The Church: Our Tension

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[0:00] We are on Sunday nights going through the book of Nehemiah.

We'll do that tonight in Nehemiah chapter 4.! And on Sunday mornings, we are studying through the church. What does the New Testament say we are to do?
What does the Old Testament teach us that we can build upon about being the church, the people of God? And today, those two studies, the church on Sunday morning and Nehemiah on Sunday evening, intersect in a way that I want to use a text from Nehemiah that we're going to look at in greater detail tonight to bring to the forefront a question, an issue that we all deal with and wrestle with as it relates to the church.
This morning is going to be a little bit more of just biblical thinking through a difficult topic, maybe a little more than a sermon.
I want to share a number of verses with you as we try to grapple with this tension that we wrestle with as believers. And we're going to land in Nehemiah 4 this morning.
[1:25] So, if you want to go and find Nehemiah 4, we're going to look at just one verse from there a little bit later. And then tonight, in our evening study, we'll be walking through the entirety of Nehemiah chapter 4.

Hopefully, when we get finished this morning, you'll kind of see how all these things tie together. We've looked at the fact that Christ is the head of the church. We have looked at what we are to do as a congregation when we gather for worship.
We looked last week at the leaders, the Lord gives to the church. We looked at the terminology of pastor or overseer, elder, what those roles are within the body of Christ.
And I want us to look this morning at just a very honest reality of being a Christian. This impacts us on a personal level.
This impacts our families. And certainly, as a church congregation, this is something we have to wrestle with a bit. And the tension is, in part, what we have already sung together.
[2:35] However, we declared by song that God is sovereign over us. That He rules and reigns over all things. That He is on His throne.

Nothing can thwart His plan. Nothing escapes His will. And we declare and we believe that God is powerful enough to do anything to accomplish His will.
And yet, we look at the world even this week and see things on the news that are sometimes difficult to make sense of.
Whether that be by natural disasters, as we saw played out this week. Whether that be the hands of evildoers.
Or whether it just be the effects of living in a fallen world. There's a tension we wrestle with. For some, the tension for a while is more theoretical.
[3:51] God is sovereign. And yet, there are bad things that happen in the world. How do we square that? For some, that's theoretical.

You think about it. You read about it. You study about it. You teach about it. But for others, it goes from the theoretical to the deeply personal. It's not hypothetical.
It's your life. There's something that has happened to you. Something that you have endured. Something you are currently going through. Something you are currently wrestling with.
And it's not just theological ideas. It's the real impact on your life. Trying to square. What do I do with a God that I affirm is sovereign over us.
And yet, I see things and experience things. I'm living with things that are very difficult. And that can be as painful as loss of a loved one.

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[4:55] As horrific as what we've seen unfold in the world just a few days ago. It can be as personal as trying to figure out, why am I praying for something over and over and over, and not seeing that prayer answered?

That we experience it also. Not just in what we would call theodicy, which is trying to square the goodness of God with the presence of evil.
We wrestle with this even on a practical level as a congregation. This day, classrooms all over our church are filled with people who have studied and read and prayed and labored over their lesson to teach children or adults or teenagers.
And while they are working hard here in the week to be prepared to teach, we also affirm that if not for the work of the Holy Spirit, there will be no spiritual fruit. And it creates a little bit of tension.
This reality that God is sovereign, the Holy Spirit must work and move for any good to take place, and yet, we have a responsibility individually and as a congregation to do what He has called us to do.
[6:21] I'll just give you a couple of examples of how this wrestling match takes place within our hearts. The Bible affirms that our days are numbered. Psalm 139, verse 16 says, Your eyes saw My unformed substance.

In Your book were written every one of them. The days that were formed for Me when as yet there was none of them. My days and Your days are numbered.
They are written. God is sovereign over our birth. God is sovereign over our death. The Bible doesn't even defend that. It just unveils that.
It just tells us that's the truth. And yet, when we're sick, we go to the doctor.
And when helpful and necessary, we're thankful for medication and those who are skilled enough to help us to understand how to use that.
[7:26] In one sense, I can't add a single day to my life, yet, I should avoid doing foolish things. I believe God is absolutely sovereign over my life, and yet, I'm going to do the best I can to live in wisdom, to be as healthy as I can, and handle sickness as it comes into my life or to my family's.

There's some tension there. God is sovereign over my life. I don't believe at all that I'm living my life at the whims of the world, the whims of sinful people.
God is sovereign over my life. I trust Him with the details of my life. And yet, drunk drivers are real. I read even this morning of a young wife and mother who lost her life to a drunk driver.
How do you square that? Well, I'll tell you what a lot of churches do is they just ignore it. They just don't speak of it.
Just be quiet, sing your song, memorize your Scripture, go home, don't ask about it, don't talk about it. But as a congregation, if we're going to be the church God's called us to be, it includes structure like we talked about last week, but it must also include an honest wrestling with the hardest questions that we face.
[9:02] And I think in the church, we must be willing to say that there are real tensions we live with, and how do we as a congregation respond to those?

A song that would be familiar to many of you is a song called Sovereign Ruler of the Skies. One of the verses says, Plagues and deaths around me fly, till he bids, I cannot die.
And yet, we see things that happen in a fallen world that just make us question, how does that work? How does that work together?
Or a really practical one. I trust the Lord to protect me. I trust the Lord to protect my family. And yet, every night, I lock our doors.
And I lay in bed, and I think, did I lock the doors? And I get up and check them, and I lock the doors.
And we turn on alarm systems. And many of you have cameras around your home because we're trying to keep our family safe.
[10:18] We trust the Lord to protect us, yet there are practical things that we do. And an honest question I have for you this morning is, does the fact that God watches over you mean that you should not lock your doors at night?

Or, if you set your alarm at night, does that mean you no longer trust God? Now, when it is theoretical, it doesn't pierce our heart.
But when your child is sick, and when your spouse is ill, and when your son has rebelled, and when the ministry you've given your life to and labored in sees no fruit, it's not theoretical.

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It's the honest tension of one who loves God, believes His Word, and yet experiences in the world all around us this tension of what do we do, how are we faithful, how do we respond in a world where God is sovereign, and yet we have also been called to live in wisdom.
I experience this every day of my life, every week of my life. Biblically, I affirm with all of my heart, and there's no question about this scripturally, that only God can save.
[11:53] I can't save someone, man can't save himself, only God can save. The Bible doesn't defend it, it just makes it explicitly clear.

And yet, Acts 17, we are to call on all men to repent. The Bible is clear that spiritual fruit as a result of our teaching is something the Holy Spirit produces within us, and yet, we are called to obey, and we are called to walk in the good works prepared beforehand that He has for us.
The Lord Himself says, I will build my church. And yet, every single week, many in our church, staff members and members and volunteers alike, many of us are busy about the work of praying for our members, and reaching out to those who visit and responding to needs and trying to follow up on people who haven't been here.
We're doing our best to try to help people who are new to our church learn who we are, help them to know how to join the church, help them to get connected into the church, trying to do our best to make people not feel left out but feel included.
Why are we doing that? Because we want to strengthen the church and see it grow. Yet, the Lord said, I will build my church. So, does that mean we do nothing? We just show up and sit and, what does it mean that we work?
[13:34] Well, there's some tension there. Even as I preach this message in this moment, I recognize that the Holy Spirit is going to have to take His Word and make it come alive in your heart.

I can't do that. And yet, this week, I labored for hours in trying to discern how to best present these truths.
There's some tension there, isn't there? Every Sunday school teacher feels it. Every Awana teacher feels it. Every one of you that are in discipleship groups and training people and doing evangelism, you feel it.
This real-life tension that we have to wrestle with as a church, that this church belongs to Christ. He is the head of the church. He arranges the bodies He sees fit. It's up to Christ to build the church, and yet, we have a responsibility and a desire to work and pray in such a way that we would be able to reach people and disciple them and see them grow.
So, I want us to be honest this morning. There's some tension in the Christian life. There's some tension we face as a church. God is sovereign, and yet, man is responsible, and we often wrestle with that truth in the sense of just salvation, and it's present there, but it's present in way more elements than just salvation.
[15:06] It's present in everything we do as a church. So, I want to take just some time this morning, and really, more than a sermon, I just want to kind of think out loud through a scriptural lens, of how do we acknowledge this tension we have to live with as Christians and as the church, and then I want to land somewhere, I hope, that will be helpful and instructive for us.

So, we're going to look at this with three headings. Number one, let's look at the reality of our tension. The reality of our tension. And just beside that, here's the summary.
God is working. The reality of our tension, and just right beside that, that God is working. Here's the reality.
We can look at it in a number of ways. I just want to, again, kind of think and talk out loud with you through a biblical lens of this. So, one example would be that God is at work even through people's sinful choices.
Whether you know it or not, the song that we sang a moment ago as a congregation, Sovereign Over Us, refers to Scripture taken from Genesis 50. Genesis 50, verse 20 says, as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.
[16:32] To bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today. Genesis 50, you have people making real choices, real decisions, with real consequences, and the Scripture says that those men meant that for evil, but God meant it for good.

God was at work even through people's sinful choices. Now, where is the clearest example of God at work in a sovereign way even through people's sinful choices?

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Well, the answer is the cross, right? The Bible tells us that. Make a note of a few verses here. Acts chapter 2, verse 23. This Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.
So, Christ was crucified. Why? Because this was the definite plan of God. But reading on, it says, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.
Acts 2, 36. Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.
[18:02] So, Acts 2, 23. Christ is crucified by the definite plan of God.

Acts 2, 36. It's the people who put Him to death. You back up behind that, go all the way back to the Old Testament Isaiah 53, 10.
Speaking of this event, says, yet it was the will of the Lord to crush Him. we've got to have a maturity in our doctrine and theology as a congregation that can wrestle with these very difficult truths in this tension that Christ died according to the definite plan of God and the people who put Him to death are completely responsible and accountable for what they did.
God is at work even through people's sinful choices. Now, here's the help for us with this. You are surrounded every day by people who are making sinful choices.
And here's what I want you to understand. That the goodness of God and the plan of God is not stopped because there are sinful people all around you making real sinful choices.
[19:23] There's another reality we see. God is at work on the positive side through our obedience. Philippians 2, verse 12, Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only is in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

Not work for. We studied this in great detail a few months ago. This isn't working for your salvation. This is working out your salvation. You take the salvation you've been given by God and apply it. You work it out in every circumstance. But verse 13, the very next verse says, For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.
So the Bible says you're to take your salvation and work it out, and while you're working it out, here's the truth, is that it is actually God working in you as you do that.
There's some mystery there. There's some tension there. But this tells us that God is at work even when sinful people are around us, and God is at work even as we try to obey His Word.
[20:39] There's another reality. We see it in our evangelism. John 6, 44, No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Him draws Him.

No one is converted unless the Father converts Him. That's God's sovereignty. And yet, Colossians 4, verse 3, At the same time, pray also for us that God may open to us a door for the Word to declare the mystery of Christ.
We are praying for God to sovereignly open doors so that we can share the gospel, share the mystery of the gospel, call on people to believe, Acts 17, that we are to call all men to repent.
No one will believe unless the Father converts Him, and yet our responsibility is to pray for open doors, to pray for bold mouths and bold hearts, and to speak the truth of the gospel as we should.
And my favorite example of this reality in terms of our church is that God is at work through our work. Proverbs 21, 31, The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord.
[22:01] The horse is made ready. That's what you do. You get the horse ready, then you go into war, and victory belongs to the Lord. When you study your Sunday school lesson, you're preparing the horse for battle.

But for your students in class to believe and to respond and to obey requires the Holy Spirit to work. When you memorize Scripture and think through how can I share the gospel, you're preparing the horse for battle.
But when you open your mouth to witness to your friend or to your neighbor, only the Holy Spirit can convert them. Victory belongs to the Lord. When you are teaching your children in your home, when you read the Bible and you think and organize your thoughts of how you're going to lead family devotion at home, you are preparing the horse for battle.
But victory belongs to the Lord. Only God can bring about that victory. You see it in 1 Corinthians 3, 6. I planted, Apollo swattered, but who is it that gave the growth in that verse?
God. God. Thank you. Paul planted, Apollo swattered, but God gave the growth.

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[23:22] Paul didn't give the growth. Apollo didn't give the growth. The growth came only from God. Does that mean that Paul should not be planting seeds? No. He's supposed to.

Does that mean Apollo shouldn't be watering spiritual seeds? No. He's supposed to. Well, if Paul plants in Apollo's waters, does that guarantee growth? No.
Growth only comes from God. Well, how does that work? Well, there's some tension there. There are people who preach the gospel and their churches flourish, and there are other men just as faithful who preach the gospel and things don't flourish, and there are people in Sunday school classes who study hard and care for their people and love their people, and they have all kinds of visible fruit, and others who study just as hard, care just as much, and they don't see visible fruit. There are people who witness to people, and they see people converted all the time. Others just as faithfully sharing the gospel, and they don't see people coming to faith in Christ. And if we don't speak of that reality, we're just not being honest.
And maybe those aren't issues that you've wrestled with. Maybe those aren't questions that have gone back and forth in your mind, but if they haven't, one day they will. Why is it that one person prays for healing and the Lord gives it and someone else prays with just as much faith and they don't?
[25:01] How do we as a church stay faithful to plant seeds and to water seeds, yet knowing only God can give the increase? We see this in a fifth way in our prayer life.

James 4, verse 2, you do not have because you do not ask. One of the reasons why, biblically, we don't have something is because we're not faithful in prayer to ask the Lord.
And yet, Proverbs 19, 21 says, many are the plans and the mind of man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand. There's some tension.
I feel this in a practical way every time I pray and ask for something, whether for myself or my family or our church. I feel this every time. I believe that we are to pray.
I believe God moves in response to our prayers. I believe that sometimes, according to James 4, there's things that we haven't received because we haven't asked. And yet, even as I'm praying, I'm so aware that I'm not God.
[26:08] I don't have perfect knowledge. I don't have perfect wisdom. There are things that God is doing that I cannot see. And I'll think to myself, who am I to tell God what to do? I'm praying for things.

I hope as best I can in a biblical way without selfishness, without worldliness, but I know my own heart. I'm imperfect. I know my own heart. I can struggle with sin and pride and everything else like you do.
And who am I to try to tell God what He should do or how He should move in a certain situation because, after all, I trust Him. He's God. And yet, the Lord has told us since ancient times no one has seen, no ear has perceived any God besides you who moves on behalf of those who wait for Him.
God moves in response to His people. So, this is the reality of our tension. We're to share the gospel, but only God can save.
We're to teach the Word, but only the Spirit brings the fruit. We're to pray, but God knows the end from the beginning. And here's what I want you to take away biblically in the midst of all of that tension is that God is always working.
[27:27] God is always working. What do we take away from that? God is always working. We are to be always obeying.

When you struggle with this tension in your Sunday school class, in your Iwana class, in your small group, whatever it may be, just make sure that you remind yourself God is always working, that we trust His sovereignty, and we are to live in obedience right in the midst of that tension.
That's the reality of our tension and the takeaway is God is working. Let's look at a second reality here as we're moving our way to Nehemiah 4. The reason for our trust.
There's a biblical reason for our trust even in the midst of this tension. and just put beside that God is wise.
There's a reality of our tension, but we rest knowing God is working and there's a reason for our trust and the reason is God is wise. Let's just think biblically about this.
[28:42] The Bible teaches that God is unrivaled. Romans 11, 34, for who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been His counselor?

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God doesn't get tired. He doesn't get weary. He doesn't get confused. He's never perplexed. He has no counselor. 1 Corinthians 2, 16, who has instructed the mind of the Lord so as to, or who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct Him?
The Lord needs no instruction. We see His wisdom is also poured out in His power. Jeremiah 32, verse 17, O Lord God, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power.
Nothing is too hard for You. But there's some tension here. If nothing is too hard for Him, what do you do when that which you've prayed for and longed for does not come to pass?
As a church, we don't have the out to say, well, God just couldn't do anything about it. This was too hard for God. Or, well, don't blame God.
[30:04] He didn't know about it. We don't want to go to an unbiblical place to try to solve our tension. Psalm 147, verse 5, Great is our Lord, abundant in power, and His understanding is beyond measure.

So the Lord knows all things, and the Lord has power to do all things. He's not only unrivaled and powerful. Third, He is merciful. We trust in Him because of His mercy.
Psalm 103, verse 14, For He knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust. Psalm 145, verse 8, The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.
So God is always powerful. God is merciful. God understands what's going on. God is merciful. God is merciful. And He alone is perfectly wise. What I don't want is to be a part of a congregation where we can't speak out loud the honest struggles and tensions that we feel.
[31:16] And you think that it just has to stay unspoken. God is merciful. God is sovereign. God is sovereign. Because the truth is, there are all kinds of needs in our congregation with people who are saying, I really do affirm that God is sovereign.

What I struggle with is if He's sovereign, how come this is that way? Or how come this is happening? Or how come this isn't happening? How come I'm teaching my kids and I'm not seeing this result?
How come I'm teaching my class and I'm not seeing fruit? How come I'm sharing the gospel and I'm not seeing people converted? Well, the reality of our attention is there's things we don't understand, but we rest in knowing God is working.
And the reason for our trust is this, that God is wise. And there's a third thing, and this really is, all of that is introduction for what I want to take you to here in Nehemiah 4.
The result of our thinking. What's the result of our thinking? As we wrestle with this tension, the result is that God is worthy.
[32:35] God is worthy of our praise. God is worthy of our trust. God is worthy of our worship. And we see this in such a clear way in Nehemiah.

We've spent three weeks going through Nehemiah. Let me try to, in about 30 seconds, catch you up if you haven't been with us on Sunday nights. Nehemiah is in Susa, the Persian capital, as a cupbearer to the king.
He receives word from one of his brothers that the people in Jerusalem are a mess, that the walls are still broken down. It's been a hundred years or more, and the walls are still in disarray.
This means not only that the people are unsafe, it means it's a shameful thing for them. And Nehemiah asked the king for permission to leave his post and to travel back to Jerusalem with the purpose to rebuild the wall.
And he goes back to Jerusalem. He inspects the walls. He gets a plan. He rallies the troops there to build, and he has people working to rebuild the wall all around them.
[33:51] And it's this really amazing, marvelous thing. And you've got people who are perfumers and goldsmiths working shoulder to shoulder. Nehemiah 3 mentions a man and his two daughters who are working shoulder to shoulder.

These aren't expert builders. They're just people who have been rallied to the cause by Nehemiah to do what they ought to do, and that is to complete the work of rebuilding the wall.
And as soon as this work begins, even before the work begins, really, there is opposition that takes place because that's what happens when you're doing spiritual work. There's always opposition that takes place.
So, Nehemiah chapter 4, they are rebuilding the wall. There are threats all around them. There are people that are outsiders who are threatening them.

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There's even some, we'll see tonight, on the inside who aren't doing what they are supposed to be doing. And they are trying to rebuild the wall while they also keep themselves safe.
[34:52] They are trusting God to do His work and His will, but they are the ones physically lifting the stones. And in Nehemiah chapter 4, you come to verse 8, and it says, they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.

There's a plan to come and attack and fight against Jerusalem. So, what will Nehemiah do when the very real threats of the world face him?
Verse 9, and we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night.
We prayed to our God. We trusted in God. We cried out to God. We expressed the sovereignty of God, resting in the providence of God, believing our protection comes from God.
We prayed to our God and we set a guard. We had some guys go up to the top and keep their eyes out because if somebody came to attack us, we need to be ready to fight against them.
[36:18] We prayed to God and we set a guard. This, my friends, is where we live in the tension of all that we've talked about. You've got to pray to your God and you set a guard.

You trust in God. You rest in God. You live under the sovereignty of God, but there's an obedience. There's a response. There's a way of wisdom. And the way of wisdom is if somebody plots to come attack you, you better cry out to God because your help comes from the Lord.
And in wisdom, put a guy on the top of the wall with some binoculars and a great big old gun that can do something if the army comes to fight against you to try to kill your people. Is there some tension there?
There's some tension there. There. There. If the Holy Spirit doesn't take the words I speak and apply it to heart and give the increase, no good will come out of this.
But I spend hours each week in the Word studying and writing and praying and trying to be prepared to serve you. But only God gives the increase. There's some tension there. There. So what do you do?
[37:31] You pray to God and you set a guard. You pray to God and you put on your seatbelt.

You study and you get as good as you can at teaching the Bible. But you first pray to God for His help.
And notice how often they did this. Look at the end of verse 9. We pray to our God and set a guard as protection against them day and night. Over and over and over again we pray to our God and over and over again we set a guard.
Over and over we rested beneath the sovereignty of our God as repeatedly we were faithful to do what wisdom says we should do.
So how do we as a church respond to all of this? We want to see people saved. We want to see people discipled.
[38:39] We want to see people join our church. We want to see people grow and use their spiritual gifts. We want to take the gospel to the neighborhoods and to the nations. We want to send people all around the world and support the people who are all around the world preaching the gospel.

And yet, our teaching, our plans, our organization, and our giving by itself will produce zero spiritual fruit. Only God can do that.
but we study and we give and we go and we call on people to repent and we work hard to be organized and prepared.
we believe God is at work all around the world and we want to see the nations come to faith in Christ. And yet, there are missionaries every single month that we are sending money that as a church we generously, sacrificially give to support the work of missions.
If God is sovereign, why don't we just sit back and say, hey, we trust God. we're not going to give you anything. God will work it out. Why don't Sunday school teachers just sleep in a little bit more and why are you studying anyway because the horse is prepared for battle but victory belongs to the Lord.
[40:07] Why don't you just quit studying and just show up and wing it week after week because after all, God is the one that has to give the increase anyway. And sadly, there are people who actually, truly live like that and minister like that.

And they want to sit back and blame God when they've not been faithful. So all of that, I want to give you four words here as a congregation of biblically how we are to live in the midst of this

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tension.
Number one, we start with prayer. For your family, for your child who is sick, for your spouse who needs a job, for your ministry you're a part of, we start with prayer just like Nehemiah 4.9, we pray to our God.
Psalm 127, verse 1, unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.
And there you see the exact tension of Nehemiah 4. If God is not the first watchman, you've got no chance. And yet, as God is our watchman, we set a guard on the wall.
[41:35] Your theology's got to be able to handle this tension because it's all around you. First, we start with prayer. Second, we prepare.

This is our study. This is our practice. This is our organization. This is teachers spending time in the Word.
This is our musicians practicing to lead us in worship. This is those who organize our greeters to make sure we've got people where they are. This is your Sunday school class organizing for ministry.
This is setting up meal trains for people who have had surgery or in the hospital or had a baby. There's some organization. There's some preparation. Somebody has to say, how can we organize our church for ministry?
On any given Sunday, we've got 1,200 people or so who are here. That takes a lot of organization. It takes a lot of work. It takes a lot of generous giving.
[42:39] It takes a lot of administration behind the scenes. It takes a lot of people using their spiritual gifts. It takes a lot of preparation. And to do what God's called us to do, we start with prayer because if we work and He doesn't, we've got no chance.

But then, we go to work preparing and organizing to do what He has called us to do. And then third, we respond. respond.
This is getting to work. And my friends, here's what you've got to land with today. That trust in God, faith in God is essential, but it should never be used as an alibi to not be obedient.
If you ever use God's sovereignty as a license for your sin or your disobedience, you have neither understood the doctrine of sovereignty nor the responsibility you bear before the Lord.
We pray, we prepare, we respond. Just to give you a biblical example of this, in Genesis, because of sin, God has threatened to judge the world and He's going to flood the world and He reveals this through Noah who's called a preacher of righteousness and Noah believed God and only Noah and his family were kept safe from that flood.
[44:17] Noah really believed in the sovereignty and the power of God. But, what did Noah do? answer out loud.

He built the ark. Do you see that? Like one of the first Bible stories you learn is this very tension I'm talking about.
Noah believed God and yet, in his belief, did not take the excuse to say, well, I'll just sit back. No, he went to work building.
He had to prepare. He had to organize and then he had to respond in obedience. He had to do what God called him to do. Was God sovereign over the flood? Absolutely.
Was God going to do what God was going to do? Absolutely. Was Noah responsible to be faithful to build the ark? Yes. And from the earliest of our age, of our life, we're learning about Noah and the ark, which is really a story about sovereignty, judgment, and responsibility to obey.
[45:31] And what you've got to see from that story today is that Noah believed God and, because he did, he built the ark.

so if you believe God, trust him and study as hard as you can to teach your class.
Trust him and prepare your voice and your instrument the best you can to lead in worship. Trust him and be organized for ministry as best you can.
There's some tension and there's some mystery, but as a congregation, we're not going to navigate these waters by being afraid to think and talk out loud about real life tensions.
We're going to say, what does the Bible say and how can we honor God right in the midst of it? I could give you lots of names of people who have been saved and baptized in the last year.
[46:37] I could give you lots of people who have joined our church in the last year and gotten plugged in. And I can give you names of people who are missing and people who are members but

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are just on the sidelines.

I can give you names of people that we are praying for that still haven't been converted. We've got to keep building the ark. We've got to keep preparing the horse for battle.
We've got to keep planting and keep watering. And victory belongs to the Lord. And only God can give the increase.
But let it be said of this congregation that we took our questions to God through His Word. And we have continually done our best to have a Bible-centered view of our questions and struggles.
And that while we with all of our heart believe in the sovereignty of God and rest in that, that we've been at work building the ark.
[48:00] Because our faith in God is demonstrated in our obedience to His Word. And our greatest joy is just to be found faithful.

not to be the biggest church, not to have the largest Sunday school class, not to have the biggest anything as far as that you can compare in your ministry to somebody else's of how many people attend or how many people give or how many people serve.
This isn't a contest amongst ourselves. This is a church family saying we rest in God and let the evidence that we do be that together we joyfully obey Him.
And when questions arise, we wrestle together. We walk through tension together. When the day comes to a close, let us build our lives on this.
God is always working. God is always wise. And God is always worthy. So we may wrestle a bit.
[49:23] We may struggle with some things. But there will come a day when we will be before the Lord face to face. And on that day, we will understand like never before He was better than we knew, wiser than we could understand, and more worthy of our worship than we ever imagined.

So let's today, as a church, prepare the horse for battle and pray for God to bring the victory.
and let's continually pray to God and let's each of us take our spot on the wall as a watchman, day and night.
Lord, we thank You for Your Word that gives us answers and helps to direct our thoughts, even in things we can't fully understand or grasp. You're working, you're faithful, and Your good.
We thank You for that in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.

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