

Sermon – Sunday 28th January 2007
The Sovereignty of God – Prayer and Evangelism.
Isaiah 55:6-11; Colossians 4:2-6

**** III** – I have solution for dealing with the high petrol prices. Don't fill up the car. I'm not going to put **any** petrol in my car. I'll just keep driving without filling up! Now I know what you're thinking. Bruce is an idiot. What's he talking about? Well here's what I figure. God is sovereign – that means He's in control of everything. He is powerful over everything. If he wants to, he can make my car keep going without petrol if he wants. If my car won't run, then obviously that's God's will. Nothing I do can change God's will, so why not just leave it all in his hands, and not fill up?

It's a fairly silly argument. But often that's the argument we can make when we talk about **prayer** and **evangelism** in our life. If God is in control, forget about praying and forget about sharing the gospel with people – what we call evangelism. If God wants someone to know about Jesus, they'll find out. If we pray or share the gospel with someone, it really makes no difference, does it?

God is sovereign. He's in control of all things. Why would he need **us** to do anything?

****** Let me ask 2 questions today:

1. What is GOD'S sovereign role in Prayer and Evangelism?
2. What is OUR role in prayer and evangelism?

1. First, what is God's role?

Humans have a sinful nature that is controlling. We like to have control **of** things.

**** III** – The last time I rode a horse, the owners put a “bit” in the horse's mouth and a bridle around its head and they put the reins in my hands. That's human control. Bind it up and put a leash on it and you are **controlling**. But it is a limited control. Although sometimes I was controlling the horses' speed or direction, I wasn't IN control all the time.

**** Humans, by nature, are controlling, but we are never “in control”.** We have limits to our control over things.

**** But God, by nature, is “in control”.** God's role, if you like, is one of being “in control”.

And it was *through Jesus*, in his death and resurrection, at the place where most people think that God had **lost** control, God actually showed he was in **complete** control. At the cross, God shows his **sovereignty**, his **control**, and his **purpose** over all of creation by sending Jesus to **save** his creation.

The Cross of Christ was the point in history where God turned to us, in complete control, and said “I will save you”. Let me ask you, at that point, **who is in control?** The person **being** saved, or the person **saving**?

III – If you're drowning at the beach and a lifesaver comes and saves you – who is in control, you or the lifesaver?

God showed us he was **“in control”** when he sent Jesus to save us. And that's the SAME sovereignty we can trust when we see God at work in Prayer and Evangelism – he is **“in control”** and he knows what he is doing.

So, if God is **“in control”**, why does he need us to pray and share the good news of Jesus with people?

2. What is OUR role?

Let's turn to Colossians 4:3. Paul writes:

*** “And pray for us too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.”*

Why is Paul asking the Colossians to pray for him?

**** Because they are his partners in the gospel!** They are working together for the same purpose – to see people turn to Christ. But there is another partner here. There’s Paul, there’s the Colossians, but who else is a partner? God! God has made us partners *with Him* in evangelism and in prayer.

We are the instruments God has chosen to bring the Gospel to the world. Why? 3 word answer...

I don’t know. I find it difficult to understand why such a powerful and sovereign God has chosen us, human beings, to share such an important message with the world. Surely he could do it better himself. But he doesn’t. God has chosen, in his absolute control, to have his Holy Spirit work through *us*.

But he doesn’t just ask a few people to be his partners. He calls each and every one of us. God doesn’t say to one of us “I give you the gift of sharing your faith” and to another “But you can’t!”

Colossians 4:5-6 says:

*** “Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of **every** opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”*

God is talking about EVERY ONE of us! We are **all** called to make the most of *every opportunity*. We are **all called** to give an answer to everyone who asks about our faith. And it’s more than a suggestion. It’s a **command** – with a **promise** – *Open your mouth and God will speak through you.* Come back with me to Isaiah 55:11. *God says:*

*** “my word... will not return to me empty but will accomplish what **I** desire, and achieve the purpose for which **I** sent it.”*

God’s word **achieves** what he sends it out to achieve. When we open our mouths – HE SPEAKS!

So God, in his sovereignty, has chosen his Spirit to work through US. He has made us his *partners* in Evangelism, in sharing the gospel. We can’t do that when we don’t open our mouths. And we can’t do that when we don’t pray. When Paul asks the Colossians, his partners in the gospel, for their help in evangelism, what does he ask for most of all in chapter 4? *** (Put up verse again)* He mentions it three times in this passage alone. **PRAYER!**

**** III** – When I walk into my study at home, one thing takes up a lot of space ... my computer. Considering the amount of time I spend on it, it’s one of the most useful things I own. I write sermons on it, I organise calendars on it, I write letters on it and even send a few hundred e-mails to some of you on it! Do you want to see a picture of it? (Picture of Big Vacuum computer) Well, it’s not *my* computer, but it has something in common with mine – it’s no good if it’s not turned on. It’s a great tool, but it won’t do the work without an operator! I need to turn on the power, put my hand on the keyboard, and USE IT!

Prayer is a tool given to us by God. And we need to turn on the power! We need to ***pick up*** the tool of prayer and use it! Prayer isn’t just an act of courtesy to God like saying “please” or “thank you”. Prayer is ***effective***. Prayer ***changes*** things! God ***responds*** to our prayer.

In Matthew 6:10 there are some words we should know very well:

*** “your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”*

When we pray we should expect God to answer according to His will – because we know that’s the best answer to get! God may respond with a “yes” or “no” answer to our prayers. But he will always respond with the ***right*** answer.

III – Let’s say you sit down one day and you pray for sunshine for a big church event. And it rains. The event is washed out. Or you pray for a friend of yours to come to know Jesus. And they don’t. Was it a waste of time praying? No!

Your prayer is heard by God and he listens to it **according to his will**, and through that prayer he sees your **desires** and he sees your **will**, and he sees your **trust** in him and he sees your **love** for people. Regardless of the answer he gives, your prayer isn't wasted.

When you pray, God **sees** your faith, and He **hears** your prayer and responds. Maybe not in the way we might expect, or in the way we might hope, but he answers. And that is the beauty of prayer. God not only **responds** to our prayers, but he responds to them in the **best way possible** for His kingdom.

**** III** – If a lifesaver is rescuing me out of the water, and dragging me back to safety, I want to do things HIS way, not MY way. And I want to HELP him do things **his** way for the sake of my salvation! I don't fight *against* him, I go *with* him – we are partners, but he is the one in control.

**** We are *partners with God* through prayer and evangelism.**

We will never fully understand why God **CHOOSES** to listen to our prayers and respond to them, or why he **CHOOSES** to speak through **us** to bring people the gospel. But we do know that he **DOES** choose to listen to us and he **DOES** choose to speak through us – and his Word **never** fails!

God is sovereign. God is *in control* when we tell people the gospel, and he is *in control* when he answers our prayers. We are his **partners** but he is the one in control.

So should I continue to drive my car without filling up the petrol tank? No. To not fill up my tank is to ignore the way my car works. Petrol goes in, and the car runs. Petrol is the tool I need to run my car. I don't completely understand the way petrol *actually* works in the fuel injection system of my car. But I know it works!

This is the way God works in partnership with us. We pray. He listens and answers. We open our mouth to share the gospel, and he speaks through us. We CANNOT ignore the **way** our partnership with God works!

**** PRAYER** is like breathing in, and **SHARING THE GOSPEL** is like breathing out.
This is a partnership we are to live and breathe.

We heard last week from 2 Corinthians 5:20:

**** “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.”**
That is an amazing partnership God offers us.

Let me finish by sharing with you a vision for us at All Saints in 2007 and beyond –

That we will be the church God wants us to be.

That we will breathe in prayer and we will breathe out the gospel message.

That we will be **partners** with God, because of the partnership that started at the cross of Jesus. What a great picture it will be for us as a church – to see us so **gripped** by the work of Christ on the cross, that we **delight** in coming to him in prayer; that we **delight** in opening our mouths when we have the opportunity – and sharing the life-saving gospel news that has saved **us** and has the power to bring others from death to life! To see people reconciled to God. To see, on the last day – the judgement day – less people in hell and more in heaven because of the work that God's Spirit achieves through our life.

This is not only the **command** and **will** of God for us as a church. This is our **privilege**. This is our **privilege**. To serve Him, and to see others saved. Praise God that he has made us his partners in this work! Let's pray...