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THE LESSON OF THE CUTTING BOARD

Romans 9

Do you remember the first time you flew in a jet airliner? I do. It was just after I had graduated from college. It felt very exciting and I loved it. I don’t know what class of aircraft it was. Whatever it was, those planes are long gone. Today’s jets are more advanced, more fuel efficient, quieter and even safer. However, the plane I flew on had one really big advantage over most of the jets of today. It had 2 seats on each side of the aisle. What I would like to know is who was the nimrod engineer that came up with 3 seats on each side of the aisle? Was that a good idea? I don’t think so. Why 3? The airlines know that’s a lousy plan. You can know that from the fact that in first class, where they treat people like human beings rather than like overgrown sardines that you cram into a tin, you never, ever see that 3-3 seating configuration. There is only a 2-2 configurations, or personal pods. Yeah, that’s what I see in first class as I pass through on my way to sardine class where we are packed in with the rest of the fish.

That’s one of my gripes with airline travel. There are others. Don’t even get me started on one of the biggest ones, which is TSA, the Totally Sadistic Agency. However, I’ve realized that one of the more discomfiting aspects of airline travel is you really can’t see anything outside the plane. Especially, you can’t see where you’re going. If you are not sitting right by a window you can see essentially nothing outside the plane. Even if you are right at a window you can’t see much because the windows are so small. Most of all, you can’t see what’s ahead. So you are crammed uncomfortably into this tube, strapped into a seat, and you have no idea what’s ahead, where you’re going or even what’s happening outside. We’ve been on a plane that clearly had some kind of problem, but we had no idea of what was going on. To add to the fun, on a plane you aren’t in control of much of anything. We don’t even have total control over when we use the restroom. “I’m sorry sir, the captain has turned on the seat belt sign. You’ll have to return to your seat.” “Well, then you’re going to have an unpleasant clean up job here fairly soon and I’m going to be humiliated.”

Life has some similarity to that unpleasant condition. Like on that airliner, we can’t see what’s ahead, we don’t know a lot of what’s going on around us, and most of it is out of our control. It can feel very uncomfortable. But there is something that can help us deal with these limitations of human life. We’ll see this in Romans 9.

At Romans 9 we hit a turning point in Paul’s letter. In the first 5 chapters Paul laid out the radical nature of the Gospel of Christ. The Gospel says we are given what we most need, acceptance, approval by God, forgiveness and new life, eternal life, totally by God’s grace. It is by faith, not by our merit at all. In chapters 6-8 he answered an objection to the gospel of grace. Some claimed that Paul had uncoupled an eternal relationship with God from living righteously. He answered that objection, now in chapters 9-11 he answers another one. This next objection is that the Gospel of grace in Christ Jesus as Paul has explained it seems to completely undo the whole covenant God had made with the Jewish people.

Paul’s most fierce and constant opponents were Jewish people. In their minds, Paul was both a heretic and a traitor to his own people. They despised him. This break with his own people was grievous to Paul. He was, as he described himself, a Hebrew of Hebrews. He was as Jewish as it gets. It tore him up that his own people rejected and hated him. He loved his fellow Jews. It was of huge importance to him to answer their objections and hopefully help them see that this new gospel this was all part of God’s plan.

We understand why he wanted to deal with that objection. But this discussion doesn’t feel particularly compelling to most of us today. We live in a stressful world. People are concerned about the economy, the state of our society and of morality, about just how we are going to be able to have a life that has some joy and meaning in it, about how we are going to deal with the people in our lives and our messy relationships. Those things matter to us a lot, but this question just doesn’t register much with us.

However, it actually does have much relevance for us. That’s because it brings up the issue of trust. Remember that the core of the Gospel that Paul has said is the crucial key for having full life and eternal life, is believing God’s promise. That’s living by faith. It means trusting God. Trust is the foundation of the whole thing. Trust is really at issue in this discussion that takes up Romans 9-11. But how can we trust God if he didn’t keep his promises to the Jewish people?

Paul starts off answering this question, but in the process goes off on a tangent to explain some things he said. He doesn’t get back to answering the objection until 11:1 where he says, “I ask then: Did God reject his people?” Right, that’s the question. We will get the answer to it in chapter 11, but prior to that Paul will say some things that raise some big questions for us today. Let’s look at Romans 9.

GOD IS STILL FAITHFUL TO ISRAEL

Paul was not a traitor to his fellow Jewish people. He loved them. He says in verse 2, “I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart” because of them. He was torn up by the fact that his countrymen were mostly rejecting Jesus, their Messiah, at that point. He felt that so deeply that he says in verse 3 that he wished he could be cut off from Christ and cursed if that could somehow save them.

Paul loved the Jewish people and believed in them with all his heart. He said they had the “adoption to sonship.” In Exodus 4:22 the Lord told Moses to say to Pharaoh, “Israel is my firstborn son.” In Psalm 82:6 he says, “You are all sons of the Most High God.” They have a special relationship to God. They brought God’s Law to the world and they were the nation that gave birth to the Messiah. They brought to the world the truth about the one true God, and they truly do have a special relationship with God. Paul believed that was still true.

However, verse 6 makes a statement that is a huge divide. “Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.” At issue here is who is true Israel? That is still a question that is debated today. What makes a person Jewish? One common answer is that is they are born of a Jewish mother. But that answer is problematic, for the line of David, the line of Messiah according to the prophecies, came through Ruth, who was not Jewish! She was from Moab!

Paul says that being a part of God’s chosen people is not a matter of one’s physical heritage at all. Who is really a child of Abraham? Paul had said in 4:16, “Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring, not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.” In other words, one is a child of Abraham by having the faith of Abraham, believing God’s promise, whether one is physically descended from him or not.

Paul claimed that it was possible to be physically part of Israel by birth, but not actually be part of Israel because one does not have faith in God’s promise through Messiah. The real Israel, Paul claims, are those who believe in Messiah, and God is keeping his covenant with those people. So part of Paul’s answer to the objection that God hasn’t kept his covenant with Israel is that he has kept it with true Israel, those who are Israel by faith.

That statement would have been inflammatory to his fellow Jews. But Paul reminded them that there is biblical precedent for saying that some people who were physically descended from Abraham are not Jews. He gave examples from the Old Testament. Abraham actually had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, but only Isaac was part of Israel. Paul also cited Rebekah’s two sons, Jacob and Esau. Both were children of Isaac and Rebekah, but only Jacob was considered to be Israel.

Paul quoted Malachi 1:2-3 where the Lord said, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” Wait, doesn’t God love everyone? How could he say that he hated Esau? There was an ancient idiom involving the word “hate.” Toby and Anna have been teaching their girls not to use the word “hate.” At one point we were talking about cilantro and I said, “I hate that stuff.” Ella reprimanded me. “You’re not supposed to say hate, Yapaw.” “Okay, I detest cilantro.” She wasn’t familiar with the word “detest” so I got away with that one.

In this ancient idiom “hate” was not literal. It meant something along the lines of “when you see how exceptionally kind and gracious I was to this person, the way I treated that person might look like hate.” Jesus used that idiom in Luke 14:26 when he said, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even their own life, such a person cannot be my disciple.” He was not teaching that we need to literally hate our families and even our own lives. He was teaching that our commitment to him comes first before everything else. Compared to the undying depth of our commitment to him, everything else looks like hate.

All this meant that there were people who were physically descended from Abraham, who were not Israel. The real Israel is people who follow Abraham’s example of faith and believe God’s promise, *even if they are biologically Gentile*. Maybe we could call it theological ethnic fluidity. So Paul says God is keeping his covenant with true Israel.

However, that matter of God choosing Jacob and not Esau, opens up a whole new matter. God didn’t choose Jacob over Esau because Jacob was so superior, such a sterling person. He would prove to be a selfish con man who cheated his brother and lied to his father. Why did God choose him? Because God decided to choose him and not the other just because he wanted to. This raises a whole lot of issues.

GOD SOVEREIGNLY CHOOSES

In verse 14 Paul quotes Exodus 33:19 where God says, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” In other words, I will show mercy and give grace to whomever I jolly well please, thank you very much.

Verse 16 is a verse that often gets overlooked, but that has enormous implications. “It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.” What is the “it” in question in that verse? It is God showing mercy to someone, giving them grace. It is God choosing them, bringing them into his kingdom and adopting them as his child. Paul says that is not about human effort or merit in any way. It does not depend on human beings working hard so they merit being given grace. It is purely, 100% about God choosing to show grace and mercy to them of his own volition.

Paul uses a potter as an example. Doesn’t the potter have the right to make whatever he wants out of a shapeless lump of clay? In those days of no indoor plumbing if he chose to make a chamber pot out of the clay, the clay had no right to complain. Maybe the clay wanted to be made into fine China. It is not up to the clay to decide. It is up to the potter.

I really admire people who can make stuff. Lorin Youde has made a number of things in his woodshop that amaze me. He once made some toy wooden tops for us that were very cool. I am pathetic at working with my hands. I made a few things in metal shop and wood shop in junior high. I made a cutting board in wood shop. Do you know how hard it is to make a cutting board? It’s a board! Out of a piece of wood I made a board! That’s like saying, “Out of this piece of paper I am now going to make…a piece of paper.” Oooh, that’s impressive. Here’s the real pitiful part. I even messed up the cutting board. But here’s the thing. That piece of wood never once complained about becoming a cutting board. It never objected that it wanted to be a piece of fine furniture. It didn’t even make an issue of being made into a messed up cutting board. I had the right to make that wood whatever I wanted. Sort of. I actually had to do what the teacher said, but the wood had no say in the matter.

Paul was reminding us of who we are and who God is. We’re merely clay. We’re the piece of wood. God is the Creator, the artisan who decides what to make, Paul was claiming that God has the right to sovereignly choose some people, and that he does so. He didn’t choose one brother over the other because he was a better person. He just chose him for reasons that only he knows, but they were completely disconnected from the efforts of that brother to be a godly person. That was good for Jacob, because he wasn’t a very godly person.

The larger implication of this is that Paul is saying to the Jewish people that God is sovereign and has the right and ability to do whatever he wants and to choose whomever he wants, including Gentiles. This is reflected in passages like Ephesians 1:4-5 where he wrote that God, “chose us in him (Christ) before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.”

Well, God knows the future, so he probably chose some people because he saw that they would have faith and would seek him, right? Some people claim that, but listen to the things Paul said both in Romans 9 and in Ephesians 1:5. In Romans 9:16 he said God’s choosing of people does not depend “on human desire or effort.” It has nothing to do with what those people want or do. In Ephesians 1:5 Paul said he chose us in “accordance with his pleasure and will.” He did it because it was what he wanted to do and decided to do, end of story. It is purely by his sovereign choice.

God is the Creator of all, the Owner of All, the Ruler of All, the Almighty with power over it all. He has the right, the authority and the power to do whatever he chooses. Psalm 115:3 says, “God is in heaven, he does whatever pleases him.” In Isaiah 46:10 God said, “I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, ‘My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.’” God can do whatever he wants, and his purpose will be accomplished, no matter what humans do.

This is a place where we run into the reality that God is not like us and is ultimately impossible for us to completely understand. In Isaiah 55:8 God said, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.” We can’t even begin to think about what it would be like to be almighty and sovereign, to be able to do whatever you please and know your purpose will be accomplished.

When in your life can you say, “I will do all that I please”? That would be never. I will do all that I please, so I’m going to buy a private jet that I will fly to Hawaii, and when I’m there I’m going to buy a spectacular house on a beautiful beach as a vacation home. Sorry, Rick, but you can’t buy the jet or the house because you don’t have anywhere close to that much money, and even if you could buy the jet you can’t fly it because you don’t have the ability to fly a plane. So no, you can’t do all that you please. Here’s the sad truth. I can’t even say, “tonight I’m going to sleep all night without waking up even once.” I can’t even do that, no matter how much I purpose to do it.

Who is the most powerful person on the planet? The cliché is it’s the guy who lives in that big white house in Washington D. C. Can he do whatever he pleases? No. He’d like to put an end to Vladimir Putin’s gross atrocity in the Ukraine, but he doesn’t have the ability to do that without making things much worse. He’d like to get inflation under control, but he doesn’t have the power to wave a magic wand and do that either.

We have no idea what it would be like to truly have sovereign power and authority like that. And the truth is, the very idea is kind of scary for us. The late Ray Stedman wrote that we don’t like sovereignty because “it is always connected to tyranny.” The more power a person has, the more of a threat they are to us. The United States Constitution is full of checks and balances. Why is that? Because its creators were terrified of one person getting unlimited power.

Sometimes I wish passages like this one weren’t in the Bible. That’s because the concept of God being sovereign, of choosing some people just because he will have mercy on whomever he wants to have mercy, is uncomfortable for us. It raises quite thorny questions that we don’t have nice, pat answers for. One of those questions is raised in verse 19. “Why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?” That’s a tough one. If God is sovereign, ruling over everything, isn’t whatever happens his will? That means if I choose to disobey him, aren’t I doing it because he chose that I would, so isn’t it his fault? How can he blame me then, because I can’t resist what God orders?

Another problem with this idea of God’s sovereignty is, it ends up looking super unfair to us. God chooses some people and not others just because he wants to? So some people get the shaft because he chooses it and there’s nothing they can do about it? Imagine that the President came out with a new plan to help some people. His plan is that everyone whose last name begins with the letter M, regardless of their race, gender, age, beliefs, character or political party will receive a stipend from the government of $10,000 per month for the rest of their lives. They get this huge benefit just because the President chooses them. Ooh, I love this plan because Myatt begins with M. How is that plan going to go over? Well, no doubt there will be people claiming that their last name is not Williams, it’s Milliams, or that it’s not Robinson, it’s Mobinson. We’ll have Bill Marrington in our church, and also John and Suzy Muewel. But we all know the howls of protest would be deafening. “That’s not fair!” Right, and it doesn’t feel fair to us that God would choose some people purely of his own accord. It will never feel fair to us, and we truly don’t understand or even like this idea.

Yet another problem with this idea is it ends up being determinism. We have no choice. We just do what God has predestined us to do. We are nothing more than robots, doing what we are programmed and predestined to be and to do. This has a couple of big problems. One is that makes God the author of untold evil. All the horrible things that people do, they must be doing because God predestined them to do them. Putin had no choice. He is waging this ugly, horrific war because God decided he should do it. So God becomes the cause of terrible atrocities and evil.

Another problem with this is that it doesn’t match up with how we live. I choose. I know I do. I decided to put my faith in Jesus. I make choices every single day to either do what God wants or not to. There are some things in my life that seemed destined, ordained by God, but that is by no means true of all of it. The experts have said people my age should get yet another covid booster shot. I don’t know what to do about that. I know some people have. But it feels to me like I’m the one who has to decide. One more problem with this idea is I just don’t see how it can work. We struggle with all of the ramifications and complications of such a complex system.

WE DON’T KNOW WHAT GOD IS DOING

What is your answer to all those questions, Rick? If you are taking notes make sure to write this down. If you’re not taking notes, you should, because you really need to learn this answer and remember it. It is a simple answer, but it covers all the bases. My answer is, “I don’t know.” I don’t know how this is fair. I don’t know how God gives us choices and they are meaningful, but still controls things. I don’t know how this system can possibly work. I don’t have an answer to any of it. I wish I had it all figured it out, but I don’t have any of it figured out.

However, we should pay attention to what Paul says beginning in verse 22. “What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath?” In verse 23 he asks, “What if he did this to make the riches of glory known to the objects of his mercy?” He proceeds to quote several Old Testament passages pointing out that God has worked all along to rescue Gentiles as well as Jews. But I want you to notice the “what if” approach of Paul. He’s saying, “We don’t necessarily understand what God is doing. All we have are possibilities and what ifs because our thoughts are not God’s thoughts.”

It is crucial to remember the experience of Job. He went through terrible suffering that he did not deserve. His friends had pat answers. “God is just, so he would only let these things happen to you if you deserve it. So now we know the truth, Job. These things could only have happened if you have some terrible hidden rebellion against God going on in your life. We want you to repent of it so all your suffering can finally stop.” Job howled in protest. He knew he was not rebelling against God. His defense of himself led him to question God. “Yeah, how could you let this happen to me? This is not fair!”

God needed to answer his questions, didn’t he? God is sovereign, so he brought all this on Job. He needed to explain the reason for it all and help him understand how it could be fair. So in Job 38:2-4 God finally did respond. He said to Job, “Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man: I will question you, and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundations? Tell me, if you understand.” Uh, I think I was absent that day. In verse 12 he asked, “Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place?” I could have answered that one. Yes, I’ve given orders to the morning on several occasions. “Did it work?” “Well, no.” He goes on for two chapters, pounding away at Job. In chapter 40 God pauses and gives Job a chance to answer. Job says in verses 4-5, “I am unworthy. How can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer, twice, but I will say no more.” But God wasn’t done. He wanted to drive the point home, so he went at it again. In verse 8 he said, “Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?” For two more chapters he fired questions at Job. Finally, Job waved the white flag again. In 42:3 he said, “Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.” In verse 6 he said he despised himself and repented in dust and ashes.

We come at God with our questions about his sovereignty and his choosing of whom he will. How can this be fair? How can you say we don’t choose? Doesn’t this make you the author of evil? How can this work? And God says to us, “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundations? Have you ever given orders to the morning or shown the dawn its place? Would you discredit my justice?”

God is basically saying to us, “You will understand this when you are all knowing, all powerful and eternal.” When is that going to happen? I’m pretty sure that will be the day after I become the starting quarterback for an NFL team. In other words, NEVER! We can’t understand because we’re not Almighty, Eternal Creator God. The correct way for us to respond to all of this is to say with Job, “Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.” We need to admit that we are not infinite, not eternal, not divine, and that it is not just likely, it is certain that there are things we just are not going to understand because God’s thoughts are not our thoughts. We are not able to understand it because it requires divine knowledge and wisdom. Our role is not to understand, which we cannot possibly do. We are to accept it and trust.

That’s all you’ve got? This is impossible, I don’t have the answers but we should believe it. That’s your best shot? This is a tough pill to swallow. It’s a pill the size of a football. Laurie and I have a friend who is a wife and a mom of 3 little boys. She is in a war with breast cancer. Her last year has been horrific. She has been through a nearly unbearable ordeal. It seemed like it was finally over and she had made it through. And then her doctors told her the ordeal is not over. In fact, it may never be over until she is no longer on this planet. Her posts on line about this grim battle are raw, filled with pain. Why should she believe in a sovereign but good God? She wrestles with this big time.

There is reason to believe. Read the book of Daniel and you will see details of world history laid out hundreds of years before they happened. Consider the prophecies of the coming Messiah laid out by Isaiah and others. Daniel even foretold the time of his coming. These facts remind us that a sovereign God is moving history along according to his plan.

IMPLICATIONS

THOUGH DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT:

GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY GIVES US SECURITY

Security is a precious commodity to us, and it is a rare one. There is a man named Philip Poniz who has been collecting unusual and rare timepieces since he was a teenager. In 1983 he arranged to rent a safe deposit box at his bank, and he has kept his collection there ever since. In April, 2017 he went to access his box, opened the lid and found the box empty. His collection, valued at $10 million, was gone, apparently stolen. He was stunned to learn that there are no federal laws, no rules requiring that banks compensate customers if property in their safe deposit box is stolen or destroyed. Every year a few hundred customers report that valuable items have disappeared from their boxes.

That’s bad, but it could be worse. There’s a San Francisco man named Stefan Thomas who has $220 million in Bitcoin in what is called an iron box. He can only open the box and access that money with a password, and he can’t remember his password. He has 10 guesses before it is locked permanently, forever. He has used 8. He only has 2 left, and then those millions are gone for good. About 20% of Bitcoin worth $140 billion, appears to be in lost, locked or stranded wallets.

Things we think secure are not always as secure as we wish. There is something of enormous value that is completely secure. God has not chosen us because of our desire or effort. That takes the pressure off. God chose us before the creation of the world. His choice was made because he will have mercy on whom he has mercy. It has nothing to do with us. That means that we can’t foul it up. Our life with him is absolutely secure, because it is in his purpose, and his purpose will stand.

What if my security with Laurie was based on my ability to give her presents that she is thrilled by? How pressure packed would her birthday, our anniversary, Christmas all become? It would be terrible. It is much better to be secure in her love. What if our security with God was based in our ability to live according to his standards? All of life would be enormously stressful, pressure-packed, and every shortcoming, every failure would be threatening. That’s a terrible way to live. It is much better for us to be secure in God’s sovereign choosing of us, because nothing can threaten it.

GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY GIVES LIFE

This whole thing of God’s sovereignty is an uncomfortable mystery for us. We wish we could understand all of it, but we can’t. All we can do is accept that truth that God exists in ways beyond our comprehension. But this leads to a cool reality. In John 17:3 Jesus said, “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God.” Jesus said eternal life consists of knowing God. Eternal life is not just long, but it is life as God intended it. The more we know God, the more we will experience real, full life. It is as we see him as he is, not an enlarged human being, pretty much like us, just bigger and better, but as the Almighty God, the Sovereign Ruler of all, as we see his existence and his ways are far beyond us, we begin to truly known him. And as we know him we actually begin to experience life. We will truly live to the level that we know him. So knowing him as the Sovereign God whom we can’t explain or fully comprehend, becomes a source of life for us. It means there is direction, purpose to our lives even when we can’t see it. I don’t understand all that has happened in my life. By human standards it all amounts to near zero. But God has me as part of his sovereign plan, and that means I can rejoice that it all means something eternal. I can live and rejoice in what God is doing rather than my measly achievements.

GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY GIVES PEACE

Years ago Laurie and I went through the fire of ministering to a couple whose teenage son had died in a freak tragic accident. To say they were devastated doesn’t begin to cover the emotional wrecks they were. They were grieving so intensely it was like being too close to a blazing fire. We talked with them, cried with them, prayed with them. At one point we talked about the sovereignty of God and its mystery. How could this have been a part of God’s sovereign plan? I could not explain that. But at one point they told me that the one thing that actually enabled them to retain their sanity and actually have peace, was that somehow God was sovereign even in this most painful of tragedies. It comforted them to know that all was not lost, that God had this, yes, even this within his plan.

In a world where there is chaos, where suffering abounds, where nearly everything is out of our control, it is a huge comfort to know that it is not out of God’s sovereign control. Wherever we go, God goes before us. He knows the end from the beginning, and there are no surprises for him.

I read an article not long ago about a guy named Bill Offer who is a supervisor at a golf club in Minnesota. He was told that an errant driver was out of place. He was expecting a misplaced golf club, but he was surprised to find it was a misplaced driver of a vehicle. The vehicle in question was an Amazon delivery truck and it had gotten stuck in a tunnel that was meant for golf carts. The driver explained he was unfamiliar with the area and was following GPS. It told him to go through this tunnel, with unfortunate results. The driver was embarrassed but fine. A tow truck was needed to get the vehicle free of the tunnel. Sometimes we feel like if someone is directing our lives they’re doing about as good a job as GPS in that case. We should be at peace because God is not making mistakes. He is in control.

There is enormous freedom in this. I’m not flying the plane. The airline doesn’t need me to fly it, to control what happens. Imagine what it would be like to be on a plane strapped into your seat in sardine class and thinking you were in control of the plane. It is up to you to get it safely to your destination. It would drive you nuts because you don’t actually have any control over the airplane at all. You’d be stressing, fretting, doing everything you can think of to try to get it to do what you want. You’d be freaking out because you have no idea where you are or where you need the plane to go. And it won’t do what you want it to do. Wouldn’t it be a relief to realize it’s not up to you? Just relax and let those in control fly the plane. God has control, so I can just be free to be faithful, serve him, and let him work out his purposes.

Laurie and I got to be with all 5 of our grandchildren at various points this week. Each one of them is a delight to us and precious beyond measure. At times I look at these little marvels and I begin to fret. I think of the many challenges ahead of them, of the obstacles, the hurts, the disappointments they will inevitably face, the detours they could take in life and I want to protect them, to keep them from all that could go wrong. But I can’t fly that plane. It is not in my control. Trying to exert control will only stress me and will create all sorts of problems. Peace is found in knowing Almighty God knows them, loves them more than I do, knows everything that is ahead for them, and he is in control.

Braulia Riberio was part of a team of Brazilian young people, all first time missionaries, who went to try to plant a mission station among the Paumari people in the jungle in Brazil. They would be the first people to reach the village they were aiming for. They had to take boats up the rivers because there were no roads. The only money they had was enough to buy food and supplies for 3 months in the jungle. But they reached a place where there were no transportation boats. They would have to hire a private boat to get them to their destination, but it would take all their money. They decided to go ahead, even though they only had enough food for the short trip. When they got to the village the first person they encountered was a woman who invited them into her hut. They all sat on the floor and talked to her for an hour. Finally, she asked why they were there. Braulia told her they wanted to help the people of her village know Jesus, the Son of God. She looked at him with a curious expression for a moment, then shouted to her grandson, “Danilo, the missionaries have arrived. Take them to their home.” This surprised the group, and Braulia said, “Uh, our home?” She pointed at a tall hut near by. She said, “Danilo and I built this hut two summers ago, preparing for your arrival. We heard on the radio about the Creator God and how his Son, Jesus, wants to help us. I said, ‘if that is true, he will send us his people.’ So we built the hut for you.” They moved into the hut and the people fed them fish, manioc flour and jungle fruit. For the entire 6 months they were there they did not need a cent of the money they’d had to use to get there. The Sovereign God had it all under control.