

Acts 12 "Life and Death"

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 September 2024

Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0 : 00] 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.

But today, when we look at the text, Jason read part of it. We're looking at a text in Acts chapter 12, and in this text, one man is delivered from death, and six men die. And it's a text about, a little bit about the mystery of why some die and why some live. It's a text about miracles and providence. It's a text about salvation and judgment. It has one of the terrifying, in our culture, terrifying stories of God putting somebody to death. And for many people, it's a hard text.

One of the things we do as a church is we preach through books of the Bible. And so this is really a very wonderful, powerful place where we can share and look at these very hard issues together and see what it is that the Word of God has to say. So get your Bibles. Turn to Acts chapter 12. If you don't have your Bibles with you, the words will be on the screen. But I just want to encourage you, there is something about having your own Bible and being able to make notes. And it helps you to listen. And it's also really good for you to have your own Bible because in case I don't get something right, I don't mind being told later that I sort of took something out of context or anything like that. So let's look at this story. What's just happened is in the past couple of stories. We've been told about how this huge leap is made from Jews who've become Christians to pagans being Christians. And we've just been introduced to this group of pagans and Jews who become Christians in a city called Antioch, which is going to become really important for the spread of the Christian faith to the rest of the world. And that's what's just happened.

And we get sort of this in-between story because it has some very important things to teach us. And that's where we are. So chapter 12, verse 1, here's how it goes. About that time, Herod the king, and by the way, this is Herod is the grandson of the Herod that tries to have, that is alive when Jesus is born. So about that time, Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belong to the church. He killed James, the brother of John, with the sword. And when he saw that it pleased the Jewish elites, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of unleavened bread.

[3 : 38] Now just sort of pause here for a second. James is the older brother of John. So if you're familiar with the Bible, Peter, James, and John were the three disciples that were closest to Jesus, his closest companions. James' younger brother, John, is the person who wrote what we now call the gospel of John, the book of Revelation, and first and second and third John. So James is precious to Jesus, and he dies. And what sends he dies with the sword. It means he was beheaded by Herod. He's not guilty of anything. He's inconvenient.

And a threat. So he's put to death. And you can very well imagine that he prayed like crazy, and the church prayed like crazy, but still he died. And then he arrests Peter. Now just notice again, verse three, last little bit, it says, this was during the days of the unleavened bread. And then continuing in verse four, and when Herod had seized Peter, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. Now just pause here for a second. There's something here which is very, very important for you to

notice. I tell my skeptical friends who are critical of religion, or I tell people when I meet them, if I get a chance after I've just listened to them, who will tell me maybe about how profoundly some things in religion or spirituality have wounded them, and they've walked away from any type of belief in anything of spiritual or religious, or especially Christianity. If I have an opportunity, after listening to them, I say there is no greater critique of religion than the Bible, which always surprises them. And you can see this profound critique of religion here in this text, and these subtle little words. It's one of the reasons why it's important, if possible, to slow down when you're reading Scripture and notice the details, because the details can matter a lot. And what it does is it reveals the heart. So what do I mean by that? Just think about what they've just said.

...heal it. And part of the reason that religion and spirituality is completely and utterly worthless is because doing prayers and doing ceremonies doesn't change the human heart. Unless God does something to change the human heart, my actions that flow from the human heart aren't going to change my human heart. I can't leave myself to fix myself.

And so we have here just this very little window, and we're going to see another little window of the human heart, which we'll talk about at the very end, and then we'll talk about what the Bible has to say about how we're helped with the problem of the human heart. And so let's continue. So how does the story develop? Well, verse 5. So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. Now when Herod was about to bring Peter out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison.

So I just want to pause here for a second. I just want to get the image. Peter's in a jail, and in the jail he's in a cell, and in the cell he's sleeping, and beside him he's chained, and he's chained to two Roman soldiers, one on each side of them, and at the door to the cell there are two other Roman soldiers. And earlier on when it said that there were four squads, what that means is that when it comes to night time, every three hours those guards would change. So at six to nine, some people would, two soldiers there, two soldiers at the front, nine o'clock comes, they'd go off, go to bed, or whatever. The next shift, the next shift, and the next shift. And as we're going to see by the end of it, it's very obvious that this is the final shift, that what's about to happen takes place.

[8 : 13] So sometime shortly after four o'clock in the morning, these events are going to take place. And one of the things you need to notice here is that Luke is selling the miracle. This is something which is really important. You know, there are no miracles in Buddhism, and Hinduism, and Islam, and of course there are none in atheism or agnosticism. But if you take miracles out of Christianity, you don't have Christianity left. Miracles are absolutely essential to Christianity, which I'll talk about a bit more in a moment. And it's very, like, those of you heard last week's sermon, I talked about how Luke is writing an eyewitness-based history, when eyewitnesses are still alive, about the first 30 or so years of the Christian movement. So it's very interesting that the play, it looks like the play that we're in, the Yotowal Little Theatre, and it looks like it's a newsroom. That's what it looks like. So it's actually sort of a very interesting thing for the first couple of weeks for the book of Acts. He's giving you the news. Luke is giving you the news. And Luke, rather than trying to just be a little bit embarrassed about the miracle, he's emphasizing that what's about to happen is a miracle. But that's the only explanation for what happened. So look what happens. Look what he says, verse 7.

And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to Peter, and a light shone in the cell. The angel struck Peter on the side. And in the original language, it's like a bit of a punch, because Peter was deeply asleep. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, get up quickly. And then the angel, the chains fell off of Peter's hands. And the angel said to Peter, dress yourself and put on your sandals. And Peter did so. And then Peter said, and then the angel said to Peter, wrap your cloak around you and follow me. And Peter went out and followed the angel.

Peter did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. Now, just pause here. This is really important. See, one of the things, you know, if you go on YouTube, you go on TikTok, you go on Instagram, and you'll see lots of videos of people who are agnostics or atheists or apatheists or ex-Christians. And they'll talk a lot about how one of the reasons they've left the Christian faith is they understand, you know, that the Bible is filled with errors.

And, you know, these genres are not saying these things really happened. And, you know, scholars don't believe they all happened and all of that type of stuff. So here's the thing, which is so important about this piece of evidence and witness of Luke and Peter.

Luke and Peter, just like a modern TikToker, knows the difference between a vision and what's real. That's what he just showed. He knows the difference between the two things. I love saying this line. [11:07] I got this line, by the way, from the movie *Black Hawk Down*, where the salesman for the warlord is smoking a cigar and said, just because I grew up without indoor plumbing using an outdoor toilet doesn't mean that I'm ignorant of history. It's a wonderful scene. And a lot of people in our culture think that just because these guys didn't know how to do TikTok that somehow they're dumb.

They're not dumb. They understand the difference between visions and what's real. So the—and here's the other thing. By the way, if you've been following along and listening to me, you'll notice that I say different words than you see on the screen. I'm seeing the word Peter rather than he, and I'm seeing the angel rather than he. 95, 98 percent of all the errors in quotation marks in the Bible are just where a scribe, rather than saying he, he, he, he, he, he, is put in Jesus or Peter in its place. They're completely non—they're not errors at all. They're doing exactly what I do every Sunday, and every Bible reader does. If you're reading the Bible to your kids and you want to make sure they understand it, you replace the he's with the names just so they can follow along. That's all that's going on here. So here we have a very, very clear claim that this happened. Now, you might say, well, Luke lied. Okay, well, that's fine. Now we can have a conversation about that. What we can't say is that Luke was writing a metaphor. He was writing mythology.

He was writing other stuff. He wrote this. Eyewitnesses were alive. This is what he's claiming happened. And now the miracle continues. Verse 10. When they, that is, Peter and the angel had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city, and it opened for them of its own accord. And Peter and the angel went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. When Peter came to himself, he said, now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel to rescue me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people, the Jewish elite, were expecting.

Now, just a couple of things here about this. I believe it all happened. And I think there's good reasons to believe it happened. And here's a little bit about how I would talk about it if I was in a coffee shop and I had some opportunities to talk about it. We could have a charitable conversation. The first thing I always say is this. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead changes everything. If Jesus, if in fact, and there's lots of, there's just a brand new book, two books that have just come out over the last two years by, oh gosh, I should have written his name down. He's sort of the world's leading scholar on the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. And he just wrote, his first volume came out. It's like, he's now in his early seventies. It's a culmination of 40, 50 years of work. And his name, it's Habermas, Dr. Habermas. And his first volume is evident, a positive evidence for why the resurrection happened. And it's 1100 pages long.

Not making that up. And he just released his second volume and it's 900 pages long. And the second volume goes through all the objections to the positive evidence. There is evidence that in fact, Jesus really did die on a cross outside of Jerusalem, either in the spring of 33 or the spring of 30, he died. He actually was buried. And then on the third day, the grave clothes are in the, in the tomb. The body is not in the tomb. And later on, Jesus appears over that day and the next 40 days to many, many people in many different occasions, proving that he was alive, that he had defeated death.

[14:54] And we now know that he can't defeat death without also defeating sin, which I'll talk about more in a moment. And Jesus rose. And if that happened, that changes everything. Other miracles, these are easy.

These are easy miracles. If that big miracle happened, these other miracles are easy to get our minds around. And the second thing about it, and this is, I apologize here. So I'm going to put a couple of you to sleep for about three minutes. So maybe I'll set a timer. I'm going to put some of you to sleep for three minutes, because I'm going to have an apologetics geek moment. Normally I have grammar geek moments.

This is an apologetics geek moment. What just happens here is something that happens to every people, every one of us. It's happened to every one of us right now. Okay, actually, here's a simple thing.

Could all of you just raise your left hand for a moment? Okay, very good. We all managed that. We all just did something similar to what the angel just did. What? What? We all just did something to what the angel just did. One of the very first attacks on my Christian faith were by people who said,

listen, you know, George, just everything is a process of cause and effect. I have lots of people tell me there's cause and effect, cause and effect, cause and effect, cause and effect. You know, there's no, and that just explains everything. And I just say, you know, they don't actually believe that when they say that, and that's using your mind to prove that your mind doesn't exist and that your mind can't know anything, which of course makes no sense. They just don't even think about it.

But you see, the fact of the matter is, is that God, because of the doctrine of creation, God made human beings to both be a physical being, a body, and also to be a soul. Every human being is an enfleshed soul, where another way to look at it is an ensouled body. We cannot be reduced to chemicals.

[16:43] We cannot be reduced to cause and effect. There is a part of us that is key to being a human being, that is outside the flow of cause and effect, and can cause our bodies to move and to do things, like we all just by raising our left hand. And if our soul can cause our body to raise its hand, an angel can cause the chains to fall off. It's the same issue. We do it all the time. We just don't make the connection. Apologetic moment all over. Here's the main thing about this. God is able to do miracles. In fact, actually, if you could put up the big point right now, that would be very helpful.

One of the things, if I had to have an overarching point for this whole sermon today, it would be this. Christian, pray to Almighty God, mindful of his wise sovereignty over life and death, judgment and salvation, miracle and providence. That's the big point of Acts chapter 12. I mean, there's maybe several other ways you can put it, but there's a direct message to Christians. This is going to be a text that's going to encourage us to pray, and it's going to encourage us to pray to God because God is almighty. He is almighty, and it wants us to pray to all God, mindful that he is not only almighty, but that he is wise and loving, and he is sovereign. He rules over life and death. He is the God of judgment and of salvation. He is the God of miracle and providence, and so we can pray, and so we should pray. We'll talk more about prayer in a moment. But what happens after Peter gets out of jail? Well, let's continue on. Verse 13. When Peter realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. They're praying for his release. I mean, part of the mystery of this text is I'm sure they were praying for James, but James died.

But they didn't say, oh, well, James died. I guess we're going to stop praying. They're praying for Peter. They're acting like Christians. Sometimes God says no to our prayers, brothers and sisters. He always hears them, but sometimes he just says no. Sometimes he says not yet. Sometimes he says yes.

And in heaven, I'm sure, maybe one of the things that God will do for you Christian in heaven is he'll say, by the way, George, I kept track of all your prayers. Like to go in a room, you want to bring some people for a bit of a laugh? Remember when you prayed that you would, you know, have this for the rest of your life? You know, and now you realize I was really right to just say no to that, right? And all those other dumb things that we pray for and everything. And he'll probably, and he'll show the different ways that he said no and why he said no. And when he said, yeah, you might forget about this, George, you know, you prayed for this. And then you forget all about it that five years later I answered it and you never remembered, right? And that's the thing. That's what we're going to find out in heaven. God answers our prayers, but he often says no. So they're still praying. It's like a wonderful thing here. So verse 13, they're gathered together praying. It's just a little bit after four o'clock in the morning, maybe 4.30 in the morning. And verse 13, and when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. And I just want to pause here for a second. One of the problems we have when we read the Bible is we don't read it as if it's a human account of human beings like us. What do I mean? What do we expect to happen if our door was knocked on at four o'clock in the morning? Would any of us expect good news at 4.30 in the morning if somebody knocked on our door? If the phone wakes you up from sleep at 4.30 in the morning, how many are expecting it to be somebody to tell you that you got \$10 million? We expect the worst. Some of us are familiar with history and some of us are from cultures where we know that the knock on the door at 4.30 in the morning is the police, the secret police or the army coming to disappear you. That's what Rhoda is living with. James has been killed. People are in jail. The state is after Christians. It's 4.30 in the morning. The door is getting knocked on.

Boy, I mean, if you're doing a movie of this, you could just imagine the hushed conversations about what you're going to do about this. But Rhoda is the one who goes down to answer the door. You can just imagine the shaking that she would be having.

[21 : 51] I mean, people make fun of Rhoda for about what's about to happen next, but she's a brave woman to answer a door at 4.30 in the morning that's being knocked on. Verse 14, recognizing Peter's voice, inner joy. She did not open the gate, but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate.

They said to her, the people in there praying, you're out of your mind. But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying it as angel. There's a cultural belief of Jewish people at that time that there were people, everybody had a guardian angel and that the guardian angel would look and sound like you if it ever was to appear. But Peter continued knocking.

And when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, tell these things to James, that's James, the half-brother of Jesus, and to the brothers, that's other people who are in leadership. Then he departed and went to another place. I just want to pause here.

Brothers and sisters, this is a profound encouragement for us to pray. This is a profound encouragement for us to pray.

Like, here they are. So first of all, how many of us would even get up at 4 30 in the morning to pray? These people are really praying. And I don't, who knows, they don't tell you what they're praying, but just imagine, what would we be praying if all of a sudden, me and Steve Griffin and Daniel Avitan are all put in jail for being Christians. And it's just a couple of hours before we're going to be released and we're going to be beheaded. And you're all praying for me. What are you going to be praying for me for? Well, some of you are going to probably be praying that there would be a change in Herod's heart and that he would let us go. Some of you are probably praying that I would have some peace and calm in the midst of my imminent death. Some of you would be praying that I would have the courage to not deny the faith, but to bear witness to Jesus in and of my death. Some of you would be praying for Louise and for my kids, hoping that they would be comforted. Right? Isn't that what you'd be praying for? That after George is dead, that they'll be comforted, you know? And we'll probably be praying that God would change Herod's heart so that the persecution would stop. Those are all the things.

How many people do you think were praying that God would send an angel to rescue Peter? Like, none of them. And here, their prayers for deliverance are answered and they don't believe it happened. This should encourage you and me to pray. If God depended for you and me to get our prayers really precise, well, gosh, nothing would happen. Like, I mean, that's just, we just, they just poured out their heart. They're pouring out their heart for Peter. They're pouring out their heart for Peter's wife. They don't mention that, but Peter, other places, you know, Peter had a wife, probably had kids.

[24 : 37] They're praying for Peter, his wife, his kids. They're praying for themselves. They're praying out of fear. And God answers their prayer with a miracle. Amen. Praise God. And they didn't think it was going to happen. Brothers and sisters, this is such a profound encouragement for you and me to pray.

Remember what I said. This is a message for us to pray, remembering that God is almighty. And how did I word it? That God is almighty. And that mindful of his wise sovereignty over life and death, judgment and salvation, miracle, and providence. And God wants us to pray. And it's not just that God does miracles.

Because look at what happens in the very, oh, actually, what happens right here is another little thing. When it says, then he departed. Oh, no, we'll continue reading. And I'll explain how. It's not just miracles. Look what happens next. Now, when the day came, verse 18, there was no little disturbance amongst the soldiers over what had become of Peter. And Herod searched for him and did not find him. He examined the sentries in order that they should be put to death.

Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea to spend time there. One death of James, now four deaths of soldiers, and Peter is released unharmed. Now, a couple of things here about this. The first thing, if you could put up that second point, Claire, that would be very helpful. It doesn't say that God did a whole pile of miracles so that Peter couldn't be found. But it's very interesting in the providence of God, the feast of Passover, that the city would have been swollen two, three, four, five, six times the number of residents, eight times the number of residents. And as soon as daylight

came, after the whole festival was over, a large number of them would have left. And Peter obviously uses his thinking to figure out how to leave with the pilgrims. And a lot of scholars, by the way, figure out that's how he ends up in Joppa, where he's going to get the vision to go and share the gospel with the Gentiles, which is a whole other thing. But he thinks. So here's the point about prayer and thinking. Prayer should leaven leaven thinking. And thinking should leaven prayer. And both should leaven action.

See, the problem that many of us have is that we think, well, you have a choice. You can either think or pray, right? And one of the stereotypes that people outside the faith have about Christians is that what we're like, you know? You know, we can't think anymore, so we pray. Or we stop thinking and we pray instead. And unfortunately, when they think that about Christians, that's often the case.

[27 : 15] I think and think and think and think. And when I can't think of a solution, then I pray. But the Bible wants us to think about this whole thing very, very differently. God wants you to think. He wants you to think well. He wants you to think wisely and well and deeply. And he wants you to pray. And there's no contradiction between thinking and praying. He wants you to pray as you think and to think as you pray. To have your thinking leaven permeate your prayer. And have your prayer permeate your thinking. And have both permeate how you take action. That's what we see here in this text in the contours of the story. But now we come to a dark time. And the last thing about the human heart and something which would make us feel very uncomfortable about sharing this story with friends who are outside the Christian faith. But it actually points to something very profound that gives us, helps us to understand why we can pray in confidence that God is sovereign over life and death. Look what happens in verse 20. Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon.

And they came to him with one accord. And having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace because their country depended on the king's country for food.

On an appointed day, Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. Just pause. This whole story is also recounted by Josephus, a Jewish historian. He has obviously different explanations, but Josephus does say that there was an oration. He does say that before the oration was finished that Herod was struck down with pain. Josephus does reveal that within five days of this, after he's rushed off the stage, Herod will die. But Josephus, and Josephus actually also says that it happens because of Herod's pride. But he makes it the, you know, the, some gods and omens and everything that happened. But the same thing is actually recorded in history outside of the Bible. Verse 22, Verse 23, Listen to this.

Because he did not give God the glory. And he was eaten by worms and breathed his last. But the word of the God, that's the gospel, increased and multiplied. Now what's going on here?

[29 : 45] He said, you can very well see that many of us would not like to have this text read to our friends who are outside the faith. We'd be very uncomfortable with it. But it's actually really, well, what would they say? They'd say amongst other things, your God kills people? And they might say, George, you know, if it's said that God killed Herod because Herod had killed James and persecuted Christians. Well, maybe I could get my mind around that. But George, George, George, George, it says, look at that in verse 23 again, because he did not give God the glory. Doesn't that sound petty?

Friends, earlier I said that one of the problems with the human heart is that we at many, many times want to do evil, but we always want to look good. The other aspect of the human heart is that we want the glory. There's this very beautiful song called *Of the Father's Love Begotten*. It was written around the year 400, still sung today in places. We sing it sometimes, often in Advent, written by a fellow by the name of Aurelius Pretentius. I don't know if I'm pronouncing his name, and it's *Of the Father's Love Begotten*. And in it, there's this wonderful line where Pretentius says in 400, referring to Jesus, he the source, he the ending be. In other words, all glory, everything which is worthy of glory ultimately comes from Jesus. And the praise for what has been done, which is good, should go back to Jesus. He the source, he the ending be. What does my heart say? Me the source. Good things come from me. Me the ending be. I want the praise. That's what the human heart says. See, rather than making this text sound very terrible, it actually is very sobering for us.

The eight o'clock service, we had a missionary, a Baptist pastor, another Anglican pastor in me. It's not the beginning of a joke. And I asked each one of them. At this service, to my knowledge, it was just the same Baptist pastor who was here. And I said, I want to put you on the spot, brother. I think

he was sitting in that chair right over there, maybe where you're sitting right now.

I don't want to put you on the spot, brother. But what goes through your mind when you think you've done a really good sermon? I want the praise. I want the glory.

[32 : 30] That's the human heart. Boy, I was really smart coming up with that. No wonder people give me some compliments. It's not just pastors. You do a real act of kindness for your neighbor.

And they're really thankful later. And you say, ah, it came from me. I'm glad to get the glory. It gives a piece of wisdom to your boss that changes maybe the course of your department or your government. That came from me. I'm glad I got the praise.

So, George, what's the hope? Well, you see, that's the problem. There is no hope. The only hope for the human heart is... Actually, if you could put up the third point that I missed that. Your heart wants to do evil and appear righteous. And it wants to receive glory for itself. But here's the Christian hope.

See, the point of this story is, on one hand, we can take real confidence when we see that those early Christians actually prayed and believed but sort of didn't believe. We can take courage that we can pray. And the other thing that we need to see in this story is that I'm Herod.

See, what is the Christian hope? If you could put up the fourth thing, there's a beautiful hymn called... What's it called again? It's called... I can't remember what it's called. It's written by Philip Bliss at the 1875. But it has this wonderful hymn, In My Place Condemned He Stood. That's the Christian hope. Christian hope is this. I can't change my heart. I can do rituals. I can take therapy. I can't change my heart. I mean, part of the whole problem is even when we really grow in holiness, all of a sudden, even as we're growing in holiness, it slips into our mind and our heart that it was me who did it. And I deserve the praise. And I can't fix myself. I need someone who loves me, who's also human, but more than human, that can fix me. And that's the wonderful news of the gospel is that Jesus died in my place. My only hope in life and death is that in my place condemned,

[34 : 42] Jesus stood for me. That's the only hope I have. It's the ground for my prayer. It's the confidence that I can have that when I pray, that I'm praying to Almighty God, mindful of His wise sovereignty over life and death, judgment and salvation, miracle and providence, because it's a complete and utter act of grace. I am not better than Herod. And the wonder of the gospel is that God loved you so much that He sent His one and only Son to the end that all that believe in Him will not perish but have eternal life. And now we pray to our Father in heaven, knowing that He is the Almighty God.

The Bible doesn't tell me or us why is it that James died and Peter lived. The Bible doesn't tell us why. But we can trust that God is a God of love and that when we appear before Him face to face in heaven, the reasons will be good. He is sovereign over life and death. He is sovereign over judgment and salvation. He is sovereign over salvation. He is sovereign over providence and miracle. So Christian, let's pray.

I invite you to stand. I just want to say as I bring this, I'm going to just say a closing prayer and then I'm not sure who comes up to lead some intercession after this. But if you consider yourself to be outside of the Christian faith and your heart is strangely warmed or drawn by this, there is no better time than right now to say, Jesus be my Savior. And He's alive and He hears and He'll save you. He will.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, we give you thanks and praise for stories like this. We give you thanks and praise that some of even the scariest stories, the ones that we want to turn from or pretend aren't there. In fact, Father, these are windows into the wonders of grace, the wonders of the gospel. And so, Father, we give you thanks and praise that Jesus died in our stead out of love for us. We give you thanks and praise that by faith in Him and in incorporation into Him, more and more into Him and Him more and more into us. Father, we ask that you would form us to be men and women, people, a congregation of prayer.

It pours out our heart to you in prayer, knowing that whether it's through providence or miracle, that you will wisely and sovereignly answer, that you are sovereign over life and death, that you hold us in the hollow of your hands and you care for us and you love us. Father, help us to grow in our knowledge of that and help it to be the form of our prayer. Father, help us to be praying for those who do not yet know Jesus, that they will come to know Him as their Savior and their Lord. And all things, Father, help us to know that you are sovereign, you are wise, you are almighty, you are good, and we should pray and that we should think and pray and pray and think and act and that that is, Father, what you would have us do. And we ask all these things in the name of Jesus, your

Son and our Savior. And all God's people said, Amen.