

The Complete Plan of God

Building a Christian Mind

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Well, I think you're here on a very good day in the plan of God as we start a new section in a longer-term series that we're doing. Those of you that have been with us over the past several months know that we are in the middle of an extended series called "Building a Christian Mind," and we have considered basic fundamental themes that Scripture teaches on matters of how to know that God exists, how to know that the Bible is true, how to know Jesus is Lord. We taught on all of those themes over multiple times. I've reviewed them multiple times, so I won't say anything further about those three series that we've completed, except to say this, is that there is something very fundamental, transcendent, that is communicated in the cumulative impact of those three series. It is this: there is truth, there is authority, there is a God, and there is a day of accountability that will come. Those things are very fundamental and I don't think it's too much to say that unless in some manner those thoughts are recurring and come back to you from time to time every week, that your mind is not trained in Christian thinking. If that sounds like a really radical thought to say, it just illustrates the need for this series all the more, and for those of you that are Christians and yet you still find yourself a little bit pierced by that state, that the thoughts that there is truth, that there is authority, that there is a day of accountability, and if those thoughts are not really a regular part of your thinking, you can do one of two things, I suppose, you can reject and dismiss the conviction of that and say, "I know I'm fine," which I hope you won't do because there's no wisdom in that, or you can say, "You know what, I need to come back to God's word. I must be missing something. There must be more to my life than just the day-to-day activity of keeping my job or watching over my family or doing these things. I'm so preoccupied with things, maybe I'm missing the whole point." Because the truth of the matter is if those aren't a regular thought of your thinking, then yeah, you are missing the point and I would not be doing you any favors to sugarcoat that to you in any other way than to state it plainly.

And so that's why I say I'm really glad that you're here today because we're about to start a fourth aspect of this series of building a Christian mind and what I would say without fear of contradiction as we will look at this section over the next six to eight weeks on Sundays, only on Sundays, is that what we're about to enter into is the most practical, the most absolutely life-changing aspects of biblical thinking that you could possibly imagine. This changes everything in the midst of your day-to-day anxieties, in the midst of severe crises, in the midst of a successful, prosperous life, a prosperous business, pursuits are going well, this changes absolutely everything what we're going to see. And

I've said in the past, and I don't mind repeating it, that these were things that I didn't really come to grasp until even after I had been through two courses of study in seminary, and you guys know where I went to seminary at, so that's a pretty remarkable thing to say. These things were not clear to me even after I graduated, and only in the course of my own study and exposition of Scripture did this rise to my understanding and enable me to put behind a lot of junk. and to embrace truth in a way that has altered the way that I think and the way that I minister and the way that I live and this is true of, not just of me, but of anyone who comes into a full understanding of these things that we're going to look at.

So this is absolutely essential and I would say this also, beloved, just by way of introduction; we're going to be in this for a while, so there's no reason for me to hurry here. If you find yourself, and if you can be candid enough with yourself to say that you are chronically discontent with life, that you're chronically dissatisfied, that people point out to you that, "You know, you complain a lot," then you really need these things because you're looking at life through the wrong lens. To be chronically discontent with life is to miss something very fundamental and foundational, it's the fact that you have right now, you have the very life that God has given to you. No matter how difficult it may be, God has given you the life that you now have as you sit here today. Now, admittedly, some of you may be suffering because of sinful choices that you've made in the past. you may be under affliction of some kind, but as you look at it now, looking forward, understand that God has orchestrated everything in your life to bring you to precisely the point that you're at now and his purpose in that is so that going forward, from this point forward, you would learn and that you would submit and that you would commit your heart to glorify him, to honor him in precisely the circumstances that you find yourself in. And so if you're in a hard strait because of sinful choices that you've made, you start by glorifying God by saying, "Lord, I confess my sin. I acknowledge that my own choices have put me in this position. I humble myself and I ask you for grace going forward." There's the starting point. If you're chronically ill, chronic difficulties of whatever sort, "Lord, I accept this affliction from you, and I acknowledge that your grace is sufficient for me, and I ask you to perfect your strength in my weakness." If you have prosperity, say, "Lord, everything that I have comes from you. What do I have that you haven't given to me? O God, I give you the glory. I take none for myself. Thank you and help me to be a good steward of the blessings that you've showered upon me." And on and on it goes. There's a common thread through all of it, and it's the title of our next series, and you need to know this in order to be able to live that way. The title of this next series is, "How to Know God Rules Over All." How to know God rules over all, that's our next series that we're embarking on here, and today's message is entitled specifically, "The Complete Plan of God." The complete plan of God.

Now, I want to say, I want to repeat a word that I've made to justify this whole series. I want to say these things further. We've said that we know God exists, how we know the Bible is true, how we know Jesus is Lord. We're about to start on how to know God rules over all. Down the road, we're going to consider how to know that Christianity is true, how to know truth exists, how to know true salvation. I've said in the past, but I think it's really important to say it again and there's always reasons for why I repeat myself. I

realize full well that most of you to one degree or another would verbalize a statement that you affirm these things. "I affirm that God exists. I affirm that the Bible is true. I affirm that Jesus is Lord," and on and on it goes; that's why you'd gather in a church like this for the most part. I realize that you would outwardly affirm these things, but, beloved, that's not the issue. That's not why we're considering these things. I say what I'm about to say sympathetically, pastorally, but I also say it with clarity, I also realize that most of you could not on the spot be able to persuasively support those beliefs from Scripture and to be able to state forth a biblical reason and multiplied biblical grounds for all of those things that are fundamental to a Christian worldview. You assume it, you kind of affirm it in general ways, but to be able to go to Scripture and to be able to explain it to yourself, explain it to your family, explain it to those that are hostile or foreign to the faith, you know, I'm mindful that most people can't do that, and that's not good. That's not the way it's supposed to be at all. And again, I say these things sympathetically, but I just have to say them, beloved, even if it hurts your feelings. For many, your lamp is plugged in to these truths but it's plugged in to someone else's outlet and you cannot live in this world on borrowed belief, and as the forces of our culture become increasingly hostile and the things that we've presupposed for generations collapse all around us on an accelerating basis, a borrowed belief isn't going to do anyone any good. You must make the sustained effort to make this truth your own, to know it, to take the time over the course of weeks and months to meditate on it and to grasp it and to be able to share it effectively with others. You and I, we must know why we believe what we say we believe and we must be able to go to specific places in the word of God to support it. We must know that.

We must know why we believe and why we believe what we teach and let me say something else and to be an encouragement to parents of young children that are here and just the opportunity that you are taking advantage of to put your children under the teaching of the word of God. We need to recognize this corporately. Some of us, yeah, we've heard these things before. You and I, we need to have the patience and the love and the care and the concern to want something beyond that which would tickle our own minds with new information. We need to have the love and concern for the young people in our midst who are hearing these things for the first time with any degree of understanding. We owe it to them. We owe it to Christ to lay a foundation that will serve them all their lives, and even if you don't see it right now, beloved, that's what we're giving to you and your family; we are giving to you that which would serve your children all their lives. We're not here to entertain them in a moment. We're not here to simply give them a happy day of a youth event. That's not why we exist. That's not what we're after. What we're after is to develop in families, in fathers, in mothers, in children, a Christian mind that knows how to think and operate biblically and to live accordingly and we think that's important to do.

And so as we begin this sub-series, "How to Know God Rules Over All," here's what we are about to embark upon, we are going to see God for what he has done and what he does and what he will do. And I said this section is immensely, immensely practical and we're going to start going all the way back before any of us were here, when I say any of us, before any of humanity existed. Go back long before the world began and enter into

the pre-eternal mind of God in what we consider here this morning. It's a pretty holy place to go, isn't it, to step back beyond time and into the divine mind of God. We can only do that because he's revealed these things to us. When we talk about the complete plan of God, theologically what we're about to consider here this morning is what is known as the divine decree. The divine decree. Sometimes theologians will refer to it as the divine decrees, plural, and we'll explain that in a moment, but here's where we want to begin and this is just so very fundamental to right Christian thinking. This is not abstract theology. This is absolutely essential to understanding everything or anything about what you see happening in the world around you. If you are not familiar with the concept of the divine decree, you have no idea of how to interpret rightly anything that's happening around you. You can't understand why a cow stands in the field like it does. You can't understand the simple principles of mathematics without understanding something about this.

Let's approach it this way. Scripture says, and you all know the very first verse of the Bible, that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and we're not talking about creation today, we're talking about something else. We'll talk about creation next week, Lord willing. God created the heavens and the earth. God at the beginning of time, in that instant of time, he created the heavens and the earth and the clock on human history began ticking at that point, right? Here's the question. Here is the question that we need to ask as we go back to that beginning moment in human history. Here's the question that matters: when God did that, when God created the heavens and the earth, did he have a plan in place for what would come next? Did God have a long-term plan in mind when he created the heavens and the earth? Now, in the course of human history, course of theology, there are deists who would say that, not really, he really didn't. Deists teach us that God created the heavens and the earth and then he just walked away and left it to work out on its own energy, its own timetable, and doesn't have any interest in what happened. So he just created it and walked away.

Now it's really difficult to understand why God would do that. Why would God create something that he had no interest in? And so that line of thinking, which was so prominent around the founding of our country really doesn't do us any good and doesn't take us anywhere. It's a dead end and a foolish way to think. More recently, in the course of the evangelical church, there's been this rise of what's been labeled and what I've taught on known as moralistic therapeutic deism. Moralistic therapeutic deism, that's a mouthful. If you haven't heard those messages, I really ask you and encourage you to go online, find them and listen to them because they're really, really important for understanding the nature of what happens in the broader church all around you. Moralistic therapeutic deism. What I'm about to say is a gross oversimplification, but it's sufficient for purposes today. They say, yes, there is a God. Yes, he created the world. But it's really not that serious of a deal to him. God wants you to be nice and kind to one another, and God will intervene when you have a problem and you need his help and you're in a tight spot, you can call on him and he'll step in, he'll solve your problem, and then he'll step out again and let you get back to the life that you want to live. And so God will intervene as you ask him to, and he'll help you when he wants to, but for the most part, he stays out of the way and just has a grandfatherly, benign approach to things. It's

so seductive and yet so destructive at the same time. Moralistic therapeutic deism is a complete false heresy on the whole nature of truth as it suggests that God created things, just wants you to be happy, he stands back and, you know, he really doesn't have much to do with it but if he needs you, you can call on him like you can call on AAA if your car breaks down alongside the road. Call. He'll come. He'll help you. He'll get you going. And, you know, then he'll go away. And just like you have no real relationship or need for the wrecker driver from AAA over the course of life, it conditions you to think about God that way and it's an outrage against biblical truth. And so you need to hear those messages.

But both of those, whether you're looking at classical deism or moralistic therapeutic deism, both of them are conditioning you to think that God is distant and removed from his universe, distant and removed from the world, and really has no interest in what happens along the way and it creates, it creates in your mind, it creates in your heart a sense of a cold, distant deity uninterested in what takes place, and because you have that sense of a cold, distant deity, you have to plead with him and beg him to get involved in something when it looks like things are getting out of control. Well, all of that can be swept aside, dismissed, and put into the prison of false religion where it belongs if you understand something about the divine decree, the complete plan of God that we're going to look at this morning. Let me repeat the question: did God have a long-term plan in place when he created the heavens and the earth? Did God have a long-term plan in place when he created the heavens and the earth? Obviously, beloved, the answer, the biblical answer to that question is, yes, he did. He did have a plan in place when he created the heavens and the earth and the theological name for that plan is the Divine Decree. The Divine Decree.

Let me start with a definition of the Divine Decree. The Reformed theologian, Louis Berkhof, defines it this way and you should write this down. It's so brief and yet so comprehensive; there is a lifetime of study wrapped up in this brief sentence. The decree of God is his eternal plan or purpose in which he has foreordained all things that come to pass. Period. End quote. The decree of God is his eternal plan or purpose in which he has foreordained all things that come to pass. Now beloved, let me restate that. God determined beforehand everything that would happen in the universe. Let that sink in. God determined beforehand what would happen, everything that would happen in the universe. He had a plan in place. He was working something out. He had an idea in mind, a comprehensive, multi-faceted, unified idea of what he wanted to accomplish when he created the heavens and the earth.

Now, for those of us in this postmodern, self-absorbed society in which we live, for those that are not accustomed to even planning out a day and just kind of respond as the day comes and goes to whatever happens, it's hard for people conditioned by what we live in today to think that that would even matter to God but that, in keeping with the Scripture that was read as the service started from Isaiah 55, "My thoughts are not your thoughts. My ways are not your ways. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so my ways," God says, "are higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts." Beloved, this is so essential, and we're going to get into a lot of Scripture here in just a

moment, but it is so essential to approach the subject matter with this thought clearly in mind: you should not judge the teaching of the Divine Decree by what seems reasonable to you based on how you live your life because how you live your life according to your thoughts is not the way that God thinks, it's not the way that God acts. God is different from us. He is uncreated. He is above us. He is distinct from us. He is powerful. He is wise. He is God and so he doesn't think or operate like we do, and so the fact that we come into something that is far greater than what we could conceive is no indication that it's not true at all, it's an indication that we think small thoughts and live in a small world with small minds that have not adequately taken in what Scripture says about the glory, the sovereignty, the omniscience, the omnipotence, the omnipresence of a holy, just God who orders all things according to his will.

God determined beforehand what would happen in the universe. Turn in your Bibles to Isaiah 46. Isaiah 46, beginning in verse 8. I'll give you a moment to find your way there. Isaiah 46:8. And again, I just remind you as we start to dive into the deep end of the pool in Scripture here, that these things are so immensely practical, so immensely far-reaching, so immensely life-changing, so settling, so calming in their effect to the believing heart that even if you don't see on the front end why it has those implications, even if you don't see on the front end why these things are so important, at least stay with us as we go through Scripture and ask God to help you see that which may not be apparent to you on first appearance.

Isaiah 46:8, "Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'" God declares the end from the beginning. He says beforehand everything that will happen and in that, he is declaring that he has established all things that will come to pass before they actually do occur in time. God in eternity established his plan. God in eternity worked out what that plan would be, and now he is in the process of implementing it and executing it and carrying out as he determined to do.

Now when it comes to understanding these things, and just on a very fundamental level, beloved, understand this, that as we look at everything that happens around us, in our individual lives, in our country, in politics, in finance, in whatever else you want to talk about, understand this, beloved, which is a direct colossal hit on the philosophy that governs the way the world thinks. This is a collision of massive proportions with the spirit of the age in which we live and we're not at all trying to diminish that, we're trying to highlight it. You and I, we live in a God-centered universe, not a man-centered world. What is happening in the world is according to a plan that God has established, that God is controlling, that God is directing to ends that God has appointed because he determined things that would happen that had not yet been done. He will accomplish all his purpose, Scripture says and that means... Sometimes I just have to smile and almost chuckle at the magnitude of biblical truth because it's so amazing and so overwhelming and so contradictory to the way that men in sin think. It means that man is not the master of his own destiny. He is not the captain of his own soul. He is not in charge. Things do not run

according to the way that men determine them to be. Things operate according to a plan that God established before eternity began and that he is working out in perfect sovereign control to an end that he has appointed that will be to his glory. This is fundamental to right thought, it is fundamental to right Christian living, and it is essential for us to understand it, and that's why we're taking time to consider these things here today.

Overall I have seven points, whether I get through them all this morning or not, we will see, but I want to answer a fundamental question with seven aspects. What can we say about the decree of God? What can we say about the decree of God? Stated differently, what has God revealed about this complete comprehensive plan of his that he established before creation and is now working out according to his wisdom?

Point number 1: the decree is diverse and yet it is one. The decree is diverse and yet it is one. Now, that sounds probably kind of abstract, but again, just stay with me through all of this. When we think about the decree of God, the complete plan of God, beloved, you need to understand this: there is a unity to it. Everything is subsumed under one comprehensive plan and so there is a unity to it. There's only one decree with infinite aspects to it and those infinite aspects show us that there is a diversity to the decrees of God, and yet there's a unity to it. Think about it this way. Those of you that enjoy jigsaw puzzles, think about the decree of God in this sense, a jigsaw puzzle is one, whether it's 300 pieces or 1,000 pieces or 2,500 pieces, it's one, right? When it all fits together, there's one puzzle that is completed at the end, and yet every jigsaw puzzle has a diverse number of pieces that fit together in order to create that one puzzle in its final output. You can think about it this way, you strain for analogies that help, that have their own built-in defects when you use them, but you strain for analogies that just give something to help us put things into words that we can understand. The decree of God is as if there was an infinite jigsaw puzzle that was put into place and it is being put together over time in a way that when it is completed there will be a full picture shown and every piece will make sense in the overall context of that great jigsaw puzzle that's been done. In like manner, the complete plan of God, the Divine Decree, has infinite aspects to it covering every event that ever happens, every person that ever lives, every animal that ever walks the face of the earth, every aspect of it has a place in the plan of God and he is working that out according to his will.

And you can see this in a crucial passage from the Apostle Paul. I invite you to turn to Ephesians 1. Ephesians 1 and we'll come back to this passage a time or two over the course of this six or eight part series. Ephesians 1. Let's begin in verse 7 which is focused on Christ and then works out from there. Ephesians 1, beginning in verse 7. "In him," meaning in Christ, "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight," watch this carefully as I read, "making known to us the mystery of his will," notice singular will, one will, "making known to us the mystery of his will according to his purpose," singular, his singular purpose, "which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to," here it is again, "the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will."

Now, beloved, I understand fully that when you read through the Bible and you read those verses in 10 or 15 seconds and keep going on, that the fullness of the significance of that maybe has never hit you but that doesn't limit what Scripture is teaching, the fact that you and I read it so often, and the full impact of it utterly escapes our attention, that only means that we are dull as we read Scripture, that we are spiritually sluggish, and we need the help of the Holy Spirit to open our minds to understand the fullness of what God is saying here.

Now look, as you go through that passage, look at how often it refers to the will, the purpose, the plan of God. Verse 9, the mystery of his will. His purpose, verse 9. Verse 10, a plan for the fullness of time. Verse 11, the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will. His will. His purpose. His plan. God has a plan that he's working out. Singular, it's a singular decree. And yet notice, beloved, that in the most comprehensive, extensive, exhaustive way, Paul says that everything is governed under and everything is included under the purpose of that plan. Verse 10, to unite all things in him. Does all things mean all things? Well, it means things in heaven and things on earth. That's pretty comprehensive, isn't it? That seems to be a pretty comprehensive description of all that exists in the universe. And in verse 11, he goes on to say the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will. All things, beloved. And this is after he said in verses 3 and 4, look up there with me, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." The fact that you in the past, I'm going to be a little sharp here maybe, the fact that in the past you've had Arminian teachers who explained away the doctrine of election to you and in the process explained away without even recognizing it the decree of God, doesn't change the clarity with which God speaks in his word. God chose us before the foundation of the world and Paul goes on to say later in that same context, he speaks about the will, the plan, the purpose of God that is comprehensive in all things.

And so all things, plural, are included in this singular plan of God. One will from one God, and yet a plan that covers everything in the universe from the beginning of time until the end of time. It's incomprehensibly massive. This is not according to human thought and let's just say this, you know, as people would furiously look for ways to contain this and to restrain it and thereby put God in a box that they can control, understand that God has spoken with clarity here. You can speak of, as I said, you can speak of the Divine Decree, singular, which emphasizes the unified plan; others say decrees because God's appointed an infinite number of things to show that all things are covered by it. We'll today speak in terms of one decree emphasizing the unity of the plan that God has by which he foreordained everything that would come to pass in all of the universe.

Now, you step back and there's an appropriate right sense of holy hush that falls rightly on a room where these things are being discussed, a holy hush that recognizes these things are high and holy and far beyond the way that we normally think, far beyond our

capacity to understand. How can one being have such wisdom and such power to do that, and that is the being to whom I will one day give an account of my little individual life? Yes. Yes. That is sanctifying. That is frightening. That is why the Bible says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, to recognize that this God exists independently of you and me, that he has a plan that far transcends you and me, that he is righteous and holy and just and wise in all that he does. This is not a God with whom we should trifle. This is not a God to treat as a vending machine. "God, I need this and so I'll pull this lever or push these buttons. Please have the vending machine deliver what I want on the timetable that I want," as the popular churches of our day would teach us to think. No. No, God is so great and so holy and so majestic that he has a plan and he established everything that would ever happen in the universe.

Now, just briefly I want to say, because I'm not going to get into it today, you say, "Well, what about sin? What about evil? What about all the bad things that seemingly happen in the world?" We'll deal with that in the future. We're not dealing with that today for the sake of being able to keep things reasonably clear on the primary point that needs to be established. We see, first of all, the decree is diverse and yet it is one. The decree is diverse and yet it is one. It covers everything in the universe and yet God has one plan that he's working out. He's putting an infinite jigsaw puzzle together with perfect precision and not a piece will be lost, not a piece will be misplaced, whether it's a hair on your head, a bird in the sky, or whether it's the rise and fall of a nation like Rome, one day to rise or fall like the United States of America. All of it on a massive macro scale or on a micro scale, it all fits under the divine decree.

Now secondly, what can we say about this decree? The decree of God is eternal. The decree of God is eternal and that's what I've been saying all along. We won't spend much time here. God planned the course of the universe before time began. He planned the course of the universe before time began. We saw that in Ephesians 1:4, "he chose us in him before the foundation of the world." Paul speaking of the doctrine of election that God chose beforehand all those who would be saved and passed over others who would not be saved. Do you realize, beloved, I haven't always even thought about it in this sense myself, but do you realize that in that verse, the distinction of those who are chosen and those that are passed over, that in that one verse you have a comprehensive dealing of God with every human being who's ever lived? God chose beforehand who would be saved. He passed over others who would not and be left to their own sins. Do you realize that therefore the billions of people who have ever lived and who ever will live are included within the course of that statement? And if the individuals are included within it, then certainly their activities by which they will be judged, or for which they will be judged, are included within that statement. This is absolutely comprehensive, and God determined it before the foundation of the world.

Listen as I read another verse from 2 Timothy 1:9. 2 Timothy 1:9 says that God "saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began." Before the ages began. This is an eternal decree of God which included in it the cross of Christ and Christ dying at the hands of godless men.

The book of Acts shows us that. Again, I'll just read this for the sake of time. Peter preaching on the day of Pentecost to the Jews who crucified Christ says, "This Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, that Jesus you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." Our purpose for today is that the crucifixion of Christ was in the fulfillment of the plan of God. God planned that out before the ages began. And beloved, this is where we have the opportunity to draw upon past things that we've said. One of the things that we said in the past in the course of this series was that we know that Jesus is Lord by the outworking of the fulfillment of the prophecies that were made over the course of 2,000 years before he came. Those prophecies made millennia before he lived on the earth all required this incomprehensibly intricate fulfillment and motions of men and words and events over the course of every day of every year for thousands of years in order that they would be fulfilled at precisely that time. Now the only way that that happens is if there is a divine plan that is being worked out and orchestrated by a divine Conductor who is in perfect control and has planned it all out to do exactly what he wanted. Even godless men are working under the hand and direction of God because God is wisely moving all things according to his purpose.

Now listen, beloved, let me give you another analogy. I'm giving you table game analogies here, which is really ironic because I hate table games. I hate table games. Ask Nancy, she'll tell you. I hate table games. The bad thing about saying that is that that's all some people will remember. They'll forget everything about the divine plan. "You know, Don hates table games. Isn't that cool?" Beloved, understand this, that in the world in which we live, and as we think about calling upon God for help and we pray to him for help and, you know, you think about what it means for God to be sovereign, understand this, beloved, the world is not operating like a game of checkers or a game of chess where God makes one move and then we make a move in response, or Satan makes a move and contradicts it, Satan moves his bishop and puts the king in check. It's not like that at all. When we talk about the Divine Decree and the outworking of the Divine Decree, which is the doctrine of divine providence which we'll get to, we're talking about something where God is orchestrating, God is directing, God is working in everything that happens. He is sovereign over it all. He is working out all things according to his purpose. And so God does not make a move and then wait for Satan or man to respond. He established the end from the beginning, and everything within the course of his universe is working to the fulfillment of that great goal.

Now what does that mean for you and me, and I'm going to leave the rest of this for next time. Why is this so very, very practical? Beloved, every joy, every sorrow, every difficulty, every uncertainty in your life is included in the comprehensive, complete plan of God. There is nothing in your life that has come apart from, that has not been filtered through the mind and hand of God. Everything that is in your life is there with a purpose from God himself and this is utterly transforming in the way that you think about these kinds of things. It's not, you are not, and those of you that have come from charismatic churches, I'm delighted to be able to liberate your minds from the lies that you've been told, you are not subject to Satan as you go through this life. God is in control, not the

devil, and you see that in the book of Job. You know, Satan had to get permission from God to even afflict Job. God set limits on it, and then God brought glory to himself and blessing to Job at the end. You're not subject to Satan. You're subject to a holy God, a good God. If you're in Christ, you're subject to a God who loved you and sent his Son to save you and to bring you into his family and everything that happens somehow is in furtherance of that. You say, "Well, what about the hard times? You know, what you're saying is God sent this heartache to me. God sent this rebellious child to me, God sent this affliction, this bankruptcy, God sent all of these problems then if what you're saying is true." Look, people think that they are protecting God by shying away from that conclusion. It's an utter disaster. That's a wrong way to think. Just one Scripture passage would give us a sense of it. In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul talks about how there was a messenger from Satan that was afflicting him, and he recognizes, "Do you know what? God sent that affliction to me to humble me, to keep me from exalting myself."

God has a purpose in these afflictions and not only does he have a spiritual purpose in it, alongside the affliction, he gives us a grace that is sufficient to help us endure it, a grace that enables us to give him the glory, a purpose that causes us to acknowledge our weakness, to humble ourselves before God and before man, and to say, "I am nothing before him. I am nothing before you. I am weak, I'm a creature of flesh, and I'm like a wisp of smoke passing through the wind that will be gone quick enough and quick enough forgotten." And it's through afflictions, severe afflictions, that God teaches us to think rightly about ourselves in that way and to draw upon him in intimacy even as Christ drew upon the strength of his Father as he faced Gethsemane.

And so, yes, God has a plan. He's working it all out to his glory. It includes everything in the universe and every detail in your life. Now, yeah, that's a lot to take in. It takes some time to process that but when you view the issues of life from this perspective, you see them completely differently. If you're not calculating God into your approach to life at all, then you don't understand the first thing about what's happening to you. You don't understand the first thing if that's not a central part of your thinking. If you think that Satan's just being a bully to you, and that, you know, you need God to call him off, you're looking at things all wrong. The devil is God's devil. God uses the devil for his own purposes. If you think that the presence of hardship and affliction is a sign that God has abandoned you, that God's not loving, you're viewing it all wrong, beloved. It's because you're viewing it far too narrowly, you're viewing it as a time-warped creature in a time-focused manner and not connecting it to the greater purpose of God that is at work in everything that happens. And you and I are going to have the privilege of working this out more in the days to come. For now, we thank God for the opportunity to have introduced this, and we'll look at more of it on Sunday. Be with us on Tuesday as we continue our study of the Sermon on the Mount.

Let's pray together.

Father, these are matters of great consequence we know, to contemplate a God that was never created. To contemplate a being that has always existed by itself is too much for our minds to grasp. To comprehend a God who had the power to speak into existence out

of nothing the heavens and the earth, it's too much for us, Father. Our minds aren't that great. To contemplate a God who could plan redemption before there was even a fall of man, where do we begin? Father, we are lost in wonder and awe at the majesty of your great being. We bow in worship before you. Father, we humble ourselves before you. And while the subject matter is so vast for our minds and our understanding, yet by your Spirit provoke in our hearts a recognition of what is true about this, is that something in these truths that we have seen from your word today, something about these truths have the clue to the nature of my existence. They contain the explanation for what I need to go through life. They contain what I need to face my deathbed and the fear of death and what lies beyond. In all of these things, Father, your hand is in them all. We thank you for that. It's because your hand is in everything that happens, it's because your plan is comprehensive, it's because you're working out a perfectly exhaustive plan that Paul could say, Father, in Romans 8:28, "he causes all things to work together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose." Father, your purpose is driving everything that happens. We know you in Christ, we love you and trust you as a result. Be glorified in our midst and help us as we continue in days to come to grasp these things and build in us a Christian mind that thinks rightly about God and the universe and lives accordingly. Father, for those here that perhaps wandered in, not aware of a gospel, not aware of Christ, not aware of their sinfulness, Father, we pray that you might graciously point them to the blood atonement that Christ offered for sinners at the cross, that they might find their eternal hope in him and enter into the kingdom of God. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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