.”

**Mark 12:29-33** ~ “Jesus answered, ‘The most important [commandment] is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. <sup>30</sup>And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength [Deut.6:4-5].’ ... <sup>32</sup>And the scribe said to him, ‘You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him.’”

- God alone is God! He alone is self-existent; He alone is self-sufficient; He alone is eternal; He alone is infinite; He alone is holy; He alone is the Creator. God had no beginning, and He will have no end. Outside of His own divine nature and character, He has no limits. God is gloriously transcendent above, and distinct from, all creation. As He Himself declared: *“I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me”* (vs.9).

## 2. God alone is sovereign (vs.10-11)

- A second glorious and matchless aspect of God’s deity is that God alone is sovereign. Part of God’s God-ness is His sovereignty. In fact, if God were not sovereign He would not (could not) be God. As we have seen, God’s sovereignty can be defined as “His supreme power and absolute authority over all things.” That is, God’s right and might to rule over all His creation.

There are no rogue molecules in all of God’s creation; there is nothing in creation that determines or informs God’s will. God (“the Potter”) never receives counsel from His creation (“the clay”), He never depends on His creation for anything (Acts 17:24-25), God is never concerned with human “opinion polls” or “popularity surveys.”

- ✓ **Illust:** “Being infinitely elevated above the highest creature, He is the Most High, Lord of heaven and earth. Subject to none, influenced by none, absolutely independent; God does as He pleases, only as He pleases, always as He pleases. None can thwart Him, none can hinder Him. ... divine sovereignty means that God is God in fact, as well as in name, that He is on the Throne of the universe, directing all things, working all things ‘after the counsel of His own will’ (Eph.1:11)” (A.W. Pink; *The Attributes of God*; ch.6, “The sovereignty of God”).

➤ In Isaiah 46:10-11, we read God's declaration of His own sovereignty: *"declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' <sup>11</sup>calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it"* (vs.10-11).

These verses declare God's omniscience ("all knowledge") and His omnipotence ("all power"). God does not just know the future, He creates and controls the future. He knows *"the end from the beginning"* (vs.10) and will *"bring ... to pass"* all that He has *"purposed"* (vs.11; *yāṣar*, or "formed or fashioned" [see *"potter"*; Jer.18:2, 3, 4<sup>2x</sup>, 6<sup>2x</sup>). Since God is the Creator of all things, nothing in creation is equal to or greater than He. He is not at all dependent upon creation to exist, nor is He in any way dependent upon creation to execute His sovereign will.

All creation is subject to God's sovereign *"counsel"* (vs.10 and 11; *ēṣā* or "plan"), which refers to God's knowledge and guidance. In addition, all creation is subject to God's sovereign *"purpose"* (vs.10; *hāpēš*; or "pleasure"), which refers to His will or desires.

Notice that God is not a "knowledgeable audience member" of humanity (like someone watching a movie they've seen a dozen times). He does not passively watch history unfold ("looking down the corridors of the future") – He actively ordains it! He not only declares what is to happen, but commands and governs what happens. God not only predicts the future, He determines the future. Nothing happens apart from God's governance, nothing happens outside of God's sovereign will, and nothing happens that will not ultimately bring God glory. *"... I will accomplish all my purpose ... I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it"* (vs.10-11).

**Ps 115:3** ~ "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases [*hāpēš*; Is.46:10 "purpose"]."

**Prov 19:21** ~ "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose [*ēṣā*; Is.46:10, 11 "counsel"] of the Lord that will stand."

**Dan 4:34-35** ~ "At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; <sup>35</sup>all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?'"

➤ The working of God's sovereignty is called providence – the execution of His sovereign will over all His creation. God's providence is the action of God's providing for and governing over all things, according to His will and for His glory. God's providence is not merely His omniscience or His foreknowledge. It describes His working out His sovereign will over all His creation. Some people foolishly object by saying, "God does not intervene in human affairs" or "God would never interfere with my 'free will.'" Try telling that to Noah, or Jonah, or Uzzah, or Pharaoh, or the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, or Jeremiah, or Paul, or Judas! There are seemingly countless examples of God "intervening" or "interfering" with mankind.

✓ Illust: "It's important to see that this 'providence,' this 'providing for,' isn't merely God's *reaction* to our ever-changing needs. It's more than that. Our word *providence* comes from the Greek *pronoia*, which means "forethought," and also the Latin *providentia*, which means "to provide *beforehand*." The word *providence*, then, conveys the idea that when God provides for us, it's because He already knows what we need – far, far in advance of it happening in time. He has already ordered things accordingly. When Jesus says, 'Your Father knows what you need before you ask him,' He doesn't mean, 'Your Father reads your mind as soon as you think it.' No, the Father's knowledge of you – the entire span of your life, all that will happen within it, and all that you will need – is something He has *always* known" (Barry Cooper; Ligonier podcast: "Providence"; April 11, 2023).



- The concept of human “free will” is not found in Scripture. To be sure, as humans are volitional creatures, with a heart and mind and the ability to make choices – and we are culpable for the choices we make. But our “wills” never operate “free” (outside or independent) from God’s sovereign will.
- ✓ Illust: “Man passes from one master to another, but he is always in subjection. Free will I have often heard of, but I have never seen it. I have met with will, and plenty of it, but it has either been led captive by sin or held in blessed bonds of grace” (Charles Spurgeon; sermon: “Our Change of Masters” July 6, 1879).
- Often incomprehensible to our human brains, God sovereignly works in and through human choices (but He never, to any degree, relinquishes His sovereignty). Nothing falls outside of the realm of God’s sovereignty. For God works all things – even sinful/evil things – into conformity to His sovereign plan and according to His sovereign will. This is most profoundly on display – as “the ultimate act of divine Providence” – in Jesus’ sacrificial and substitutionary death on the cross.

**Acts 2:22-23** ~ “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 – <sup>23</sup>this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite [*horizō*] plan [*boulē*] and foreknowledge [*prognōsis*] of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”

**Acts 4:24-29** ~ “And when they [the believers] heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, ‘Sovereign Lord [*despotēs*], who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them ... <sup>27</sup>for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed [*Christos*], both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, <sup>28</sup>to do whatever your hand and your plan [*boulē*] had predestined [*proorizō*] to take place.’”

**Gen 50:20** ~ “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”

**Rom 8:28-30** ~ “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup>For those whom he foreknew [*proginōskō*] he also predestined [*proorizō*] to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup>And those whom he predestined [*proorizō*] he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

**Eph 1:3-5** ~ “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup>even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup>he predestined [*proorizō*] us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose [*eudokia*; pleasure] of his will ... <sup>11</sup>In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined [*proorizō*] according to the purpose [*prothesis*] of him who works all things according to the counsel [*boulē*; plan] of his will”

- Whether it be “*a bird of prey from the east*” or “*the man ... from a far country*” (vs.11), God orchestrates and executes all things in conformity to His will: “*... I will accomplish all my purpose ... I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it*” (vs.10-11).

### 3. God alone is good (vs.12-13)

- A third glorious and matchless aspect of God’s deity is that God alone is good. We are “*far from righteousness*” (vs.12) and God’s “*righteousness*” (vs.13) is absolute. God has no flaws, no imperfections, no deficiencies, no weaknesses. He is infinitely and eternally good.

**Luke 18:18-19** ~ “And a ruler asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ <sup>19</sup>And Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.’”

**Matt 5:48** ~ “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

- As we have seen many times in recent sermons, since the fall of Adam (Gen.3), there is nothing inherently good in a human being. The Bible reveals that we are sinful from birth (Ps.51:5), sinful to the core (Jer.17:9), spiritually dead (Eph.2:1), and justly condemned by God (Eph.2:3). We sin because we are sinners (Rom.5:12).

**Rom 3:9-12, 23** ~ “What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,<sup>10</sup> as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup>no one understands; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup>All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one’ [cited from Ps.14:1-3; 53:1-3]. ... <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”

**1 John 1:8, 10** ~ “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ... <sup>10</sup>If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

- This is abundantly clear in how God referred to the Israelites, and “us” by extension. Remember, in verse eight, God called them “*transgressors*” (vs.8; *peša* ) which could literally be translated “wrongdoer” or “lawbreaker” (see Rom.2:23; Jms.2:10-11). It describes those who are in rebellion against God (see “*rebelled*”; Is.1:2; Rom.5:10; 8:7). As we have seen, Scripture describes every human as a sinner (other than Jesus; 2Cor.5:21; 1Jn.3:5).

In verse twelve, God referred to sinners as those who are “*stubborn of heart*” (vs.12; *’abbiyr leb*) and those “*who are far from righteousness*” (vs.12; *rachowq tsâdaqah*). Both of these are vivid expressions of our sinfulness. The sinner rebels against God and transgresses His law, because they are hardhearted and utterly depraved. We have no heart for God (Is.29:13; Ezek.36:26, “*heart of stone*”), not heart of contrition, and – humanly speaking – no hope of salvation.

As sinners, we are not even remotely close to God’s righteousness. Contrary to popular belief, humans are not basically (mostly) good. While we may not be as sinful as we can be, we are completely sinful (Is.59:2; 64:6; Rom.3:23).

- Apart from God’s salvific grace and mercy, everyone is justly condemned as sinners. For God is completely and infinitely righteous. His “*righteousness*” (vs.13; *tsâdaqah*) refers to His absolute moral (holy) perfection. As “*the Holy One*”, God is without sin (Hab.1:13) and always acts/judges justly (2Tim.4:8). This is one reason we, as sinners, are under God’s condemnation and wrath. For He is absolutely righteous – holy in character and conduct – and we are utterly unrighteous. The chasm between us and God could not be greater. If God did not intervene, we all would be justly and eternally condemned by God as sinners.
- Thankfully – in addition to being holy, righteous, and just – God is also gracious, merciful, and loving: “*I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory*” (vs.13). He has promised to save all those who belong to Him – for all those who (by faith) receive His one and only Son as their one and only Savior.

The glorious message of the Gospel is that through the sacrificial and substitutionary death of His Son, Jesus Christ (see Rom.5:8; 6:23), God has brought those (we) who were “*far from righteousness*” (vs.12) into “*[His] righteousness*” (vs.13).

**Isa 53:5-6** ~ “But he was pierced for our transgressions [n., *pesha*’; cf. Is.46:8]; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup>All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

**Isa 53:12** ~ “Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors [vb., *peša*’; cf. Is.46:8]; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors [vb., *peša*’; cf. Is.46:8].”

**Rom 5:1** ~ “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”



**Rom 8:1** ~ “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

**2 Cor 5:21** ~ “For our sake [God] made [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

➤ Notice that God’s righteousness *“is not far off”* (vs.13; *lo’ rachaq*) and His salvation *“will not delay”* (vs.13; *lo’ ’achar*). All one has to do to be saved is truly put their faith in Jesus Christ – to receive Him as your only Lord and Savior. God’s righteousness – His salvation – cannot be earned, it can only be received. No matter how much you have sinned, or how long you have been a sinner, God’s saving grace is sufficient to save. No matter how many steps you have taken away from God, it only takes one step to return to Him!

**Ps 103:12** ~ “as far [*rahaq*] as the east is from the west, so far [*rahaq*] does he remove our transgressions [*pasha*] from us.”

**Eph 2:5, 8-9** ~ “even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – <sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup>not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (see Gal.2:16; Tit.3:5; 2Tim.1:9)

**2 Cor 6:2** ~ “... Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

**John 3:16** ~ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

## Conclusion

➤ Since we know that God alone is God, that God alone is sovereign, and that God alone is good, we can be assured that whatever God ordains is right. No matter the heartache or suffering we endure in this life – no matter how “dark the road”, no matter the “griefs” we endure, no matter how “bitter the cup” – as believers, we know that God will never forget nor forsake us (Matt.28:20; Heb.13:5). We know that His promises are true, His plan is invincible, and His salvation secure.

Whate'er my God ordains is right: His holy will abideth.  
I will be still whate'er He doth, and follow where He guideth.  
He is my God, though dark my road. He holds me that I shall not fall.  
And so to Him, I leave it all, He holds me that I shall not fall.

Whate'er my God ordains is right: He never will deceive me.  
He leads me by the proper path; I know He will not leave me.  
I take, content, what He hath sent. His hand can turn my griefs away,  
And patiently, I wait His day, His hand can turn my griefs away.

Whate'er my God ordains is right, though now this cup in drinking  
May bitter seem to my faint heart, I take it all, unshrinking.  
My God is true each morn anew. Sweet comfort yet shall fill my heart,  
And pain and sorrow shall depart, sweet comfort yet shall fill my heart.

Whate'er my God ordains is right. Here shall my stand be taken.  
Though sorrow, need, or death be mine, yet I am not forsaken.  
My Father's care is 'round me there. He holds me that I shall not fall,  
And so to Him I leave it all, He holds me that I shall not fall.

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