



Divine Tensions

Matt Chandler – January 3, 2010

Hey, how are we? It's good to be back. There are just a couple of things before we get started. First of all, I'm hopped up on steroids, so I'm extremely emotional. So if at some point I get to crying up here or something like that, we'll blame it on the steroids. If I get really angry and start yelling at you, I was doing that years before I was on steroids, so we'll just take that as me being somewhat normal. Secondly, I think one of the things that I have found throughout all of this that my heart is really grateful for is the fact that this happened when it happened. Leaving the Highland Village campus, coming into this campus, going live stream, all these things are these big markers in our church's life, and the Lord decided to do this at a time to show us all that this is His church, not my church, that this is what He's doing, not what I'm doing and that I am a piece of the puzzle just like everybody else here. To remove me from that as all of that was going on and to let it be a seamless and as beautiful as it has been was such a gift from God to us to show that His power and His might are not wrapped up in me. His power and His might are wrapped up in Him, and He's going to accomplish His will. And that was a gift He gave us. It has brought me an immense amount of joy to think on that, to dwell on that and to revel in the fact that God chose to do it like He chose to do it. So I'm grateful for that.

Now, here's my plan (and I say that so loosely now that all these things have new meanings). I want to address what I want to address today, which honestly is a retweaking of a sermon in October on the sovereignty of God and human responsibility. And then next week, I want to start to finish out "The Path" series and then start the book of Colossians. That's my plan. Now, we'll see how that goes, but that's the plan. So write that down in pencil. . .or maybe just even think about it, forget and be surprised next week. That might even be better. My hope is that I will be back preaching live in Flower Mound very quickly. There are a lot of factors that I do not control that are going to speak into that like how my body handles the treatment or how well I'm able to fight through certain things. So if we can do that, I'd like to get back to at least some sort of semblance of routine with you very quickly. But those are my plans, and my plans are very weak and out of my control. The other thing I'll say right as we move into the text, I could not be more proud of the staff and the elders here at the Village Church, who have done nothing but stand in the gap, get things done and love you well. I love that Piper said last week that, after listening to everything and checking everything out, he felt like we didn't need him. And honestly, we didn't need him, but how great was it that he came? That cat is just unreal.

Now, I have always, by the grace of God, been intrigued by the tension created in Scripture. I guess you could say that I've never outgrown the "why" stage. I've always wanted to know "How does that work? How does this work? What's going on here?" And so I've always just kind of dug and asked questions and wrestled and not wanted to

let it go and get to the bottom of it. But if you take a step back and start going, “Okay, God is the Alpha and the Omega. He has always been and He will always be. I am finite, small and momentary,” at some level, there are going to be pieces that I’m not going to figure out. If He is outside of time and I am inside of time, there are things I’m not going to be able to see that are very clear to Him. So I’ve always had this kind of tension and this press in me, because I want to solve everything, but I’m well aware that I’m not going to be able to. And so this is where faith comes in. This is not where we as believers turn off our brains, stop thinking and start saying stupid stuff. It’s where we press in, we study, we do sound exegesis in the Scriptures, we learn what the Bible says and we learn to live in faith in tension.

And so I’m grateful for that tension, and I want to paint some of that for you. Look with me at Ephesians 1, starting in verse 3. *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”* So let’s do the time line. Before the foundation of the Earth was laid, before the universe is, God chooses that some of us are going holy and blameless in His sight, some of us, some of us in this room right now. So before the foundation of the Earth was laid, God had decided that some of us would be holy and blameless in His sight. So that’s the time line. We’re in 2010, and this happens way back here. Let’s keep reading. *“In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, . . .”* The reason He does this is not because He looks and goes, “You know what? That guy is going to be a good guy. I want him on My team. . . That guy is going to be great at business, and if I save him, I can use his money to really fund My thing here. So I’m going to save him. . . You know that guy? Everybody is going to love him. I’m going to save him because everybody is going to love him, and then he is going to point people to Me. So I’m saving him.” That’s not why people are saved. They’re saved to the purpose of His will. Let’s keep reading. *“. . . to the praise of his glorious grace, . . .”* It’s almost as if it’s, “Oh that guy? That one? Really? You’re going to choose that one, God?” *“. . . to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us,”* we did not discover, we did not figure out, He made known to us *“the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.”* That is a thick, weighty text, is it not? It has all of these questions that, if you’re a thinker, should start making your head spin.

Now, here’s what last night looked like in my house. We ate dinner with some family and then watched the first half of the Florida-Cincinnati game. I then went upstairs, put the two older ones in their beds and read a little bit. Then I got beside Audrey’s bed on my knees, put my hands on her body and I asked Christ to save her. I ask Christ to open up her heart, open up her mind, open up her ears, that she would see the glorious beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ and that her heart and mind would be His completely. Then

I said amen, went into my son's room, body slammed him on the bed, he squealed, we laughed and then I prayed the same thing over my boy with my hands on his head that the Holy Spirit of God would flood his soul and radically convert him to Christ and that his days would be marked with a desperate love for God Almighty. Then I said amen, walked back down the stairs, walked past Nora's room, she was already out, so I didn't go in there and as I walked by the door, I just said the same thing in my mind, "Save Nora."

So are you seeing a little bit of tension already? According to Ephesians 1, salvation already belongs to God. There are not certain cards that I get to play to see my children saved. But I'm asking Him, despite the fact that Ephesians 1 clearly said He's got it. If we go to Romans 9, it would say that they are either vessels for noble purposes or vessels for destruction. So despite the fact that Romans 9 and Ephesians 1 and a great deal of biblical theology would say, "God's done this," I'm still asking Him. And we see this tension everywhere. I'll read a bunch to you. In Proverbs 16, it says that when you throw the dice, what numbers come up were determined by God. So that great weekend or that horrible weekend you had in Vegas, according to Proverbs 16, that's on the Lord. "*The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble*" (Proverbs 16:4) Proverbs 16:9 says, "*The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.*" In Psalm 115, it says, "*Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.*"

As we began this process, at every doctor's appointment we went to, we were like, "This what we want to hear; this is what we don't want to hear." So we went in to Dr. Barnett's thinking, "We want to watch this over a period of time, and then we'll decide. What we don't want to hear is that we need to do surgery right now." And we walked into that office on Tuesday and heard, "We're going to do major surgery on you on Friday." So we went into Dr. Fink's thinking, "We'll do chemo, but we don't want to do radiation in my brain." We walked into that and they go, "We're going to do chemo and radiation, and we're going to start it very quickly." So every doctor's appointment that we went to, we kind of had this, "This is what we want, this is what we're asking for," and it went the exact opposite way. Lauren and I had to smile how this verse kind of continually came up about how we have our plans, but the Lord has His plans. This goes back to me being in time and Him being outside of time. It's me thinking, "Oh what does this mean ten years from now," and God already being ten years from now.

Let me give you a couple of others. According to Jesus, the birds are fed because the Father feeds them and wildflowers grow because God lets them grow. On and on I could go about the natural process here, but here's the interesting piece. It's not like these guys are backwoods idiots. Ecclesiastes clearly outlines in chapter 1 that they understand the water cycle, that it rains, it evaporates into heaven and then it rains again. They understand the science behind how the natural process works, and yet they still say, "God makes it rain." It's their understanding that He's behind all the natural processes. "*I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps*" (Jeremiah 10:23). "*For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in*

the seas and all deeps” (Psalm 135:5-6). Ephesians 1, which we just read, is about as strong as any. God works everything according to His will. So there’s not one part of creation, not one part of anything that God does rightly and beautifully stand over and go, “This is Mine, this is My doing, this is Me operating, this is Me accomplishing for Me, My purposes.”

Now here’s where we get even more tension. In the middle of all that, men and women in the Bible cry out to God about their circumstances, about their situations, they ask Him to relent, they ask Him to start something He’s not doing, they ask Him to stop something that He is doing, and He hears them and responds. Let’s go to Exodus 32 on this one. We’ll pick it up in verse 9. *“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.’ But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, ‘O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.’”* So to put the story in plain English, they’ve rebelled against God, God tells Moses, “I don’t even want to talk to you about this. I’m killing every one of them. Leave Me alone. I’m going to destroy them, and then I’m starting with you.” And then Moses goes, “Wait! Let me say a couple things here.” And then he begins to plead with the Lord, “If You do this, people are going say that You just dragged Your people out here to kill them. Why would You do that to Your own name.” And he begins to plead with God for the lives of Israel. Now listen to God’s response. My Reformed brothers are going to hate this, but it’s in the Bible. *“And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.”* He changed His mind. I mean, He’s not lying. Some people start to play these really silly games with these kinds of texts. They’ll do things like, “Well, it’s not really a lie for God to lie. He was just trying to lead him a certain way.” And they start playing these really silly games with the nature and character of God. So the text clearly says that God says, “This is what I’m going to do,” Moses intercedes and God relents. That’s what you get playing out in the text.

And this happens over and over and over again in the Scriptures. I’ll just read a couple to you. James 4:2 says, *“You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.”* Did you hear that? You don’t have, because you’re not asking for this. The insinuation is, if you’ll ask, it will be granted. I don’t believe that to be universally true, so be careful. Luke 11:9-10, *“And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”* 2 Chronicles 7:14, *“If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and*

heal their land.” Do you hear it? God is sovereign, God’s already got His plan, He’s working it and yet He’s saying, “If you’ll turn, if you’ll pray, if you’ll come, I’ll respond.” 1 John 1:9, “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*” So because we’re Western and linear what we want to do right now is go, “Okay, is He sovereign or can we change His mind? Can we engage Him in such a way that God hears us and responds?” The answer is yes. That’s so hard for everybody.

Here’s what I’ve learned, even through this little journey, and I knew it to be true before. Keep in mind, I’m not teaching a new sermon here. You can go download this from October. My theology has not changed here. What I’ve got to experience is both through this. I get e-mails from people just going, “The Lord’s will be done,” and then I get e-mails from people going, “You just believe and the kingdom is here. Christ has already purchased your healing,” which is partly true. He has purchased my healing, but we’re still wasting away. Paul unbelievably clear about that. So you get these two camps. Do you see what’s happening? There’s, “We don’t need to bother Him. He’s going to heal Matt or He’s not,” or it’s, “We just need to pray enough.” There’s this draw in the soul of man to be Aladdin and make God Robin Williams, to rub the lamp and go, “Do what I tell You.” And we’ll lock up whether or not God loves us depending on if He responds in the way we want Him to. We make Him a cheap magician and not the God of the universe. And it’s a sad, horrible thing to condense and reduce God down to “He loves me if He does what I say.” That’s Willy Wonka, that’s Veruca Salt, that’s “I want the squirrel” or “I want the goose that lays the golden egg,” depending on which version you like. So in this, both are correct. You’ve got to watch your tendency to reduce. You’ve got to watch the tendency to go, “It’s just His will, and what He’s going to do He’s going to do.” And you’ve got to watch the tendency to go, “No, if we simply believe, we fast, we pray and we bother and He’ll answer.” You’ve got to resist polarizing in either one of those directions, because the truth is they are both true. The Scriptures are flooded with both of them.

Now the reason why, for seven years now, I’ve continually tried to bring you back to the cross is because the love of God for us is wrapped up in the incarnation of God in the flesh, His death, burial and resurrection and not in whether or not He heals me. God’s love is bound in Jesus Christ, the cross and the resurrection, not on whether I suffer or don’t suffer or you suffer or don’t suffer. Our love is secure there, nowhere else. So the reason we keep coming back to that over and over and over again here is it really is the only place of immaculate hope. That’s all we’ve got. We’ve got God’s love in the cross of Jesus Christ and that Christ willingly absorbed the wrath of God on you and me so that we might be blameless and holy before Him according to His predetermined plan. That’s our hope. That’s where my hope is. That’s where my joy is. Now we’re asking for healing. I’ve been honest here. I’ve said I’m here for 40 years unless God kills me. I’ve said that every time I’ve said that for four years. My plan is to grow old and surly, to walk my girls down the aisle, to see my boy grow up and marry a godly woman and become a godly man. I’ve got hopes for all those things, prayers for all those things. We’re fighting for those things aggressively, and we believe that’s how it’s going to play out. But if it doesn’t, there’s no bitterness in my heart. We’ve gotten to live really, really

well and enjoy God very deeply for a long time now, and we've gotten to contend for you, we've gotten to beg God for you and we've gotten to preach for you. And all of that is wrapped up in the cross of Jesus Christ. That's where it's wrapped up, not in new buildings, not in long life. Listen, it's inevitable. I'm constantly trying to convince you of this. It's inevitable. I am going to die, this year, next year, ten years, fifteen years, twenty years, thirty years from now. You are too. I've told you before that I don't care how much pilates you do, I don't care how much spinach you eat, it's coming for you. It's also a great comfort for me that I don't have to reinvent anything I've been saying to you, but I get to stand in it now and go, "I'm not a liar, guys." I'm pleading with you, for you, for the glory of God.

I think there are several other examples in Scripture that help us with this. I love Paul in Corinthians, who is far more powerful and I in regards to walking in the Holy Spirit. His handkerchief and apron heal people. A lot of times in the Scriptures, he's not going, "Jesus, please heal this man." He walks up and goes, "Get up and walk," and the guy gets up and walks. Now that's different, right? Because I've prayed for a lot of people while I was in the hospital, "Please heal. . . please heal. . . please heal. . ." I have never said, "Get up and walk," and had someone hop out of their bed and walk. So this is a different level of power that I've ever been able to walk in, and I would contend that it's greater than anything you have been able to walk in either. And yet on three occasions, Paul pleads with God, "Remove this thorn in my flesh. . . remove this thorn in my flesh. . . remove this thorn in my flesh." And what's the answer? "No." God's answer to him was, "No, I won't. If I take this from you, you'll boast in your exceedingly great revelation, and I've already said that the proud I know from afar. No, I will not heal you, but My grace will be sufficient for you in it." But then you've got other times where God absolutely heals. In Philippians, you've got a guy, Epaphroditus, who gets really sick, and Paul and other apostles are praying that he'd be healed. But he keeps getting worse and worse, and they think he's going to die. And then right near the end, all of a sudden, God heals him and it's clear that He heals them in the prayers of the saints. So you start getting these pictures of, "No. . . Yes, but I'm going to let you suffer for a season," and then sometimes it's just immediate and miraculous. So I would say in all of this that even if God chooses not to heal, then we praise Him for all circumstances, knowing that He is sovereign, knowing that He is above all, knowing that He is in all and through all. There is a great C.S. Lewis quote in his book on grief where he talks about when you're in heaven, when all of it is said and done, it's not that you look back at all the problems and pain and go, "Oh, that makes sense." Instead, you look back and there was never a problem to begin with. I've always loved that quote.

With that said, let me give you six things that we're praying for as a family. We are praying for my complete physical healing. We're praying for it nightly, sometimes more often than that. In fact, every time I take my chemotherapy, we put those two pills in my hand, I cup my hand over them and go, "Okay Lord, let this kill every cancerous cell in my body, and let it leave the rest of my cells alone." So we're praying for that. I'm praying for my doctors. Both MD Anderson in Houston and the Mayo Clinic said I could not have a better team of doctors and a better plan than the ones down here in Dallas are working. So we feel very confident in our doctors. They are believers. We've prayed

together, and we've cried together. They are a great group. But we're praying for their wisdom, their insights. I've been praying for my children's salvation quite a bit. That has just been heavy on our hearts to see our children to come to know the Lord. They have done very well throughout all of this. We have been very honest with them. And so they've done very well, but we're praying for their salvation. We've been praying for strength. We have decided to do this publicly instead of privately. There was some great dialogue about that before we decided to do it publicly. So we've been praying for strength to suffer well. Nehemiah 6 has just been a big prayer of ours where Nehemiah goes, "Now Lord, strengthen my hands." And so we've prayed that almost daily. And then we've been praying a lot for you, that God would be working in you. Piper said last week that when all this is over, the latter glory would be greater than the former glory. And although I agree with that way and hope that way, there's also something going on right now in the middle of this, and not just for us. And so I've gotten to hear from so many of you and pray with so many of you and be encouraged by so many of you who have also suffered well, who have also suffered hard, who have bled, who have cried, who have also lost loved ones, who are sick right now. God is accomplishing something in us right now as a church, deepening us, stirring us, helping us pray, teaching us to pray. So we're passionately praying for you. So that's kind of where we are as a family and that's kind of what I wanted to say.

So let me pray for us, and then we'll go from there. "Father, I thank You for these men and women. I thank You for a day to come together and just let the Word read us a bit and press us a little bit. I find my heart really pulled here, God, for those in that sovereignty camp so hard that they can't seem to bring themselves to just ask You, to lay their burdens down, to approach Your throne of Grace with confidence, to plead with You for circumstances, for hurts, for pains. I pray for them. For those who have made You some kind of genie in a bottle that can be controlled if we just play the right cards, I pray that there be some repentance too. Both reduce You to something that You're not. One makes You uncaring and gone and an absentee landlord, and one makes You a slave to our will. Both ideas are wicked. So would You let the force of the texts today crush both of those ideas, and might we be men and women of God who plead and pray and fast and beg You and then rest in Your sovereign purposes? May we be marked by that. I just pray that You would stir up our hearts and our minds toward You and that You would give us confidence in You. I know some people in here right now are struggling and suffering and hurting. So I pray that they would hear this morning that You love them. I pray that they would hear this morning that You love for them is seen most clearly in the cross and not their circumstances. So give us eyes to see past just this moment, just this week, just this season, just this struggle, whatever that struggle is. And may we rest on that firm foundation. We love You. We want to love You more. Help us. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."