

- ***READ Revelation 4:1-11*** Part of the grand revelation that was presented to John during his stay on the island of Patmos is this glorious throne scene. Though he was already receiving a vision that would allow him to write everything that he had already written and would continue to write, John finds himself in the Spirit which I believe means that he finds himself in the spiritual realm. It is within this spiritual realm that he sees this heavenly scene of a grand throne on which sat the Lord who is described in majestic terms that surely don't even come close to describing the actual seen.
- Nevertheless, the throne on which the Lord sits is surrounded by heavenly beings and creatures who are focused on one thing alone, and that one thing is the praise and worship of the deserving One. The words that are proclaimed by the four creatures and the twenty four elders signify what could only be described as the sovereignty of God. David would write in **Psalms 103:19**, *"The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all."* The idea in Psalm 103 is seen in detail in **Revelation 4**, and it leads us to the understanding that it is God and God alone truly rules over heaven and earth. Nothing that has happened apart from His allowance, and nothing that will be will happen unless He allows it. He truly is the sovereign *"King of kings and Lord of lords."* (**I Timothy 6:15**)
- While this attribute of God cannot be honestly argued as being untrue, there is, however, much debate as to how and even if God exercises His will over the happenings of this world. Yes, God created the world and everything within it, but does He take an active role in how things take place. As with most subjects, there are a couple of extreme positions that can be taken. On one end you have people who would take the position that God does not have any sort of an active role in the goings on of this life. He simply created the world, and then He has sat back since then and just let things run their course however they might go. Then at the other extreme, we have people who are of the belief that every single thing that has ever happened was a part of God's preordained plan for how this life was to go. It is as if a script was written by God, and we are all just acting out the parts that have been prescribed to us.
- With these positions being the extremes, we want to look at a middle ground where the truth usually resides. That position would absolutely affirm that men have their free will to choose whether or not they will do this or that and most importantly whether or not they will serve God. (**Joshua 24:14,15**) But I would also balance out this statement of man's free will of choice by affirming that God is not so far removed from this world that He has no dealings in what takes place. I am firmly convinced that the overall story of the Bible clearly shows us that God is living and active in regard to what takes place in this physical realm here on earth, but the question when we bring it home to ourselves as Christians today is this...how does He do it? How does He operate within this life. Even more specifically for us as Christians...how does God use us? This is the question that we will seek to answer this morning, and we'll begin this effort by showing that God does operate within this world, and He operates with the purpose of accomplishing His will. We might narrow that down to say that everything God does within this life is with the goal of accomplishing His will for man's salvation. (**Ephesians 1:4**)

I. God works among men to accomplish His purposes.

A. We can see God using Pharaoh's stubbornness.

1. Hundreds of years after God's initial promises of a great nation, land, and seed...we find Abraham's descendants having multiplied greatly in Egypt and it is time for them to leave and make the journey north to that promised land. The means by which God works within this situation is His choosing, appointing, and authorizing Moses to be the man that would go, with his brother Aaron, to convince Pharaoh that he should let the Israelites leave Egypt. Moses is not too convinced that this is going to work, but he eventually goes and does as the Lord commanded.
2. Upon Moses and Aaron going to Pharaoh to persuade him to let the Israelites go, God foretells that He would *"harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt."* (**Exodus 7:3**) Looking back throughout the narrative of the ordeal of getting the Israelites out of Egypt, we can see exactly how God did such a thing in hardening Pharaoh's heart. (**Exodus 7:3,13; 9:12; 10:1,20,27; 11:10; 14:4,8**) Through the miraculous works of Moses and Aaron which were supplied by God, Pharaoh's arrogance and pride caused for him to continue to be stubborn and rebellious against

God and His wishes up until the time that God truly brought Egypt to her knees through the killing of the first born. There is not a doubt in my mind that God knew exactly the type of heart that Pharaoh had, and He knew exactly how to act upon it so that His will would be accomplished and the proud and arrogant of this world would be humbled before His true might and power. I don't believe that God at any point forced Pharaoh to do anything against his own will or volition. God simply knew the type of man that Pharaoh was, and He used his own wickedness against him to accomplish His will.

B. We can see God using the actions of the Jews and Romans in His plans for Jesus's sacrifice.

1. These same principles could be applied to what took place during the life of Jesus here on earth with what eventually led to Him be condemned by the Jews and crucified by the Romans. God knew exactly the type of hearts that were found within those who were supposed to be leading the children of Israel. They were to be the humble leaders of God's people, and instead Jesus condemns them for their pride, arrogance, and leading of the people into sin. **(Matthew 23)** Again, God knew exactly the type of men that He was dealing with, and He used their own wicked hearts against them to accomplish the very plan that they seemed so dead set on stopping from coming to fruition...that Jesus would rule as King of the Jews and all people. **(Acts 2:36)**
2. In the moment, this working of God might not have been evident to those who were involved, but just weeks later Peter, through the Holy Spirit, is able to connect the dots. As Peter is delivering this intensely convicting message, he speaks to God's working through the actions of these people to bring about His purposes being accomplished. *"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power."* **(Acts 2:22-24)**
3. God had a plan that needed to be accomplished, and He was not above using the wicked hearts of men to get such a plan to come to be accomplished. Within the moment, we can see that the Apostles themselves didn't understand what had taken place, but standing where they were standing in **Acts 2**, it all began to make sense. How much more so looking back at the whole picture of the Bible are we able to see God's plan being carried out and accomplished? It might not be too far off of a statement to say that it is much easier to see God's work among men and this world after the fact when all things have been considered, but that doesn't mean that some men of the Bible didn't have confidence in the moment of God's working in their own lives and the workings of the world.

C. Joseph was confident that God was working in his life.

1. The story of Joseph is one that is quite incredible simply because of the ridiculous roller coaster-like twists and turns that happened all throughout. In **Genesis 37**, we are introduced to Jacob's favorite son, Joseph. Not only was this young man his father's favorite, but he was by all accounts a pretty impressive young man. However, this didn't stop his brothers from hating him. In fact, the hatred and jealousy was so severe that by the time they had to sit and listen to Joseph foretell dreams of them all bowing down to him...it was time for them to have him killed.
2. Thankfully, the oldest brother Reuben was willing to talk the other brothers out of killing him, so they instead sell him to Midianites who eventually take him down to Egypt where he is made a slave in the household of Potiphar. **(Genesis 38:36)** Things begin to look up for Joseph just long enough for him to be thrown into prison after being wrong accused of an indiscretion. While in prison, he interprets a dream that he asks in return might help him to be released, but that doesn't plan out as he had hoped. Eventually, he is able to interpret a dream that does get him released, and he is able to begin to make his way up the food chain in Egypt to the point that he ends up being Pharaoh's right hand man.
3. Most people might think that Joseph had forgotten about God along the way since things seem to continually go sideways, but this is evidenced to be untrue when we see Joseph naming couple of sons that were given to him. In **Genesis 41:50-52**, we read of Manasseh and Ephraim being born to Joseph and both of these boys were named in Hebrew with God in mind. *"Joseph named the firstborn*

Manasseh, "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." He named the second Ephraim, "For," he said, "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction." Joseph trusted that God had been with him all the way through, and this is finally evidenced with great gusto when Joseph says to his brothers in **Genesis 50:19-21**, "But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them."

D. Daniel states his confidence that God raises up kings.

1. Daniel was a man that found himself smack dab in the middle of God's workings among men. The message from the prophets to the people of Israel had been consistent and clear...if you will repent and obey then things will work out well for you, but if you continue to rebel then you will be destroyed. Nowhere is this message spoken more clearly than with what Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 1:18-20**, "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord, "Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool. "If you consent and obey, You will eat the best of the land; "But if you refuse and rebel, You will be devoured by the sword." Truly, the mouth of the Lord has spoken."
2. Unfortunately, the people did not heed the warnings of God and they were eventually punished for their rebellion just as God had promised. Daniel was a part of the generation that was suffering in captivity because of these sins of their forefathers. And yet, God was with Daniel because he was a man of great conviction and trust as could be noted in **Daniel 1**. Nonetheless, Daniel recognized that everything that had happened was a result of the almighty hand and power of God. This is seen clearly in the prayer of praise that Daniel offers up to God after God delivered to him the interpretation of king Nebuchadnezzar's dream. "Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven; Daniel said, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, For wisdom and power belong to Him. "It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men And knowledge to men of understanding. "It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, And the light dwells with Him. "To You, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, For You have given me wisdom and power; Even now You have made known to me what we requested of You, For You have made known to us the king's matter." (**Daniel 2:19-23**) Daniel had seen God's hand working throughout the history of Israel, and he was not going to hesitate for even a moment to fail to recognize that God's power was being clearly seen. However, we must recognize that Daniel was able to see things in the moment from a perspective that we simply don't have. This means...

E. Yet, even knowing these things to be true, we cannot know for certain when God has intervened in this world.

1. It is one thing for us to be able to look back at the entire history of God's recorded message and see where God was working through men to accomplish His plan to bring about man's redemption. It is also one thing for these divinely inspired and empowered men to be able to know that God was directly working with them in their situations to bring about a desired result that would eventually lead to God's plan of redemption being fulfilled. Therefore, it is important for us to recognize that we are not in those situations, and we are not able to speak with certainty as these men did that God is actively intervening and working within our lives or the lives of others in this world.
2. We can't say for certain that some negative situation that brought about a positive result was truly a result of God's working. It could be that chance and luck were the culprits. The inspired writer of **Ecclesiastes 9:11** was willing to say that this is the case at times in this life. It very well could be that God has worked in such a way that a particular world leader was raised to power for some sort of divinely appointed means, but the reality is that we cannot know that for certain.
3. Therefore, it is my judgement that we would do well to adopt the attitude of Mordecai in **Esther 4:13,14**, "Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether

you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?" The reality is that we simply cannot know for certain if God is working some sort of plan through a specific situation in our lives. We might be able to suppose that He is, but we simply can't know for certain. However, that doesn't change the fact that there is an absolutely sure way in which God does use us as His people each and every day of our lives, and that simply goes to show us that He does use us to accomplish His purposes.

II. God uses His people to accomplish His purposes.

A. We were redeemed so that we might become instruments of righteousness for God. (Romans 6:8-13)

1. The context of these verses is Paul's argumentation that just because these brethren were now saved through grace didn't mean that they could now go on willfully sinning against God like normal every day heathens. Instead, they needed to recognize what had been accomplished in them through their obedience to the Gospel of Christ. *"Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him."* (Romans 6:8,9)
2. Since this is how Christ now exists, Paul's argument is that we should now recognize ourselves as having become dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:11) The natural result in Paul's mind is that we would now no longer allow for sin to reign or dwell in our bodies in such a way that we actually obey it and fall back into condemnation. They were now to live and use their bodies not as instruments of unrighteousness, but as instruments of righteousness to God.
3. I am convinced that the language used by Paul in these verses is not done without strong consideration and understanding of what is being said. The word used by Paul in this verse to describe us as instruments is the word *hoplon* and this word brings with it the idea of something that is active and being used whether it be an implement, utensil, or tool. In the context of war it would be used to describe the weapon that is being used. We all know that these types of objects don't work by themselves, but that they are only effective when they are being used by someone. Therefore, we can conclude that when we come into Christ, we are preparing ourselves to be instruments, utensils, tools and weapons for our Lord in this life. We are being used by God to carry out and accomplish His purposes in growing and strengthening His kingdom.

B. If we want to be used by God to our full potential, then we must be committed to sanctification and holiness. (II Timothy 2:15-21)

1. The letters that Paul wrote to Timothy were written for the purpose of helping this young preaching son and those whom he would be teaching to know how it is that they should themselves *"in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth."* (I Timothy 3:15) To continue to build off of this idea, Paul writes again concerning how Timothy and others could be useful workmen and vessels for the Lord. For Timothy, and for that matter anyone who would desire to use the Word of God, it would begin with him having a solid grasp on God's Word and what it contains. We all need to know how to accurately handle the truth that lies before us. (II Timothy 2:15)
2. However, all of the knowledge of God's Word that we could fit in our heads won't matter one bit if we do not conduct ourselves in a manner in which allows for God to use us to our full potential. We have seen that God can even use the foolish and wicked in this world to accomplish His will, but if we want to be truly useful then we must be committed to being vessels that are honorable, sanctified, and useful to the Master. (II Timothy 2:20,21) The picture painted by Paul seems to be that in a large house there are vessels of every sort, and yet not all of them will be fully useful, and so is it among the people of God. Some will prepare themselves to be fully useful through striving for true sanctification and some will not care enough to give for real effort. Only one of those groups will be useful to their full potential to the Lord. Which group will we be a part of?

I feel confident in saying that God continues to work in and through men just as He seems to have always done throughout time. However, I am not so confident to be able to say when exactly God has intervened other than when I see His people being active and useful in His kingdom. In those moments, God is hard at work transforming us and using us for His purposes, and I am convinced that I ought to be perfectly content with even just that portion of being used by God. May each of us accept our roles as God's instruments of righteousness and prepare ourselves every day to be useful in His kingdom and accomplishing His will in all things.