

# Acts 4:22-31: Predestination

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah. It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Father, we ask that as we deal, Father, with a bit of a difficult text, but Father, when we pierce through the difficulty, you help us to see just the beauty of your love for us, just the beauty of your love for us. And so, Father, we ask that you help us not to turn away from the difficulty, but to take the hand of Jesus and to be open to the Holy Spirit, to walk towards the difficulty, so that we might know afresh, Father, the beauty of your love for us, and the security of the beauty of your love for us. And so we ask that you would do this wonderful work in our lives this morning, in the precious name of Jesus. Amen. Please be seated.

Set my timer. Set my timer.

And Istone ■■■■■■■■■■ited you and I want to see my mama that I have a prayer prepared for us for now, that I pray to ever shop and let us thank you so much for joining us today. And then we ask ourselves, We ask myself to see people who came here. And I've shared was still about sweet, but I've had to belega to heal because and how many things we get together.

[ 2 : 55 ] By getting in a way we're ready to come forever i in grace, and how they face life. And so many things we're good with it is to be able to capture these problems in the United States. That's it, and that P? In the United States, Hong Kong, or other than whatever, has a cause, and there's a cause, and then an effect, and then that's another cause, which is another effect, and that's just how things work. It just, everything has a cause and effect, and so I might think I've come to have these independent beliefs about being a Christianity, but it's just a matter of cause and effect, and about the fact that my parents happen to be Christians, and I thought I had these beliefs, and that they were real, but they can't possibly be true, when there was other things connected with it, and it, I mean, it might not sound like much to you, and I don't know how many of you have wrestled with different types of doubts about the Christian faith, but doubts aren't necessarily bad in the Christian faith. God wants us to think into them and pray into them, and that's what he did in my life. He used, I really went into an intense time of thinking about it, and I came out on the other side. In fact, I challenged my, I guess, I guess really they were trying to torment me, because when I challenged them, they didn't want to change their views, they just dropped, and they didn't want to talk to me anymore when they saw that they couldn't intimidate me out of my Christianity. The particular topic, and it sounds very boring, I'm going to show a video in a few minutes to help bring home what I'm getting at. It's actually addressed in a way in the text, which is, for a lot of people, it's shocking, and they don't like it, but if we press into what it's saying, as I said in my prayer, it actually brings home to us a profound comfort of the powerful, unfailing love of God for his children that gives us a type of emotional, helps us to enter into a type of emotional security to live a very, very good, just to live life and to deal with the challenges that come our way, even when they're very hard challenges. So let's look. It's Acts chapter 4, and we'll be looking today at verses, we'll be starting at verse 23. If you have your Bibles,

Acts chapter 4, beginning at 23, and if you don't have your Bible, the words will be up on the screen, but it's good to have your own Bible. I don't know if we've run out of these books of Acts. If we haven't, we should get them back out, and people can pick one of these journal copies of Acts up to be able to follow along for themselves. And so what's just happening, right, the book of Acts is a true eyewitness-based history of the early days, the first 30 years, approximately, of the Jesus movement.

And this incident is about three months or so after the death and resurrection of Jesus. And then what's happened just before this is that Peter and John were going to the Jewish temple in Jerusalem to pray. They see a regular beggar there. Peter and John, in the name of Jesus, heals him.

It's a very dramatic miracle because the man was over 40, and he had been lame from birth, and he's healed. He's jumping and jumping and jumping and jumping and hanging on to them.

They draw a big crowd. Peter gives an impromptu sermon, and as he's finishing his sermon, the temple police arrest him. So him and John are arrested, and him and John spend the night in jail.

[ 6 : 17 ] And the next morning, which is now where we're caught up, sort of, they're brought out of jail to be brought before this very august body of the cultural and intellectual and spiritual and wealth leaders of the community. They're grilled. They're the same group of people that condemn Jesus to death, and they try to intimidate Peter and John. Peter and John aren't intimidated. They bear witness to Jesus.

The group of leaders all sort of take a time out and try to decide what to do. They're really stuck. They really want to stick it to Peter and John, but they can't because of the miracle so dramatic.

And so they tell Peter and John, listen, don't say anything more about Jesus from now on. And we didn't talk about it in our sermon last week, but the famous line that you've probably heard is what they say to him. They say, listen, you figure out whether you should, you know, you know, should I, should we believe, should we, should we obey God or obey human beings?

That's what Peter says to them. You know, should we obey God or should we obey human beings? You figure it out. And then they get left, they get let go. And now the story continues.

What do they do when they leave? Well, that's where the story continues, and it goes like this. When they were released, verse 23 of chapter 4, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and elders had said to them. Now, we need to pause here for a second. You know, one of the problems we have as Christians who are very familiar with the text. So if you're here and you're not familiar with the Christian faith, you're outside the Christian faith or maybe just trying to seek out what's true or what's false, this story isn't very well known to you. But for many Christians, it's a familiar story. And the problem we have is the familiarity means that we lose the drama because we just assume that the next step is obvious, but it's not obvious. Now, we'll just take it for a second. What would we do in this particular situation? Let's say it was me.

[ 8 : 23 ] You know, it was me and Barbara Allen. We're going somewhere to pray, and we say something, and we heal somebody, and then we give a talk about Jesus, and then the authorities arrest us, and then we spend the night in jail, and then we come out and we come to church on a Sunday morning.

And what are you folks all going to say to me? Well, like in Canada, there's lots of different responses that we might actually say. The first thing that we might do is we might start to worry.

We worry that now there's been a turn against us by the authorities and that we could start being arrested. That's probably how a lot of us would be like. I don't know. The intern who used to be here, who's now a pastor down in Port Perry, he didn't talk about much of this service, but before he was 18, he had a record as long as his arm. And so maybe he wouldn't be worried. He said, night in jail is just like a walk in the park, you know, but for most of us, we'd probably be pretty worried, and we wouldn't want to spend a night in jail. I know that's what it would be like for me.

Some of us then might say, George, okay, it's really, really good, George, really, really good, but maybe we should be a little bit less confrontational. You know, maybe we should just try to work on our messaging a little bit, be a little bit more, what should we be?

Winsome. Winsome's a wonderful word. We should be more winsome, and we should be a bit more nuanced. Two wonderful words, shows that we're well-educated, shows that we can speak like Canadians, means, translated, it means, be silent and less clear. Usually, that's what it means. Don't say anything, or if you do say something, you know, I had a friend who's in ministry, he's now retired, and he did not have the gift of clarity, and he regularly, he'd try to tell somebody off or tell some other message, and he'd go home to his wife, and he'd say, you know, I don't know if they actually realized I was telling them off, because he didn't have the gift of clarity. He's a very, very nice guy.

[10:34] Right? That just wasn't one of those gifts. So we might say, George, you know, maybe we should just, you know, I don't know, dial down the things a little bit, not be quite as confrontational. You know, within that, we might say, you know, George, we could a lot further with the gospel, if we could try to build bridges, and so maybe what we should be doing is seeing how we could get involved in this, help them and serve them, have them to start to like us, and so maybe they will have us at the table, and if we have, if they're at the table with us, we're at the table with them, then we can, you know, speak the message and get the message out. You know, some of us actually might say, as well that privately blame me, because you see, we Canadians, we're sort of addicted to a type of human technology, a way of talking to people. Sort of, in our culture, it's sort of a sign of success that you're able to manage your interactions, and I'm using manage correctly, you manage your interactions in such a way that you get what you want, basically, in a win-win type of way. We all like win-win, right? Win-win is what we want. We want to have a win-win solution, and we manage things in such a way that we get what we want, and that there's a type of peace and harmony, and actually, the problem is that's such a popular way of thinking in our culture, that when that doesn't happen, we think we're sinning, but that's actually not a biblical idea. Like, none of what I've expressed is a, that's just not a biblical idea. Like, I'm not saying it's a terrible idea. Obviously, we should try to talk, you know, and try to minimize conflict when we can, but that type of mindset that we see, and it's in the church, it would mean then, if you see something like me spending the night in jail, it's in some ways a sign that I've done something wrong. And then, and then, of course, as well, the other thing which could very well happen, and that's a whole other topic with worry, is that people might wonder, people might be disappointed with God after I've spent the night in jail.

Like, they might say, like, in thinking of Peter and John, they'd say, God, why, good grief, God. Like, Peter repented. He spent his time in prayer. He's a leader. He bore witness to Jesus really clearly. You did a miracle through him, and then you let him go and spend the night in jail? Like, what's going on? Like, we're disappointed with you, God. So those are different responses we could have.

So how do they respond? Now that we realize that what happens next isn't obvious. It's not obvious. It's not obvious. We have to discover what happens next. Well, what happens next?

Verse 24, the first bit, and when they heard it, they lifted their voices to God to get voices together to God and said, so they pray. Now, just a very tiny aside on that. This was a thing which really struck me this week. I might not always look to you like this, but I can have real doubts of worry.

And I can't remember the Christian who said it, but there was a Christian who said that worry is a terrible abuse and misuse of the imagination. And I definitely can be prone to that, of having deep worry. And I would, you know, and often what happens, and this is just me, you know, this is yet another reason why you should pray for me is, is that when I worry, I don't pray.

[14:14] I don't know about you, but when I worry, I often don't pray. I have to be convicted of God by the Holy Spirit that I need to pray. And that's actually one of the things that happened to me as I was, I wasn't actually in a time of worry this week, but that's one of the things that really struck me.

I would probably be worried. And when I tend to be worried, I tend not to pray. And this text, I'm sure there were worries in the crowd, but their response was to not to spend time in worry, but to pray. And that's a very powerful reminder. But what did they pray though? I mean, our prayers reflect what we believe. Our prayers often reflect our pride, our arrogance, our anxieties, our worries, our prescriptions that we think as to what God is going to do. So pray which is good, but what do they pray? Well, they pray a very, very interesting prayer. Look at happens in, in, in verse 24. And I'll read it again. When they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them. And who through the mouth of our father, David, your servant said by the Holy Spirit. Now just sort of pause there for a second before we, we see the rest. Um, the very, very first thing they do is they acknowledge, they fill their mind with the greatness and bigness of God. And the word sovereign here, the word sovereign is a very, very powerful word. It means that God, if God is the sovereign Lord, that there is no limitation to his power. There are no rules that he has to obey, to obey. There is no force that can change what he is or does or wants to do. There is absolutely nothing that can limit whatever he wants to do.

That's what sovereign Lord means. God, you are one of unlimited power in your scope. Whatever you will, you can do whatever you will, and nothing can stop your will from happening. Like that, by the way, just as an aside, it's a profound thing to meditate upon. Like I, I have to confess, I do not meditate enough upon the greatness and bigness of God. I, I should. You can pray that I do it more. I mean, I do it sometimes, but not as much as I should. And they not only acknowledge that God is this unlimited God, that his will is unlimited, but they acknowledge that he is the one who's created everything and everything that exists within it, that he is the creator of all things. He's unlimited in power, unlimited in his rule. He is the one who's created all things. And, and even, even more wonderfully is he is a God who speaks. He is a God who speaks. Look again at what it says in verse 25, who through the mouth of our father, David, your servant said by the Holy Spirit. So when we read this next bit, I I've said this many times, but it, it, it always bears repeating. Like I'm a very simple-minded Christian. Like when I believe that the Bible is, is inerrant and infallible and is authoritative. I, I did it because that's what the apostles teach and they teach it because they learned it from Jesus. That when I read Acts 2, the first, or Psalm 2, the first couple of verses in the next verse, I'm hearing God speak. Like I'm hearing God speak.

And so what does he speak? Well, look at this, the last part of verse 24, uh, 25 and then verse 26.

Why did the Gentiles, or pagans, rage and the people's plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed.

[18:23] Now just pause before we go anything further. This, uh, is the beginning of Psalm 2, uh, if it doesn't, and, uh, it was written a thousand years before this. So a thousand years before their day, God caused these words to be written. And that part of their prayer then is a response to how God speaks.

See, that's one of the wonderful things about prayer. It's to be a conversation. We don't always hear, in fact, we usually don't hear God speak to us directly and personally, but we hear God speak to us in his word. And we are just to talk, not, not talk back in a bad way as if a kid talks back to his parent, but that we, we, we respond to what God says. And then as we respond to what God says, it, it helps us to understand the scriptures better. And then we're to respond back in prayer. And the, the amazing thing is they, God through the Holy Spirit brings this passage of scripture to them. And it's not just that, because, uh, if you go back and you read the gospels, you'll see that Jesus has used this text in the gospels. He's highlighted this text to them. And, and so in verse 20, see what 27, what we see is for truly, the quote is over for truly in this city, that's Jerusalem, they were gathered together against your Holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed. So in other words, when it says in, in, in, in Acts, in Psalm chapter two, against his anointed, and it's capitalized, they understand that the anointed one, that that Psalm a thousand years ago was talking about was Jesus. And so read 27 again, for truly in this city, right? Like this, this city in our life, there were gathered together against your Holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed and who was gathered against Jesus, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the pagans and the people of his peoples of Israel.

I just sort of pause there. So what they see is that when God's caused these words to be spoken a thousand years ago, on one hand, the scripture always has a power and a way of understanding your present situation. But at the same time, it was being talked about and being fulfilled in a very particular way. It was about to be accomplished in a very particular way in the city of Jerusalem around a thousand years later, where you see Herod, a pagan king, Pontius Pilate, the pagan governor, and the Jewish religious leaders and authorities, all united in opposition to Jesus, the anointed one, and they kill him. Now here's the shocking thing in the next verse, verse 28.

So they're all united, verse 28, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. Now some of you are going, whoa, predestined? Predestination? I don't like that idea.

In my own private devotions, for about the last four or five years ago, I've switched from using the English Standard Version, which is what we're using this morning. And in my own private devotions, my own private Bible reading, I now read the new internet, I've gone back to reading the new International Version, because I read a fair amount of the Bible in my devotions, or I try to, and I just was finding the ESV a bit too clunky for my reading. I wanted something that was a bit of a smoother read. And so one of the reasons the ESV is a bit clunky, actually, is that they often, not always, because it's not a perfect translation, and people have to make decisions, and they're human beings making those decisions. But often, they actually have the literal translation.

[ 22 : 24 ] And this is a perfect example. So if you were to go out and get some commentaries and look at verse 28 of chapter 4, you'd see that it literally says, whatever your hand. Like that's actually literally, I'll see it because maybe the commentary is using another version, and they'll say, well, literally, brackets, lit, your hand. And then it comes up to the next bit, and your plan. And different versions might not have that precise wording, but the commentary will have a little bracket that says, lit, your plan. And then it comes up at the next little bit, like the next few words, and they'll have some other different words. I think NIV and most of the other ones don't use the word predestined, but if you, and the N-A-T, they don't use the word predestined. But if you go to the commentary, they have a little, once again, the bracket lit, predestined. It's actually quite literal. And this is a very, very intimidating idea to many Canadian Christians.

Here's the issue. Could you show the video now? Hopefully this video will help you to understand how to approach this verse. So I hope you saw what it was. I tried to find a better one at the last second, but it's just dominoes. You've seen a variety of different things. You set up dominoes or some type of blocks. You'll see people who make this very, very long, complicated thing, and you knock over the first domino, and then there's this chain reaction of cause and effect that goes on and knocks all the dominoes down.

Now, just before we go any further, by the way, that video to our secular Canadian friends shows two reasons why secularism is wrong and Christianity is true. And they're actually two very ancient arguments for the existence of God. You see, somebody has to move the first domino. You can't just have an endless series of dominoes falling without somebody having been the one to push the first domino down. The other thing is it's obviously designed, but that's not my point.

My point is, you know, when I was having my conversation with my friends who were skeptics back when I was in school, they basically were just trying to say this is actually how the world works. The world is just a cause after a cause that causes an effect. The effect is a cause that makes another effect, and it's just this unbroken chain of cause and effect through all eternity, and there's no freedom, and there's no types of free will. That actually is what is taught in Canadian schools. When you get taught neo-Darwinian evolution, that is in fact what you are being taught. You are being taught that there's an unbroken chain of cause and effect, cause and effect, cause and effect, cause and effect, cause and effect. So why am I mentioning this? I'm mentioning this because we see these texts like verse 28 that says to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place, and we don't like it, and we want to withdraw from it, but we don't understand that there's a problem. Like, where do you go? Well, you can't just say, well, I'm just going to become like an average Canadian. The problem, I don't mean to offend you if you're here and you're an average Canadian, but the problem is that average Canadians by and large are like ostriches that have put their head in their sand, and they don't actually think through what it means to believe that everything happens just by cause and effect. I mean, the fact of the matter is, is one of the things I turned around to my friends. I said, well, woman, if everything is cause and effect, then what you tell me is also cause and effect, and that means neither of us have free will, and how can that be? How come you think it just... Anyway, we don't have to go there, but you see that... And so this problem of how do you live in a universe where there's cause and effect and still have freedom? The fact of the matter is, it's a problem in Islam. Islam is, in fact, the religion of pure predestination and predetermination. In Islam, Allah writes on each person what's going to happen to them and whether they're going to go to heaven and hell, and it's an unbroken thing that Allah does for each person. And even in Eastern religions like Buddhism and Hinduism, that fundamentally they are religions that are overwhelmingly predestination, that you... Your life right now is a result of the things you did. In fact, it's even... It's so predestination-focused because you get born in a particular way, and actually that's just a result of all your past actions coming up to capture you and determining your life right now. And there's nothing you can even... There's very little you can do about changing it. You can change it into tiny, minute little bits towards eventually, you know, making whatever the end is. It's a bit different in Hinduism than in Buddhism, but it all happens even before you're born. So if you withdraw from this and say, I don't like this, and I don't... Well, where do you go?

Where do you go? You just don't realize you've gone some other place where the problem is actually far deeper and far more profound. Because we have a profound... The problem is we have a profound sense that freedom is real and that freedom is important. And at the same time, we know we live in a universe that's cause and effect. You see, the thing which is so beautiful about the gospel, the thing which is so beautiful about what the Bible teaches, and you can see it if you go back and read on your own, go back and read on your own from Acts chapter 2 verse 1 to this part in chapter 4, and it's even more obvious in the original languages, is that there's this dual truth which is taught. And the dual truth which is taught is that God is sovereign. Things happen by his plan and by his hand.

[ 29 : 09 ] He is in control. But at the same time, human beings have freedom. Well, how can this be? Well, the fact of the matter is, is that we understand that human beings, God made human beings not just as a purely physical being. There's two different ways to understand what a human being is. And they're just two different ways of expressing the same truth. I am an enfleshed soul.

So are you. I am an enfleshed soul. A soul that has been given flesh. You can also understand me as flesh. So I can, I'm either, I can be enfleshed soul or an enfleshed flesh. You can put the EN bit at either one. And they're both ways to describe what human beings are. And so God has created us and bestowed upon human beings the gift. It's a, it's a free gift. It's a beautiful gift that we are not just completely and utterly dependent upon the stream of cause and effect and cause and effect and cause and effect that God has made us in his image. And part of making us in this image is that he has made us, well, we are soul and body. I am a soul that has a body. I am a body that has a soul.

And, and, and as, as an unsold body, it means that I have some freedom that God gives to me. It's a gift. It's a true gift so that I can flourish and that I can love him.

And it's a gift which is guaranteed. You see, the other problem is that even if you were to try to come up with some cause and effect reason by which we, we have some freedom is you need to have freedom guaranteed somehow. It has to be, it has to be guaranteed. You see, because the fact of the matter is, is that the cause and effect of the universe is always undermining human freedom.

We can see this with Alzheimer's. Um, you know, by the way, I don't talk about this very much, but my mother's mother died of Alzheimer's. Um, my mother has Alzheimer's and her sister and brother have died of Alzheimer's. And it's not yet clear whether the other two sisters have Alzheimer's. I of course worry about having Alzheimer's at some point in time in the future. I don't worry about it. There's nothing I can do about it. I mean, there's some things I can do about it, but fundamentally I should just live my life and accept what comes my way when it comes my way. Enjoy the day, right? Um, by the way, I just read a wonderful thing about, um, in a book just the other day, a non-Christian book, but it was a very thing. They said that a man had Irish Alzheimer's. I'm making this joke because I'm Irish. He had Irish Alzheimer's and the other person said, what's Irish Alzheimer's? And the guy responded in Irish Alzheimer's, you forget everything except your grudges. And we could probably apply that to a lot of different people groups, by the way, uh, or social movements. Uh, the only remember your grudges and how you've been wounded. But you see, the point of the matter is, is that some small biological processes can come in such a way that the person is lost and your freedom is lost. And so not only does God give you by creating you in his image, does he create you in such a way that he, well, it's only because he's sovereign and in control that he can create a human being that is given the gift of having freedom and having some control and that he can guarantee it that you have at least at significant times in your life, significant freedom. And, and then the other thing about this is, you know, being, uh, about him being sovereign, the truth of the sovereignty of God is not only that we get freedom as a gift, but that two things about it. The first thing is that often how God uses his sovereignty in the face of human beings is that often, and we see this perfectly in the cross, that God subverts the freely chosen evil of others for some type of good. Not, not in every case. In, in many of these cases, it won't be until we're in the new heaven and the new earth, uh, where we see it. It, I think it is a very deeply true Christian idea that in heaven, everything that was sad in our lives will become untrue.

[ 33 : 44 ] Earth, as there's a popular song from a few years ago that says, earth has no sorrow that heaven can't heal. And I think that's true, but I also think it's true that in, and when we're in Christ and we are in heaven and our, our lives are unfolded and unrolled, we'll see that the sadnesses of our lives in heaven are untrue. Not, I mean, they're true here now. I'm not, I'm not saying that they're not true now, but look, you look at what happened in the cross.



Herod used his freedom. Pontius Pilate used his freedom. The soldiers used their freedom. The crowd used their freedom. The Jewish rulers used their freedom, and they used their freedom, and they seemed to win. They accomplished exactly what they wanted to accomplish. They were raging against Jesus, and their rage appears to be successful, and they accomplish exactly what they desire, and exactly what they plot, and the exact outworking of all of their freedom and all of their plotting is that Jesus dies a horrible, painless, painful death upon the cross. But, they don't stop to think that this is something that God the Father had prophesied through the mouth of David a thousand years earlier, and that by him dying, just as the Sabbath, Passover lamb is being killed, that he is signifying in the most powerful way that all of our desires for atonement, and all of our desires to be made right with God, and all of the sacrifices that we think are needed, that God has provided the perfect sacrifice, that he is, in fact, Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And God takes the evil that human beings did against Jesus and uses it as a powerful means by which human beings who put their faith and trust in Jesus can be made right with him.

And it's for these very reasons that we have this, that when you're in Christ and you understand that God is sovereign and that you are free, but that nothing in human life can, at the end, undermine what God ultimately has planned for you. And the Bible is very clear that becoming a Christian doesn't mean you will never suffer, and it doesn't mean you will never die until, unless you're alive when Christ returns, and then you won't die. But God never says that those things won't happen to you, but because he is sovereign, he can subvert the evil things in your life in ways out of which good can come. That the Irish blessing, we'll stick with the Irish theme, expresses this profound comfort of the sovereignty of God. The Irish blessing is, may the wind, may the road rise up to meet you. In other words, may you journey successfully. May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind be always at your back. May the rains fall soft upon your field. And may God hold you in the hollow of his hand.

And that perfectly expresses the beauty of the Christian faith. I am held in the hollow of God's hand in Christ. I don't think I'm doing anything wrong. If you ask Crystal with her chemotherapy, her chemotherapy has been something that she has used to share Jesus with many people. Having cancer is a bad thing. Not a good thing. We don't all pray that we get cancer.

And we should be agents of healing. But God can subvert the evil that happens in a way that bears witness to him and brings glory. And I can live my life comfortable. I'm invited to enter into a greater knowledge and trust in the sovereignty and love of God, made most real in the death of Jesus for me and him becoming my savior. So that the words of the Irish blessing that God is holding me in the hollow of his hand is the way that I understand my life.

[ 37 : 58 ] It's a very powerful and beautiful image to understand about God. Just very briefly in closing, how do they finish off their prayer? Well, let's look. Verse 29. Remember they're now, they understand that they're in the hollow of God's hand. They understand that they're living in this bigger story that God has written.

They understand that Jesus is their savior. And so how do they pray? In this particular case, verse 29, they say, now, Lord, look upon their threats. So all they're saying here is they say, God, we just hope you're noticing their threats.

They're not telling God how to act about them, but they want him to notice it. They want him to notice it. And they're trusting that God will deal with their threats as he sees fit. And then the second thing, and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.

In other words, rather than equivocating, rather than becoming winsome, and rather than becoming nuanced, and by the way, there's times to be winsome and nuanced. Being winsome and nuanced is only helpful if you're also clear.

To be clear and winsome is a great thing. To be winsome and unclear, you're not actually winsome.

[ 39 : 20 ] You're just unclear. And so they pray in verse 29 to be bold and clear. And then verse 30, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant, Jesus.

It's valid to pray for miracles, brothers and sisters. It is valid to pray for them. Trust that God in his sovereign power will decide whether he's going to say yes, no, or not yet. But it's valid to pray for them. And if God does a miracle of healing directly, like in those in our congregation who are sick, those who have cancer or other problems, we should pray that God will heal them. And God can heal them instantly in a miracle.

He can heal them slowly through medicine. Or he will heal all of us who are in Christ finally when we die and are in the new heaven and the new earth. We can pray for healing. Go into medicine.

And if you're a doctor here or a nurse, you do your best with the medicine. And I encourage you to also pray for your patients. Not only for a healing of their body, but for a healing of their soul and their relationship with Christ.

And then this verse 31 is how it ends. It's a very beautiful thing. And there's a fellow who wrote in the 400s by the name of St. John Chrysostom. And he has a wonderful... I'll share what he says about this when I read it.

[ 40 : 40 ] Verse 31. And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

And St. John Chrysostom, 1600 years ago said, The room was shaken so that they would be unshaken. Isn't that great? The room was shaken so they would be unshaken and bold.

Brothers and sisters, let's stand. Bow our heads in prayer. Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you that when we are in Christ, you hold us in the hollow of your hand. We thank you, Father, that this offer and promise to be in Christ is not just for...

We're not special people, Father. We're not, like, exceptionally virtuous. We know that. We're not exceptionally holy. Father, we know that we do not deserve your love or your grace.

[ 41 : 45 ] And it's a gift, Father, that is offered to us. And we ask, Father, that you use us to let others know about the grace of Christ in such a way that their heart will be warmed and moved.

And that they will call out to Jesus to also be their Savior and their Lord. And that they will call out, and Jesus, be my Savior and my Lord. And we thank you that just, Father, as you did not say no to us but said yes to us, that you will say yes to them.

And we thank you, Father, for this profound truth that he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That you are our Father in heaven. That you are sovereign over all things. That you hold us in the hollow of your hand.

And that nothing can take us from the hollow of your hand. Whether we are walking through the valley of the shadow of death and even into death itself. That you will never let us go from the hollow of your hand until you bring us to glory.

And we see you face to face. And we thank you for these wonderful promises that you will not abandon or forsake us. But that you are our Father in heaven who is sovereign over all things.

[ 42 : 46 ] And so, Father, we ask that you help us to be bold in our life as Christians and bold in our witness. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.