

4 Disruptive Questions

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 January 2015

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] Well, last week we began a short study on this book, which is called Spectacular Sins and Their Global Purpose in the Glory of Christ.

To enjoy Him forever, the shorter catechism, number one. So that's the chief end of man, and here's a question that needs to go right along with that one.

And it's probably one, well, it's not in the catechism. What is the chief end of God? Yeah, to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

To glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. That's what God is after in every situation in all of history. And He wants to not only exalt His name, but He wants others and Himself to enjoy His glory.

Now, here's a third question. And this one is not, this is one that you're going to need to think out loud more. What does it mean to glorify someone? What does it mean to, what's my chief end?

[1:25] It's to glorify God. Well, what does that mean? Dale. To make Him look big. I like that. We want to make Him look big. Dad.

To praise Him. To praise Him. To speak well of Him. Jim. To tell others what He's done for us. To tell others what He's done for us.

Anyone else? Steve. To treasure Him. To treasure Him. Someone over here? Jackie. I think the children's catechism might say, for a child, for us to glorify Him, it's to love and obey Him.

Yeah. To love and obey Him. How can I glorify God? By loving Him and doing what He commands. What else? Yes, Kim.

Yeah, to put Him above us. To exalt Him. Very good. Now, some of you hit on it. Not all of the time, but a lot of the time, much of the time, glorify, when we glorify someone or something, it assumes that there's an audience to that glorification.

[2:42] Dale said, we want to make Him look big. Well, we want to make Him look big to others. So, when I go to work, I want to glorify God.

Well, that assumes that other people are watching. And what I want to do is raise their estimation of who God is. So, there's not all of the time, but a lot of the time, we want others to praise and exalt and make God look and feel good and big to people.

So, again, that's not all of the time, but a lot of the time, when it means to glorify God, it means to exalt Him in front of others. Now, that's what God is doing in history.

That's what God is doing in history. That's His chief end. His goal, His aim, His constant end that He wants to do is to make other people, or to make people, feel the bigness, the goodness, the glory of God.

His excellencies, His greatness, His goodness, His beauty, His majesty, His holiness. So, not only to say it, but to say it in such a way that people, in their hearts, elevate God.

[3:59] He wants His glory to weigh upon people's hearts so that they not only see, but they rejoice in it. Now, that's what God is doing in history. And the point of this Sunday School series is to see that God uses sin, and not just small sins, spectacular sins, big sins, to bring about the glory of Jesus Christ.

So, terrible sins. They don't derail God from His plan. They're the very means He uses to glorify His Son. So, the things that would seem to be the opposite, and on the face, they are the opposite of the glory of God.

God is able in His wisdom and His power in order to turn them to the very glory of His Son. So, last week we saw why this study. It has a very practical purpose.

It's to give us faith, to strengthen us, when we are experiencing terrible sin, when sin is rampant.

So, today's lesson, I've entitled, Four Disrupting Questions. Four Disrupting Questions. And today's lesson, you're going to get the questions.

[5:17] And the rest of the series, you're going to, hopefully, start to wrestle with and come to some of the answers. And so, if you don't go away from this Sunday School lesson so deeply satisfied that all these questions have been answered, that's the way it's designed to be.

We want to start gearing you up, you know, so you warm up your car on a winter's day before you get in it. Well, today we're warming up the engine so that you can start thinking through these big questions.

And they're questions that we all have and that this series is designed in some way to begin to answer. They're not going to answer in every way, but it's going to begin to answer them.

Now, four disrupting questions. And what I mean is they shake us out of our complacency. Out of our, well, everything's good and I don't have any problems, that sort of thing.

They make us think. They make us struggle in ways that we otherwise wouldn't struggle. And they're good. They're hard, but they're good questions.

[6:17] They make us think in new ways. They force us to look deeper into God's word. They shape our minds so that as we sing that song, so that we can grasp the heights he has planned, God plans for us.

So let me give you these four questions and then we're going to look at each one in turn. So the four questions are, why does God want us to know his sovereignty over sin? Two, why does God not restrain sin more often?

Three, how can we have faith in the severity of the last days? Four, how is Christ glorified in a world of sin, in this world that we live in?

Now, let me tell you that we aren't asking these questions so much from an intellectual perspective. These kinds of questions don't just pose an intellectual problem for us.

They're gut-wrenching questions. They're questions that we ask in fear, in uncertainty, in pain. They are uncomfortable, disrupting questions.

[7:31] But they're good. They force us to grow. They're like lifting weights. So the whole premise of weight lifting is to force your muscles to grow because you're breaking them down.

You're putting them to more use than they're accustomed to. And so you have to disrupt the muscle and make it hurt in order to make it grow.

If you don't hurt it in some way and put it under some stress, it's not going to grow. Or these questions, or you can think about it another way.

They're like your immune system. My grandmother was a junior high English teacher for 30 years. And her first year on the job, she used all of her sick days.

She used all of her personal days. And she was even sick besides that because she was sick just all the time her first year. Why?

[8:30] Because she was getting exposed to hundreds of germs that she had never been exposed to in her life. And the result was she was just sick a lot. Fast forward to the end after 25 or 30 years and her retirement.

And now she has so many sick days and so many personal days piled up, saved up, that when it came time for her to retire, she had a whole year's salary waiting for her at the end.

And they wrote her a big check because you never got sick anymore after a while. Well, her body had to grow, to adapt, to change, to deal with the reality that she was living in.

And it did. So the same way, these questions are painful ones. They force us to grow, but they're good ones. They're good because they do. They force us to grow and they change the landscape of our minds and of our hearts.

So let's get into the four questions. One, why does God want us to know that he is sovereign? Why does God want us to know his sovereignty over sin?

[9:39] So let me ask you another catechism question. This is one that we just had a Sunday school lesson on, our series on, not so long ago.

And the question is, what is providence? Does anyone remember what providence is? God's sovereign control over all his people and all our actions all the time. Yeah.

It's even a little broader than that. It's God's most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all of his creatures. Not just all of his people.

All of his creatures and all of their actions. So let me ask you, does that providence, does that sovereignty extend to his creatures' sinful actions?

What do you say? Yes. Now, do you feel that in a certain way we've got to deal with that? It's a bit of a problem. How do we include God's, how is God sovereign over his creatures' sinful actions? [10:41] In some unfathomable way, he governs the sinful acts of men and of demons. And we know that God himself never sins. And he never can tempt anyone to sin.

He never does anything evil or unholy. The Bible is clear about that. God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. Or God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one.

We could say he loves righteousness and justice. He hates wickedness. And he's never forced to do anything wicked.

None of that is up for grabs. He's holy and he's eternally without sin. But then, on the other hand, the Bible tells us that God is sovereign over the sinful actions of his creatures.

He's sovereign over sin. And you see, that's a hard question. And this morning, we're not asking, well, how do you put those two things together? Because in some sense, we don't know how they fit together.

[11:44] Those are two lines that cross outside of the box of our understanding. They fit within God's understanding. And God knows how it works. But in some ways, I don't think we would ever know how they come together.

And so we're not asking really how they go together. I'm asking here, why does God tell us that he's sovereign over sin? Over his creature's sin. And in some way, that confuses things.

It doesn't make things easier. It would be easier if he was just saying, no, he's not sovereign over it. Or the alternative. Well, why does he say things like that?

We want to look at 2 Chronicles. Turn in your Bibles to 2 Chronicles 10. And so we're going to look at three pictures, incidences, of God showing that he really, indeed, in an unfathomable way, is sovereign over sin.

Sin. So 2 Chronicles 10. Now you see from the heading, if you have the NIV anyways, it says, Israel rebels against Rehoboam.

[12:56] Israel rebels against Rehoboam. Solomon's son Rehoboam is on the throne. And this happens right after Solomon dies and Rehoboam takes the throne.

And a group of men come to him. And you remember this story. Or maybe you do. Look at verse 4. Your father put a heavy yoke on us.

These men come to Rehoboam. But now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us. And we will serve you. Well, do you remember what happened next?

Anyone? Those advisors told him to make it heavier. Yeah. So the young advisors say, or he goes to the old advisors, the old advisors say, make it lighter.

Make it easier on these people. And he doesn't listen to them. Instead, he listens to the advice of the young men. He asks his buddies who he grew up with, is what it says. He went to the men that he grew up with.

[13:57] So they're his peers. And they say, tell him, you thought it was bad with my dad. You ain't seen nothing yet. In other words. So why did Rehoboam do that?

How would you answer that question? Why did he do that? He's a fool. Isn't that, I mean, wouldn't that be part of the answer?

He's foolish. He was an arrogant fool. And if you said that, that would be absolutely true. But then, now go down to verse 15. So the king did not listen to the people.

For this turn of events was from God. To fulfill the word the Lord had spoken to Jeroboam, son of Nebat, through Ahijah, the Shilonite.

Rehoboam was a fool. And we can take our children to this passage and say, look at what happens when you listen just to your peers.

[15:02] And you don't take the advice of those who are wiser and older. And that would be absolutely true. But there's something else going on here.

And this is what the passage points us to. God is carrying out his purposes. He had promised Jeroboam a throne and a kingdom.

And now he's bringing it about. Rehoboam is a fool. But the ultimate answer behind this sinful folly is in some way this turn of events was from God.

God is sovereign over sin. He's not responsible. He's not the author of sin is what we say. But this turn of events was from God.

Now turn over to chapter 18. 2 Chronicles chapter 18. We see a second picture of this truth. This is many years later.

[16:02] Ahab, king of the northern tribes, has made an alliance with Jehoshaphat, the king of the southern tribes. That they'll go to war together against Syria.

So this is their plan. And before they go, they seek counsel from the prophets. And 400 prophets counsel them to go, for God will give it into the king's hand.

And Jehoshaphat looks around and says, Well, there isn't one prophet of Yahweh around here, of the Lord around here that we can ask. Isn't there one from the Lord that we can ask? Well, and Ahab says, well, I don't like him because he never prophesies anything good about me.

And Jehoshaphat says, well, don't say that. I like that. Don't say that. So they call them Micaiah. And this one true prophet tells them what had happened.

He gave them an insight into heaven. He rolled back the clouds, the veil, the curtain is thrown back. And we get to see something of the goings-on in heaven.

[17:12] Now look at verse 18. So we're in chapter 18 and verse 18. Micaiah continued, Therefore, hear the word of the Lord.

I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing on his right and on his left. So you have the picture. God is sitting on his throne. The angels are all around him.

And the Lord said, Who will entice Ahab, king of Israel, into attacking Ramoth-Gilead and going to his death there?

One suggested this and another that. Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the Lord and said, I will entice him. By what means?

The Lord asked. I will go and be a lying spirit in the mouths of his prophets, he said. You will succeed in enticing him, said the Lord. Go and do it.

[18:10] So now the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouths of these prophets of yours. The Lord has decreed disaster for you. So again, from the earthly perspective, without this insight into heaven, why did the prophets give false and destructive counsel to King Ahab?

To get the pleasure of the king. They were man-pleasers. They did it because the king liked to hear good things. So I'll give you good things to hear. They're no different than prosperity gospel preachers.

People like to hear about health and wealth and prosperity. So they tell them about health and wealth and prosperity. It's a great gospel for these people because it's exactly what they want to hear. But there are layers of answers, aren't there?

2 Chronicles gives us the ultimate answer. The Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouths of these prophets of yours. The Lord has decreed disaster for you.

And we scratch our heads and say, How does that work? And why are you telling me that? What do I do with that?

[19:30] Again, no answers today. Just questions. You see a third picture of God's sovereignty over sin in 2 Chronicles 25. So turn seven chapters over to 2 Chronicles 25.

And the historical background of this is that Amaziah, the king in the south, has just had this great victory against Edom.

So Edom, they just went to battle against them. They had this great victory against the Edomites.

And what happened was the victory went to his head. And he thought, Wow, I'm a stump here.

I've got this under control. And at the peak of this wave, of this great feeling of, I can do anything, he turns his eyes to the north. And he looks at the north and says, You know what?

With this great power, I can unite these two kingdoms together. And we'll bring this kingdom back.

And so he goes off to war against Jehoash, the king of Israel. So he thinks, I'm at the peak of my power.

[20:36] Now I can finally unite the kingdom. And I'll take over the kingdom of the north. So he's going to go fight the king of Israel. And Jehoash says, Whoa. Whoa, big fella.

You're getting ahead of yourself. You're getting a little too big for your britches. And look at verse 19. You say to yourself, Verse 19. You say to yourself, You have defeated Edom.

And now you are arrogant and proud. But stay at home. Why ask for trouble and cause your own downfall and that of Judah also? So you get the picture.

Bremen has just beaten Knox in football. And now they turn their eyes to Penn and they say, We will take them. And of course, the Penn, whatever.

Athletic director says, No, you don't fit on our schedule. Please stay at home. Verse 20. Amaziah, however, would not listen.

[21:41] For God had so worked that he might hand them over to Jehoash because they sought the gods of Edom. So Judah attacked Israel in the north and Israel routed them.

And they broke down the walls of Jerusalem and they humiliated the king. See, Amaziah is warned. Not just by the king, but by the prophets. He's warned multiple times.

We didn't read it all. You can read it on your own. He's warned multiple times and he won't give it up. He won't humble himself and stop picking a fight. Why?

Again, there's layers of answers. He's puffed up. He was a fool. But again, the chronicler gives us the ultimate answer.

God so worked that he might hand him over to Jehoash. God was sovereign over the sinful actions and these proud actions of this king.

[22:48] So that's the first question. Why does God tell us these things? Why does the Bible make us wrestle with this hard question? He is holy.

He is righteous. He hates wickedness. He does not sin. He cannot sin. But again and again, we see that God is at work in it.

And he uses it. And it serves his ultimate purposes. Well, that puts us in a real tension, doesn't it? That puts weights in our hands and says, no, you've got to lift them. Get to work. That's the first question. The second disrupting question. And they're all shorter after this.

Why does God not restrain sin more often? Why does God not restrain sin more often? I think this is the one that torments me the most.

[23:51] And you ask, why? Why did that happen? So this week we saw in France, 12 people murdered. At the newspaper.

And then several more people were killed in the hostage situation that followed. And we ask, why didn't God keep that from happening?

They could have had a flat tire on the way. I've had flat tires on my way to work, doing something good. Why couldn't they have a flat tire on their way to doing something bad?

He could have made them devastatingly sick and stopped them. He could have had someone there. He could have had someone there at the newspaper, rough, tough, ready, and armed to meet them before they started shooting.

Providence says he governs all his creatures and all their actions all the time. Why didn't he stop them? Why didn't he restrain them? Maybe you read about that girl.

[25:01] This is all from this week. That girl in Florida, her parents locked her in the bathroom for days on end. And in the past, her uncle had molested her. Her brother was abusing her.

And finally, she had enough and shot her brother. Just this week. The sheriff said, it's the stuff nightmares are made out of. And you have to ask, why?

God, why didn't you stop it? You knew about it. You had the power to stop it. Why didn't you stop the evil? Maybe you remember the Bernie Madoff scandal.

The financial guy, he was the president of NASDAQ. He ran this enormous Ponzi scheme. It was the most long-lasting, lucrative Ponzi schemes ever.

Thousands of people lost all their life savings. Thousands of charitable foundations lost all their money in this fraud. I found one to be the most poignant.

[26:03] one of those people that lost all their money and all their life savings was, his name is Eli Witzel. Witzel. He's a Nobel Prize winner.

He wrote a book called Night. And the book Night is his personal retelling of what happened to him and the things that he saw in Auschwitz.

And if you've never read that, you should read it for no other reason because it makes you answer this question, God, what do I do with this?

Why didn't you stop this? Well, this guy, he lost all of his money and his wife lost all of her life savings. They lost their life savings together.

His foundation, which brings about, you know, help for Holocaust victims and all the rest, their foundation lost all their money.

[27:00] And, so there you go. This guy had suffered so much before and now at the end of his life he loses everything he has.

And so, it's that question that hangs out there. God, why didn't you stop that? Why didn't you restrain sin? And we have to say, what does this have to do with Jesus Christ, the King of the universe?

He said, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. So, how does that fit? All that authority in heaven and earth and all this sin.

So, surely Jesus could have stopped the Paris killings and he could have stopped that little girl's sufferings. He could have stopped Bernie Madoff. He could have stopped Auschwitz.

He could have restrained and rescued. He's done it before. He could do it now. And so, what's going on? That's the second question that we wrestle with, that we want to wrestle with in this study.

[28:07] The third is, how can we have faith and joy during the severity of the last days? How can we have faith and joy during the severity of the last days?

We talked a lot about this last week. But again, as we move to the final, final last days, whenever they might be, and I'm not saying they're around the corner, I have no idea, we have to realize that suffering waits.

It awaits us. You remember the story of the Good Samaritan. Can't forget that story. Jesus told the story of that Jew who was waylaid by bandits as he was on the road from Jerusalem down to Jericho.

That road was notorious in Jesus' day. Jesus didn't just pick that road for no good reason. He picked it for the very good reason that this sort of thing no doubt happened. The road was called the Bloody Pass.

So the church is like that Jew who's going down and he's going to go through the Bloody Pass. It's going to happen to us.

[29:20] And so people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents.

And you just can't read these things as like a list of sins. You've got to imagine their just disobedience to their parents. That grief that's going to come upon people.

Abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, and it goes on.

On the last days, this is what's going to mark people and we rightly say well, we are in the last days. After Jesus Christ rose again, we are in the final last days. But I think that does a bit of a disservice to just assume that, yep, it's all going to be the same.

I think in the Bible what you see is as it gets closer and closer to the last, last days, things have, are spiraling downward. Things are getting worse.

[30:32] As men go on in their sin, they go from bad to worse. And then when they're at worse, they go from bad to worse. It's a downward spiral.

So do we see disobedience and brutality and slander and all that stuff? Yes. And as time goes on, it seems that it's going to be getting worse and worse, more heartless, more brutal, more disobedient until it reaches its peak.

and I think the reason that God and His sovereignty is just going to let it go on and on and at least in part is that when the judge finally comes, our condemnation will be clear.

The humankind condemnation will be clear. Every mouth will be silent because our, no one will be able to say, it's not that bad. And he'll just, look, it is that bad.

There's no denying it. They will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. Because of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold.

[31:40] And so if we have any sense, we should at least be concerned. Maybe, and I'm not saying these things are going to happen in our day, I don't know, but as we, it could.

So we should at least be thinking, we can't blow it off and just say, oh, it will be fine. It won't be fine. It'll be the worst thing that ever comes along for us.

And so again, we have to ask, how will we have faith and joy and love in the midst of that? It's an unsettling question. It's not an amusing, eschatological, end times debate.

It's not a friendly, you know, dorm room debate about what's going to happen at the end and how it's going to end up. It's how am I going to make it to the end if this might happen to me?

The fourth question and the final question, how is Christ glorified in a world like this? How is Christ glorified in a world of parachutings and Florida abuse?

[32 : 46] How is Christ glorified in a world where kings are fools and they send thousands to their death? Isn't that what you saw in 2 Chronicles? Just foolish kings.

Is there anything new under the sun? So how is Christ magnified in a world like this? In a world where Satan has fallen, where Adam has fallen, the Tower of Babel and the fracturing of the human race into thousands of languages in Israel's treason and in Judas' kiss?

And this is the most important question because going back to the beginning, we ask, why do we exist? It's to glorify God.

Well, how do we do that in a world like this? Paul put it like this, it's my eager expectation and hope that I will not be ashamed but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body whether by life or by death.

And brothers, we live to glorify God or live to glorify Christ to exalt Him whether by living or by dying and we might get our chance to die. So how is Christ glorified in a world like the one that we're living in?

[34 : 04] So those are the four questions that are sort of the impulse behind this study that we're going to try to wrestle with, try to find some sort of grip on.

But as we wrestle with them, God will be with us and His grace will grow us and that's what we're after in this study to grow more and more in the image of our Savior.

and as we take upon His image and we grow in faith in Him, we will magnify Him in the world that we live in. Well, we are dismissed.