

Fate Does Not Exist

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[0 : 00] Father, we thank you that you are, we can't see you. You are invisible to us. You are hidden to us. But we thank you, God.

We thank you, Lord, that you are present, that you are powerful, and that you are active. We thank you, Father, that you caused all Holy Scripture to be written, that the words are here, that are here, the words that you wanted to have written, that you were the one responsible for having these words recognized by people as having ultimately come from you.

And you are the one who has had them preserved so that we today can read them. So we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would come and move within us gently but deeply at the level of our heart so that we might receive all that you will give us through your word and that we will respond with gratitude and praise.

And that we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. So a couple of people will know what I'm referring to when I share this.

But about a month or so ago, maybe a little bit more than that, I and several others started to pray quite seriously that something wouldn't happen.

[1 : 21] And many people who know lots of things about how organizations work said that not only was it wrong for us to even ask that it wouldn't happen, but it didn't matter if we prayed because what we were praying about to not happen was going to happen.

And then a couple of weeks ago, when the time came for this thing to happen, that people said we shouldn't have been praying about because it was going to happen, there were powerful people, it had been publicized, etc.

Well, the thing we prayed about didn't happen. Like our prayers were answered. It's quite remarkable, isn't it? And it's not, I mean, I'm sharing that because it's interesting.

How did, like, what is it that happens in prayer? Sometimes when we pray about things, we're praying for a miracle. You know, we're praying that maybe the cancer which is there will be gone. And if it's gone, it's probably a type of a miracle.

If you, when the Dig and Del videos become available from the last one, I really encourage you to go and listen to the one by Greg Kopchick. I encourage you to listen to all of them, but go watch the one by Greg Kopchick.

[2 : 27] And he tells you about something that happens that the non-Christian doctor had to acknowledge that it maybe was a miracle, that there's no other explanation for what happened.

And we pray for that. But for most of our prayers, we pray for things that involve God's providence, that God will act through the normal, natural course of events, so that something that we think is needed actually happens.

And that's actually how most prayer works. Some of you know, in the Battle of Dunkirk, giving a very old example, in Dunkirk, over 300,000 British troops were trapped along the edge of the sea.

They'd been caught flat-footed by the Nazis. And the Nazi army was pushing them back, and they had their back to the sea. And the Nazi generals were all calling for the annihilation of the British forces.

And the King of England at the time, with the permission of the Prime Minister, while this was all happening, when it looked completely and utterly bleak, he did something which no politician would do today in the Western world.

[3 : 38] He got on the radio and called the nation to prayer. Believe it or not, 1940, that's what he did. He called the nation for a day of prayer for deliverance of the third of a million soldiers.

Now, what happened, as you know, you don't actually always know that, because usually now modern movies, like there was a good movie about Dunkirk made about a year ago, and it completely omitted this from the entire account.

But for some inexplicable reason, Hitler decided that the Nazi generals and the army would stop. They just, yeah, I mean, that's what happened.

Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, from the British point of view and from a world history point of view, because the Nazis were evil. But for some inexplicable reason, Hitler ordered the generals to stop, rather than continuing to press on the battle.

There were other things that happened, and of course there was other actions. But at the end of the day, after a day of prayer by the British people for deliverance of their troops, over 300,000 troops, the biggest military evacuation in history was in fact successful.

[4 : 47] And, I mean, it's not a miracle on one level, is it? But isn't it something odd? Isn't that how all of our prayers work? That we ask that somebody will arrive safely, or that the promotion will happen, or some other type of thing, or that something that a powerful group of people want to have presented, and we pray that it won't be presented, and it isn't presented.

And it's not a miracle, it's something else. It's providence. The story that we're going to look at today, and in fact the entire book, if you could look at the title up here above me, you'll notice that I've called the sermon series, The Story of Esther, The Hidden God in a Broken World.

And I think it was Amy who picked the image, or maybe it was Jen. I know that sort of the artwork was done by some combination of the two of them. It's not Ottawa here, but it's appropriate that it, I think it's Manhattan, so it's appropriate that they picked as the image, the center of a major, I mean, the Americans in a center have an empire.

But the book of Esther is all about precisely that. I don't know how many of you know this, and I haven't talked about it in the sermon, but the word God never appears once in the book of Esther. Never appears once.

And many people throughout the years have been bothered by the fact that there's a book in the Bible that never mentions the word God. But what the book of Esther is really all about in a very, very powerful way is just how the world actually works.

[6 : 15] That in the world, it actually is. We live in a broken world. Not a perfect world, but a broken world. A world where there is genocide, where there is sexual assault, where there is robbery, where families break up, where institutions don't act in a just and merciful way, but act in a terrible way.

And we live in a broken world. And in this broken world, there is a hidden God. The hidden God still operates in this broken world. And he operates according to his own purposes and his own plans.

And we as Christians know that the hidden God actually exists. So we're to pray to him that he will act. And we are to seek his will and his guidance. But the book of Esther, in a sense, it's not a book of doctrine.

It's a story. But by telling the story, it helps us to feel and get an image or a sense of how it is that divine providence works.

That even though human beings do what human beings are going to do, and even though human beings are completely and utterly free, and because human beings are completely and utterly free, they are responsible for what they do.

[7 : 30] But in the midst, or in the fact, even though every human being is free, and human beings act according to their own plans and purposes, sometimes very, very evil, and sometimes very, very virtuous, that somehow or another, the Lord is still king, and he is moving all things in human history towards his end.

That's what divine providence is. That the Lord is sovereign over all things, over everything, at the same time that human beings are free.

And I can say that, and for many of you, you start to have intellectual problems, and that's fine. We'll maybe talk about a couple of them over the next couple of weeks. But what the book of Esther does is help us to feel it, to see what it's like to be in a world that's broken, where the hidden God is still present, powerful, and active, and moving things towards his desired end.

So if you have your Bibles, turn to Esther chapter 6, which is where we are. Those who don't have your Bibles with you, you can either pick up a Bible, or the text will be above us on the stage.

And just to sort of cap up to where we are in the story, because we're in chapter 6 of the story that began at chapter 1, verse 1, what's happened so far, what's sort of immediately important for you to know, is that genocide has been planned and is organized, and it's all set to go against the Jewish people.

[9 : 06] And it's going to be happening about 9 or 10 months down the road, but it's all planned, it's all organized, it's a fait accompli. Nothing can stop it, the genocide against every Jewish person in the empire, in the Persian empire.

And a woman by the name of Esther, and in a sense her conversion is reported in chapter 4 of Esther, of the book of Esther, she is a woman who's lived like a Persian, has a name, she's named after the goddess Ishtar, she looks like a Persian, eats like a Persian, worships like a Persian, lives like a Persian, and she's done all of this under the direct instruction of the man who was her adopted father by the name of Mordecai.

She becomes one of the queens of Persia, Mordecai confronts her in chapter 4 of Esther, and in that confrontation, it's her conversion moment, and out of this conversion moment is that she has to come and try to speak to the king, risk her life to speak to the king, to plead for her people.

There's great prayer for this, she actually does go, and the king does spare her life. She asks to have the king and Haman, who is responsible for the genocide, have a feast, and that's what happened last week, but lo and behold, after this great act of courage by Esther, she stumbles.

She doesn't follow through. When it comes time to say, King, I ask you here to plead for my life and for the life of all of the Jewish people, she's not able to do it.

[10 : 40] She stumbles. And all she can say is, could you come tomorrow? And she doesn't realize this, of course, but by asking to come tomorrow, she puts her adopted father's life in jeopardy because Haman, that evening, plans to have Mordecai, the next day, impaled on a stake so everybody can see.

And Esther doesn't realize that she's just risked, potentially, is going to have her adopted father killed by her enemy. And that's where the story continues.

Chapter 6, verse 1. So on that night, that's the night of the feast and the night before the next day when the second feast, when hopefully Esther will have the courage to talk to the king.

On that night, the king could not sleep and he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king.

Now just sort of pause here for a second because this is actually, this is something that you wouldn't know. I didn't know this when I was just reading through the book. I mean, I've read through the book quite a few times. First of all, literally in the original language, the Hebrew, good not sleep, that's a perfect translation, but literally it said, it says, sleep fled from the king.

[12 : 07] Sleep fled from the king. And for some scholars, when they look at the whole literary structure of the book, and we can see it in a moment, actually, if we think about it, this is a turning point in the entire book.

On one hand, the interpretive key to the book is what's said around the time of Esther's conversion. Mordecai, who has become now converted himself, he says that, I know that the Lord will deliver his covenant people, whether it's through you or not, he will deliver his people.

But, Esther, are you here for such a time as this? In other words, has God in his providence made you a queen of Persia so you can be the one that the Lord uses, humanly speaking, to deliver his people.

And Esther says, I'm going to pray, I will do it, and if I perish, I perish. On one hand, that little interaction is the interpretive key to the whole story, but at a literary level, this is the turning point in the whole story.

At this point in time, from the story on, it is going to become clear that that which could not change, the genocide of the Jewish people, because once the Persian, once the king of Persia has made a decree, it cannot be changed.

[13 : 26] That which is humanly impossible to change will change, and the Jewish people will not die by genocide. I know I'm speaking a little bit ahead, but this is the turning point in the story, a sleepless night, a sleepless night by the king.

And as part of that sleepless night, him asking to have a book read to him, hoping that maybe these pleasant things in the past and the droning of the person's voice will help him to fall asleep.

And one of the things which is so interesting about this at a literary level is that it's emphasizing God's providence to help to make it clear that this is no human action and help you to understand that everything that's been going on in this book is helping us to understand the Lord's providence.

It was by providence that Queen Vashti was banished. It was by providence that Esther became the queen. It was by providence that Mordecai gives instructions that prevent the king from being assassinated.

It is by providence that Mordecai wasn't rewarded. It was by providence that Esther was able to go and the king showed her favor so that she did not die.

[14 : 42] And that even now, even though now Mordecai is in danger of being killed by Haman, the Lord is acting providentially throughout this and he does this by having the man have what many of us have on a regular basis, a sleepless night.

He has a sleepless night. So what happens with this sleepless night? We'll look at verses two and three. So he asked for the book. He asked for a book to be read of memorable deeds.

And so verse two, and it was found written in that book how Mordecai and the king doesn't know that Mordecai is the man who raised Esther. And he doesn't know that Mordecai is Jewish because Mordecai means worshipper of Marduk, worshipper of Marduk.

And so it was found how Mordecai had told about Bithana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the threshold and who had sought to lay hands on king Assyrus, Xerxes.

In other words, they'd planned to assassinate him. And the king said, what honor or distinction has been bestowed on Mordecai for this? And the king's young men who attended him said, nothing has been done for him.

[16 : 03] Now just sort of pause. If you've been following along every week and can remember every word that I said, by the way, I can't remember every word that I said so I don't expect anybody here to remember every word that I've said.

There's five years gap. So by providence, Mordecai wasn't rewarded immediately five years ago. By providence, it slipped the king's mind.

This is a huge faux pas in the ancient world and a huge faux pas for a king like this who desires who has to reward loyalty in such a way that people will see that he's rewarding loyalty and rewarding heroism.

And by providence, five years earlier, when Mordecai reports the plot to assassinate the king, the king forgets. And now, after a sleepless night, he is reminded.

And so he says, well, let's see what happens. What's going to happen? He has to deal with this faux pas. Verse four, and the king said, who is in the court?

[17 : 16] Now, Haman, that's the man who's planned the genocide, who's an anti-Semite. Now, Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to speak to the king about having Mordecai hanged on the gallows.

Another way to interpret that would be impaled on a stake that he had prepared for him. And the king's young men told him, Haman is there standing in the court.

And the king said, let him come in. Now, just, now remember this. Haman had gotten mad at Mordecai the night before.

He'd gone to talk to his wife and his advisors. His wife and his advisors said, what we need to do is you need to get a place that's really public and put a stake on it and the next day you need to go and get Mordecai and impale him on the stake so everybody can see.

And that's what happened just before this and Haman loved the idea. That's exactly what he wanted to do. He did high fives all around the room for a great idea, a great plan. Had the thing built.

[18 : 24] He's rushing in early to get the king's permission to have Mordecai impaled on the stake. And what's probably happening here is that when Haman comes and he comes in really early so he makes sure he gets on the appointment list in time to be able to speak to the king.

And probably what goes through Haman's mind when the king summons him in right away is, wow, everything is going my way. but little does he know that the king is calling him here to reward Mordecai.

Those of you who are here in time to confess your sins at the start of the service, many people dislike the phrase miserable offenders. How many of you were here early enough and you remember that phrase in the confession?

Miserable offenders. And the old word for miserable offenders isn't, it isn't saying that, you know, we all feel miserable. It might be that when you were saying that not a single person in the room felt miserable.

That miserable offenders is an old English and miserable, miserable here means worthy of pity.

[19 : 36] Worthy of pity or an object of pity. So what the phrase is actually saying is to God in the prayer is that we are objects of pity because of our offenses.

And what that means in the old prayer book is that if you could look at things from God's point of view, you could see that if we live our lives and die without giving our lives to Jesus, we are objects of pity.

We don't realize that what we are doing is charting a course for eternal separation from God. And you can see here right now that in a sense, Haman, right this moment, filled with vim and vigor, feeling happy, feeling pumped, feeling affirmed, feeling that everything is going his way, feeling that the future is just going to be better and better and better.

Tomorrow, today is going to be better than yesterday and the day before this is going to be even better than today. But the fact of the matter is that each of us reading this story at this moment know that he is an object of pity.

He is coming to get Mordecai killed. The king has summoned him to reward Mordecai. He is a miserable offender.

[21 : 09] He is an object of pity. So, verse 6, Haman comes in to see the king. So, Haman come in, came in.

And the king said to him, what should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor? And Haman said to himself, whom would the king delight to honor more than me?

Whom would the king delight to honor more than me? See, his pride blinds him, doesn't it? He doesn't say, I don't know, king, like, who is he who you want to honor?

Sort of depends. You know, like, are they poor? They might like money if they're, you know, if they, you know, they're widowed, they might like a new wife, like, like, maybe they want a promotion, like, you know, he could have said that, but his pride blinds him.

See, this is one of the things, one of the reasons why humility is such an important virtue for Christians is that humility helps you to enter the real world. Pride keeps you from the real world.

[22 : 22] and, um, so he's going to, he doesn't even do this, he's so filled with pride, he's just so filled with thinking everything's going his way, he doesn't even ask any type of context, he immediately starts thinking of himself and what he'd like and so his request reflects that.

You have to remember he can't get promoted any higher and he's already very, very wealthy. So what he suggests to the king is this, verse 7, and Haman said to the king, for the man whom the king delights to honor, let royal robes be brought which the king has worn and the horse that the king has ridden and on whose head a royal crown is set, that's the crown is on the horse by the way, that was the thing they did sometimes, put crowns on the, the royal, the royal horse had its own crown and let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials.

Let them dress the man, the official that is, whom the king delights to honor and let, that is, the noble lead the man on the horse through the square of the city, that is where everybody is and where all the talking and the gossip, that's where the internet is, that's where Google is, it's where the newspapers are, where everybody knows what's going on, proclaiming before him, thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.

And, and that's where he stops. Now, you know, it's interesting if you think about it, like the way the modern world works, the modern world extols three things.

it tells us that we have to be autonomous, it tells us that we have to be authentic, in other words, we have to be true to ourselves, and it tells us that what has to happen is that the world has to affirm us.

[24 : 31] It's very, very powerful in, in all sorts of different ways. And it's, it's funny because you see, Haman is living the Canadian dream.

Haman is living the Canadian dream as articulated by Hollywood and by educational institutions. He's autonomous, he has his power, he's being completely and utterly true to himself.

He's true to himself, hates Jews, loves himself, loves money, loves prestige, and he imagines a world where not only is he powerful and autonomous, and where he's being true to himself, but what really he needs to have it be completely and utterly perfect, is lots of affirmation and applause.

Because it's very, very interesting. In the modern world, it's not about learning how to, to, to reciprocate affirmation, but in, in, for the, the social, so much of the social justice stuff, so much of educational stuff, so much of Hollywood, is it's this.

I need to be affirmed. And that's, Mordecai is living, I mean, not Mordecai, Haman is living the Canadian dream. But he is a miserable offender.

[25 : 54] I mean, that's what the story is revealing. So he says all of this, and then he's probably, after he said it, you know, nowadays, it's almost probably as if he drops the mic after saying all of this, and just sort of takes a step back, waiting for the king to say, yeah, that's it, let's do this for Haman.

But instead, after he's dropped the mic, after he stands back like this, ready for the applause, the king drops the bombshell on him. Verse 10.

Then the king said to Haman, hurry, take the robes and the horse as you have said and do so to Mordecai, the Jew, who sits at the king's gate.

Leave out nothing that you have mentioned. So Haman took the robes and the horse and he dressed Mordecai and led him through the square of the city proclaiming before him, thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.

Then Mordecai returned to the king's gate but Haman hurried to his house mourning with his head covered.

[27 : 05] You know, one of the things about God's providence is by God's providence some of you know the rest of the story, you know that Haman is going to come to a bad end.

I should have said a spoiler alert but I'm sure some of you have read ahead to know that that's going to happen. But this is actually by God's providence an opportunity for Haman to repent, isn't it?

If you think about it. Like one of the things which is very interesting in the Bible, especially in the book of Romans, the book of Romans says that in the last day when the Lord judges the living and the dead, every human being that exists, no one will have an excuse about the Lord's judgment against them.

Nobody will be able to say, oh but you didn't take into account this or you didn't give me enough opportunities, whatever. And I mean it's just sort of said but a story like this helps us to feel it.

He could have mourned and said to himself, maybe I'm on the wrong path. Maybe I have a problem with pride.

[28 : 14] Maybe I shouldn't hate Jewish people. But he doesn't mourn any of those things. What he mourns is that I didn't win.

I failed. I was humiliated. I did not get what I wanted. See, there's a difference between mourning a type of sorrow over our life that actually leads to death and a type of sorrow that leads to life.

And Haman chooses a sorrow that will contribute but will continue on towards death. You see something else very true to life as well.

Verse 13, and Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, if Mordecai before whom you have begun to fall is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him.

And it's very interesting. None of them said, maybe we shouldn't help you come up with this plan for genocide. Like, isn't it so true? It's like they all back off and say, whoa, like you're toxic.

[29 : 44] You shouldn't have made such stupid decisions. I didn't have anything to do with that. Like, I never gave you any type of advice. I never just last night said maybe you shouldn't have a gallo made.

Like, none of them take responsibility. It's very, very true to life. Like, none of them take responsibility for it. But instead, they pile on the guy who's already down. Verse 14, And while they were yet talking with him, the king, king's eunuchs arrived and hurried to bring Haman to the feast.

That's the second feast that Esther had prepared. And we'll look at that next week. So how does this sort of all tie together with some of the things that we've been looking at? You know, some of us have problems with the idea of providence, that the Lord is present, powerful, and active, that he's hidden, and that he's moving all things towards his desired end, and we have problems with that.

We do. But, you know, it's interesting that at the same time that we have problems with that, the fact of the matter is, is that at the serious intellectual level, when people become serious in a worldview without God, what you end up seeing is a world where there's not providence, but fate, a fate that you cannot avoid.

Stephen Hawkins, who just died a little while ago, he was a very important physicist, and one of the things that he was seeking to try to figure out, there's different names for it, but he was trying to figure out a unified theory of everything.

[31 : 31] some people call it the theory of everything, some people call it the final theory, some people call it the ultimate theory, some people call it the mastery theory, sometimes it's mentioned and called the unified theory of everything, and it's the idea that there's going to be some way to come up with a scientific equation and a scientific theory that will ultimately explain everything.

And why would they think that? Because they would say that if you look at life without God, then what you have is science, and science measures cause and effect.

It means that I push this and it moves. Everything is, something causes something else to happen, and that something causes something else to happen, and in theory, if you could get enough of the right variables and have the right type of equation, in theory, according to this world, where everything has, every effect has a cause, every effect has a cause, and that effect becomes a cause of something else, in theory, you can come up with a unified theory of everything, and you can predict everything that's going to happen.

But in such a world, there is no human freedom. There is nothing called human responsibility. There is nothing like love. It's an entire world of fate, of inexorable, unstoppable, scientific, of processes of cause and effect that just move us around, and that human beings are no different, ultimately, than little corks in the ocean that just move around and get banged around and move by the tide and the wind and the waves and just move wherever they are as we are completely and utterly pushed by these physical forces that we have no control over.

And at a serious level, that's really the only option there is outside of the Christian worldview. If you could put up the first point, Andrew, because the Lord is Lord, fate does not exist.

[33 : 37] It's not just through science that people worry about fate. It's interesting how many movies talk about the whole idea of fate. I'm watching a series with my wife right now called The Man in the High Castle, and one of the premises of that is that there isn't fate, that people can choose their own fate.

I mean, it's just affirmed. There's no particular reason for believing it, but it's just completely and utterly affirmed, and it expresses this fundamental human desire that fate can't be true.

In the ancient religions, fate was true. The gods would have you fated to do a particular thing, and you couldn't avoid it happening. In Hindu worldview, through the whole cycle of karma, you are fated to a certain spot, a certain location, in a certain life, and there's nothing you can do about it.

That there is this overwhelming problem of fate, yet at the same time, human beings react to this and say there has to be something that's not true, that that can't be true.

Our understanding of creation, our understanding of reality, which seems to push us to think that there has to be a fate, that can't be true. There has to be some other option. There has to be some place for human freedom.

[34 : 49] There has to be some place for me to have some control. There has to be some place for love. And it's only in the Christian faith that that is made clear. The Bible reveals that because the Lord is the Lord, fate does not exist.

There is no fate. Instead, if you could put up the next point, the Lord is the good king moving all things to his desired end, and he is the just judge who will judge every human being.

The Lord is the good king moving all things to his desired end, and he is the just judge who will judge every human being.

See, what the book of Esther reveals and what the Bible reveals is that the Lord is a just judge. He really is. Human beings are free.

We make our own decisions. You look through the book of Esther. It's the king who decides to get drunk. It's King Xerxes who decides to get drunk. It's King Xerxes who, while he's drunk, demands his wife, one of his wives, one of his queens, Vashti, come and do something indecent.

[36 : 10] It's her decision to say no to that. It's his decision to punish her and punish all of the women. It's his decision to do a horrible thing that ends up leading to Esther being the queen.

It's Haman's decision to be anti-Semitic and to plan genocide. It's Haman's decision that he wants to have Mordecai killed. These are all their decisions. It's not that the Lord forced them to do that.

These are all their decisions. And so the Lord is a just judge. He judges us according to what we do. There is real human freedom.

But at the same time, the Bible teaches a second truth at the same time, that not only is he the just judge who judges human beings on the basis of their free acts, what they've done and what they've not done, but at the same time, he is the king.

And he is not a God who, like open theists, try to say that he doesn't actually know what's going to happen. He's just trying to muddle through, and as he's trying to muddle through, eventually he'll have some type of a plan.

[37 : 18] No, that's not the way the Bible describes the Lord. And he's not just sort of acting on a whim. I like Daniel. You know, I don't like Bob. I like Sue.

You know, I don't like, you know, Mary. He's not a God who's just filled with whims. He's not capricious. He's not trying to muddle through. He's not sort of having to struggle with human beings.

He's not saying, I have to struggle with George. He's not doing what I want him to do. I've got to struggle with him because, you know, dang it, Church of the Messiah is just not doing what I want. How do I win? No, he doesn't do that.

And he's not just up in heaven waiting for human beings to act and they say, okay, that's what they're going to do? Well, then this is what I'm going to do. That's what they're going to do?

Well, this is what I'm going to do. He's not doing that either. But all the way through the Bible, right from Genesis chapter three when human beings fell, right from Genesis chapter three when human beings fell, he has an end.

[38 : 22] He has something that's going to happen in the future. And he is king. And even though human beings act with their freedom, sometimes virtuously, sometimes with evil, he is moving, while respecting human freedom, he is moving all things towards his desired end, which we know will be when the Lord returns.

And there is a judging of the living and the dead, and there's a new heaven and the new earth. So in some ways, the end is also the beginning. He is sovereign. It's Spurgeon said, I think it was Spurgeon who said, he never wants to separate the truth that the Lord is king from the truth that the Lord is judge, judge, because they're friends, which is a wonderful phrase, they're friends.

And one of the things we have to fight against is that some Christians talk as if freedom is so important that you have to deny that the Lord is sovereign, and other Christians talk so much about the Lord being sovereign that you have to forget that human beings are responsible, and we have to hold the two truths together, because that's what the Bible teaches.

He's king, and he's judge. He's a good king, and he's a just judge. And one of the reasons that we can say that these things are both true is because of Jesus.

If you could put up the third point, and by the way, I adapted this, just so you don't think I'm really clever. I adapted this from something I read in J.I. Packer like a hundred million years ago.

[40 : 01] I'm pretty sure it came from Packer, and I've just adapted it slightly, so the shout-out goes to him, not to me. The cradle and the cross reveal the crown, and the cradle and the cross reveal the judge.

And that's the thing which is so wonderful about the Christian faith. In John chapter 118, it says that Jesus is the one who makes God known. And the word that it, and what it's basically saying is when we look at Jesus, that we understand more fully and completely who God is, who the Lord is as the king.

of all things. We don't have a king who's distant, who's locked out of his creation, who's cold and heartless.

He's not like a divine watchmaker who made creation, wound up the watch, and then he's off on a holiday doing something else while natural laws just work. No, we see the Lord reveals that he is active and present in his creation when we see the cradle, we see Jesus being born, we see his humility, we see his lowliness, we see his desire to be the Lord among us, to bring a people to himself.

And in the cross, we see him dying to redeem us. And when we see the cradle and we see the cross, we understand why it is that we can trust that he wears the crown, that he is the king of all things, the Lord of all creation, that he is moving all things to their proper end.

[41 : 33] Who is he who is moving all things to their proper end? Not a God who is evil, not a God who is unjust, not a God who does not care about his creation, not a God who is powerless, but a God, the Lord, who was born amongst us, God amongst us, and who died on a cross for us, and that is the one that we trust is the God of providence, who is moving all things to their proper end.

That is the God who wears the crown, the one who came in a cradle and died on a cross. And why can we trust that he is a just judge?

Because he is not some guy manipulating us and pushing us here and there, who doesn't understand human weakness, who doesn't understand the profound need that we human beings have for a savior.

What reveals the justness of the judge and how we will judge? What reveals that is the cradle and the cross. The cradle and the cross reveal the crown.

The cradle and the cross reveal the judge. If you could put up the final point. You know, as I've been going through the book of Esther and before that, Ruth, because both Ruth and Esther are all about helping us at a literary level to feel the doctrine of providence, to see how it works.

[42 : 58] Rather than giving us a series of propositions, it helps us to enter into a world where God is hidden, but he's present, powerful, and active. That's what Ruth and Esther do.

And it really has helped my prayers. It really has. I hope it helps yours. That's why, as our final point is, Lord, please grow in me a lively, living, trusting, knowing that you are sovereign and your providence is real.

That you are sovereign and your providence is real. Could you all stand, please? One of the things I hope you get from that is that the whole point of the cradle and the crown is that you have an opportunity to repent now.

If you've never given your life to Jesus, call out to him. Don't have a mourning or a sorrow or an unhappiness about your life that's just focused on yourself and is a type of death, but to use that unhappiness and sorrow to realize your profound need for the one who is revealed through the cradle and the cross.

And to begin to know the Lord's providence in your life. And so you figure out that prayer for yourself, but I urge you to call call upon him.

[44 : 38] I'm going to ask those of you, if you put up the fourth point, that would be great again, Andrew. I'm going to ask people if you would pray that. Those whom the Lord has moved, if you would pray this with me and then I'll just close.

And then Daniel's going to come up and finish this off with intercessions. But let's just pray that together. Lord, please grow in me a lively, living, trusting, knowing that you are sovereign and your providence is real.

Father, bring this home to us in a very powerful and deep way. Bring this home to me, that you really are present, powerful and active even when you are hidden. And that you do answer prayer.

Even prayers, Father, which other people say are impossible, that you answer them. And in all things, Father, help us just to desire to know you and to be known by you and to grow in these great virtues.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.