

A Sure and Certain Decree

Building a Christian Mind

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I invite you to turn to the book of Isaiah 46. Now as you're turning there, I would just remind you and for those of you that are visiting, that we are in the midst of an extended series "Building a Christian Mind," and we have covered many topics under that, and we have a few more topics to go, but right now, we are in the midst of a portion of this series that we are calling, "How to Know that God Rules Over All." We say that God is great. We sing that God is great. Well, just how great is he, and how great is his majesty, and how great is his sovereignty, and those are things and the answers to those kinds of questions go far, far deeper than what we are accustomed to realize and lift us beyond ourselves and into a realm of truth and a realm of majesty that is really higher than sinful creatures like you and I should be entitled to think.

In Isaiah 46, we looked at this passage last time as part of our consideration, and I just refresh your memory with it. In Isaiah 46:8, the prophet speaking on behalf of Yahweh says, "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 here is speaking and is establishing the fact that he developed a plan before the beginning of time, before the creation of the world, and it is his intention to carry it out. He declared the end from the beginning. Every detail that we see unfolding in time that seems to be the result of nothing more than human choices and things of that nature, Scripture teaches us to think about them in an entirely different way, to realize that what we see and what has happened over the course of thousands of years of human history is the outworking of a divine plan which was in place from the very beginning.

We said that the theological term for that great doctrine is the Divine Decree, and I will refresh your memory on the definition of that in just a moment, but we framed the discussion last week in this way. You all know what the first verse of the Bible is, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth," Genesis 1.1. We asked this question which frames everything else: when God created the heavens and the earth, did he have a plan in mind for what would happen next or did he just randomly decide to create things and then he would step back and see what happened, as if it were some kind of toy that he had created that he wanted to watch what would happen, a cat and mouse kind of game? The obvious answer, if you think theologically at all, as you contemplate the glory of

God, the omniscience of God, the wisdom of God, the obvious answer is, of course God had a plan in mind; of course God was intending to achieve a purpose by which that informed the creation of the heavens and the earth. And as the sovereign majesty overall, he did not leave himself to be subject to the forces of human decisions or satanic opposition for the accomplishment of his will. God determined in advance everything that would happen and the implications of that are vast for right thinking, for developing a Christian mind.

Beloved, if you approach life from a sense that you are subject to forces that are beyond your control, you're not thinking rightly and you're not thinking according to biblical and Christian principles. If you are fearful of the future, afraid of what some person might do to you or what might happen to your health or your fortune, you're not thinking according to right biblical principles. The anxiety that you and I go through is an evidence that we have not let these things thoroughly and completely permeate our thinking and our being. And so it's very, very important for us to contemplate these things. If, stated another way, if you are to rightly understand your position in the universe, if you are to rightly understand why you exist and why God gave life to you and gave the specific life to you that you have now, you need to understand these things. You must understand it from a right context. Where did you come from? Into what plan do you fit? And what will be the outcome of these things? If we don't understand the source of all things, if we don't understand the goal of all things, then it's obvious that we don't have the first clue about what life is about and why we exist. What we are considering, these doctrines that we are considering this week and in weeks to come, clarify all of those things for us. God had a long-term plan in place before creation. He had an eternal plan in mind, and as we saw here in Isaiah 46, he knew exactly what was going to happen as the result of his creation. He is not responding to events like you and I are. He is completely ahead of the game. He has completely appointed what happened and everything is working according to the counsel of his will. Everything is. He's not responding to surprises. He's not having to adjust to a Plan B because of some mistake that you have made or some sin that you have committed, or some change in direction in national or international history brought about by wicked world rulers. God is not like a man and he does not think like a man. His ways are higher than our ways. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. And so we should not attribute our weakness and uncertainty as we go through life day by day, we should not attribute those man-centered perspectives onto the holy uncreated God of the universe who said, "I declare the end from the beginning."

Now look, beloved, in the things that we've just said, we have introduced a colossal collision between the way the world thinks and the way that Scripture tells us to think, and if it seems like we're talking about mighty themes, great and mighty themes from the word of God, we are. We're talking about the highest and loftiest themes that there are for a man or woman to contemplate and, beloved, these things are foundational to everything else as you will see.

The theological name for what we're discussing, that divine plan in place before the beginning of time, is the Divine Decree. The Divine Decree, and in colloquial terms, you could say that God has an eternal plan that he is certainly working out in every detail of

the universe. God has an eternal plan that he is certainly working out in every detail of the universe. Everything that you see, everything that you read, everything that happens in life, in nations, in your private life, all of those things are part of the outworking of the Divine Decree. To state it perhaps a little more theologically, the decree of God is his eternal plan in which he foreordained all things that would ever come to pass. You are here today, beloved, as a result of the Divine Decree. God appointed you to be here on this day to see these Scriptures, to hear this message in this place, in this time, in this century, in this year, in this month, on this day. We are here by divine appointment. Every aspect of life is like that but the urgency of it is increased all the more when we open the word of this eternal God and contemplate what he teaches us in his word and causes us to contemplate ourselves in light of the divine presence and in light of the divine plan. We are standing on holy ground. It is fitting, metaphorically at least, to take off our shoes and recognize the holiness of what we are contemplating here as we gather together here this morning. We stand on holy ground. We remove our shoes. We say, "Lord, speak through your word and by your Spirit to us, because your servant listens."

If I can give you an easy to understand illustration to show the necessity of this, again, every illustration when you talk about divine things is compromised, it's faulty, it cannot be pressed too far, but just general things can help us contemplate things rightly. If you've ever walked by a major construction site, perhaps in a city watching a skyscraper go up and being built from the ground up and they dig out a big foundation and pour it and then raise the building on top of it over the course of months and sometimes years, think of a construction of a building like that, beloved, and understand this, the contractors who are doing that work are working according to previously prepared architectural plans. They're not working things out in a random way and just slopping up materials in any way. There are precise plans for everything that goes into that and they are working according to a previously prepared plan that has in mind the end goal of that 60-story high-rise building. The blueprints guide the work that is done as they are rightly being worked out. Well, in a much greater way, in a far more holy and significant way, the Divine Decree is the blueprint that God established by which the things of the world and the things of the universe would operate and he says, "I declare the end from the beginning." God knows what will happen because he appointed it to happen.

And so last time we looked at a couple of points, I'm going to review those quickly and then see if we can't get through the remaining five here today. What can we say about the decree of God? Last time we saw point number 1: the decree is diverse, and yet it is only one. God is one. His mind is perfectly unified, and therefore his plan is the outworking of a single divine mind, a single divine operation of the divine will, and yet, as we look on the universe, we see an infinite complexity to it. You know, billions and billions of people, trillions and trillions of creatures, and the passage of thousands and thousands of years and every detail in between. The decree that God appointed is one coming from one mind, and yet it is comprehensive and therefore it is diverse in everything that it includes. We saw from Ephesians 1:11, and I'm just quoting a portion of the verse here but it says that God works all things according to the counsel of his will. All things, plural, without exception, his will, singular, coming from the exercise of divine volition to accomplish what he wants.

Secondly, we said that the decree is eternal, by which we mean that he established it before the beginning of time. God planned all things before time even began. Before Genesis 1:1, God had set into purpose, God had established his purpose for everything that would follow. There's a sense in which, as you look at Genesis 1:1 through the end of Revelation 22, you read, and we see the progress of Revelation, and we read how God unfolded his Revelation over the course of some 1,500 years through 40 different authors, all inspired by the Holy Spirit and producing an inerrant, infallible, single book. We read it from that perspective. Beloved, understand that God saw all of that before the beginning of time. God was not working things out. God wasn't figuring things out as they went along. God already knew these things and simply revealed them to man over the course of time. The decree is eternal, meaning God planned all things before time began.

Last time we looked at 2 Timothy 1:9 and it says this, 2 Timothy 1:9, he "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." He gave this to us. He established his purpose in Christ Jesus before the ages began. This is a matter of eternity. This is a matter outside of time itself. It's very difficult for us to comprehend those things because time is the only realm of existence that we know, but so great, so majestic is our God that he dwells outside of even time. Even time does not put constraints on the God of Scripture. The decree is eternal. He saw the end from the beginning. He established the end from the beginning. Everything that we see in life is an outworking of that great purpose.

Now, with that little bit of review out of the way, let's go to our third point here and stay with me as we go through these things because there will certainly be profound personal application for these things at the end, and also let me encourage you, let me encourage you that this is the kind of message that I really encourage you and ask you and beseech you to listen to multiple times because you do not acquire the fullness of this and understand it deeply in your heart just on a superficial passing in a distracted period of 60 minutes of listening. These things take time to apply yourself to. This is what we should expect, the great things of God we should expect to take time and effort to apply ourselves to understand. God is beyond our comprehension. He is great. He is lofty. He has attributes that cannot be communicated or fully understood by men. We just take halting efforts in accordance with his revelation to try to understand certain things about them truly, even if we don't know them exhaustively. Well, beloved, on something like this, it takes some time and effort to do and to apply it and it is your responsibility to come to grips with these things and to study and to meditate on them so that the goal of developing in you a Christian mind could be advanced by the truth of God.

So, with those things in mind, our third point. We saw first of all the decree is diverse, yet it is one. The decree is eternal, it pre-existed time itself. Thirdly, the decree is fixed. The decree is fixed by which we mean it is sure. It is certain to come to pass. The decree is fixed, it is a sure and certain decree, and all we mean by that for today's purposes is this, is that God's plan does not change based on whims of time or history. Things that happen

in the course of human time that seem to be catastrophic, seem to be unexpected, is not a surprise to God. It's not something new to God. It's not something that he has to adjust to a new circumstances and come up with a Plan B. Beloved, understand this, sometimes you'll hear even good Bible teachers talk about God's Plan B. You should never speak that way. You should never speak that way because that is an assault on the eternity and the knowledge and the plan and the decree of God. Of course God doesn't have a Plan B because he's sovereignly working out his original plan all along. And we see this, for example, and I'm just going to read a couple of verses to you in Psalm 33:11, Psalm 33:11 where we read, "The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations." Beloved, what God planned originally is flung forward through the millennia of human existence and every aspect of his plan is fully established, fully carried out as men come and go, as nations rise and fall. His counsel stands forever. That's hard for us to understand because especially parents of young children, experience day by day the fact that they make plans and things happen and it goes a different direction. Some people had plans for marriage, the engagement breaks off and life goes a different direction. You think you've got a long-term career someplace, events or people intervene and it changes and you don't have your plans anymore. This is different. This is distinct. This is sanctified. This is holy. This is something separate that we're talking about, which is what we would expect. God is distinct and separate and above us. He is not subject to the whims of human time. He is not subject to change. He is not the slave of circumstance. He's not figuring things out as he goes along as some really bad forms of open theism teach. God isn't figuring things out as he goes along. He's not watching what happens and then responding. That's horrible theology. That's ridiculous, blasphemous theology. No one should think that way with a Christian mind. "The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations."

In the New Testament, in James 1:17, we read this, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." God gives to us. He gives to us according to his eternal plan. His intentions do not vary. They do not change. There aren't shadows due to a shifting character in him, nor because he's responding to surprises that he did not anticipate. Nothing surprises him, beloved. He's omniscient. He knows all things. Psalm 139 says that he knows what's on your tongue before a word of it comes out of your mouth. He knows when you rise and when you sit down. Nothing surprises him.

And so you and I, when life surprises us, we have to process that in some ways on two different levels. 1. We process it on a human level and work through the thought that, "This isn't what I planned, this isn't what I wanted, this isn't what I anticipated," and we work that out on a human level, but then we go further. We go further, we ask God for grace in the midst of the changing circumstances and then we go still further beyond that and we remind ourselves and we worship God and we honor him saying, "God, this was not a surprise to you. This is somehow part of your plan, even though I did not see it coming." And all of a sudden, you are responding to life in a completely different realm. Rather than responding on the basis of your fickle emotions and your changing patterns of life, you're responding to it according to what the truth is and the truth is that God is

sovereign over this. He has appointed it. He has foreordained it. It has passed through his hands and his wisdom to reach you.

In Proverbs 16, you can turn there, there's a couple of verses I want to point out to you. In Proverbs 16 we see repeatedly the contrast between our plans and what the purpose of the Lord is. Let me just point you to two verses. Proverbs 16:4, "The LORD has made everything for its purpose." Everything that we see, everything that we do not see in the visible and the invisible realms, tangible and intangible, past, present, and future, everything is established by God with a purpose that he has in mind, so much so that Solomon goes on to say, "even the wicked for the day of trouble." That even the wicked do not work outside the foreordained plan of God. Then in verse 9 of Proverbs 16, "The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps." We plan our lives, we plan our days, and it's right and good that we should, God honors good planning, but the outworking, the conclusion, the result of all of our plans is in the hands of the Lord who establishes our steps.

The decree is fixed and God does not have to adapt to something unexpected. He is not like us. Beloved, let me just say that again. In this context, it's so important to see and to understand. We are, you and I, are constantly responding to things that have changed from what we expected them to be. Constantly. That's the only thing that we know is to respond to changing circumstances in life. When it comes to thinking about God and the way that the universe works, we have to say, but that's not the way that God is. That's not the way that it works in the realm of the divine mind and the divine purpose. God knows, he fixed it and he works out his plan without surprise, without disappointment, without fail in any single detail, so much so that Scripture says that he's appointed the days that he prepared for us, when as yet there were not any of them. Your days are fixed. God has determined the length of your life before it began. There's a sense in which it's right to say that we're immortal until our day comes, and so the decree is fixed. The decree is one. It's diverse. The decree is eternal. Beloved, what should be sinking into your mind is a growing awareness like this that says what is happening is unfolding from something that God established. My life is not random. My life is not without purpose, even if I don't fully understand what that purpose is. Things are working out according to what God established them to be. And that changes your entire perspective on all of life.

Now, fourthly, the decree is free. The decree is free, and what I mean is not that the decree is without charge, rather what we mean by that is that God established his decree free from any kind of outside influence or outside constraint. This is a statement about the complete independence and sovereignty of God. Nothing that he determined to happen was because someone told him to do it that way. God is free from that. Nothing happened because God was obligated to act in any particular way toward any particular man, woman, or child. God is not under any obligation to any of us. He is free. He's sovereign. He's Creator. We do not constrain him. We do not lay obligation on him that he must respond to. No, far to the contrary, God is absolutely free and sovereign in everything that he wants to do.

Turn in your Bibles to Isaiah 40 with me. Isaiah 40. In Isaiah 40, beginning in verse 12, we read this, "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?" He created the earth, established all of the boundaries with precision, measured out the dust of the earth with precision, measured the weight of the mountains with precision, balanced the hills across the entire globe. Verse 13, "Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel? Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust."

Beloved, in light of creation, in light of the purpose of God, look and drink in deeply from what verse 14 is saying. Who did God consult with? This is reminiscent of Job 38-41 when God lays forth all of these things before Job and says, "Were you there when I created the stars? Were you there when I established Leviathan in the depths of the sea? Were you there when I created other things?" All Job could do is say, "No, no, no, no. You know what? I am not an equal disputant here. I had an argument against you, God, but when you display yourself, when you glorify yourself like this, when I am thinking rightly, I see all I can do is shut my mouth and bow before you in repentance and worship because I don't know these things." I couldn't for a moment, imagine this, beloved, imagine this, imagine a ridiculous scenario like this. We take for granted the fact that God establishes and sustains the orbits of the planets, the orbits of the stars, the orbits of galaxies around one another, the infinite deep recesses of the universe. We take that for granted and because God is faithful, it's fixed and, you know, these things, you know, we can plan our day around when the sun is going to rise and when it's going to set because God fixes these things. We take it for granted but have you ever contemplated the wisdom that it takes to do that? Imagine for a moment something totally ridiculous, that you were standing before God, and God said to you, "In 15 seconds it will be your responsibility to keep all this going. You must keep the stars going, keep the universe spinning. Don't let anything slip. Don't let anything fall. It's all up to you in five, four, three, two, one, you're on." Everything collapses because you don't have the first idea on what to do.

Now, beloved, take that position of impotence and ignorance that is so evident and obvious in that homely example and realize that God does not struggle with that. God knows exactly what to do, and in fact, God knew what to do and established it before any of them even existed. Who taught him that? How did he know that? It's eternal knowledge in an eternal being who is absolutely sovereign over everything. He didn't have to ask for advice. No, he didn't consult with anyone. No one taught him. He didn't gain knowledge from outside himself. He always had all of this. Not just in the operation of the universe, but in principles of law and justice and righteousness. In principles of grace and mercy and a planned redemption in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's all the outworking of his great infinite divine mind so much so that Scripture says, to God, nations are like a drop in the bucket. You see the way people fawn over world leaders? Everybody gets riled up when the King of England's around or, heaven forbid, when

Taylor Swift is in town. Understand, beloved, that to God, nations are as insignificant as a drop of water in a bucket, how much more so an individual even by human standards recognized, someone with celebrity, recognized how utterly insignificant every single person and every single self-exalting man or woman is in the presence of a God like what we're just talking about here today. Less than nothing Go to the King of England and say, "You run the universe for five minutes and let me know how it goes. You guys couldn't even beat 13 colonies."

No one taught him the path of justice. No one taught God anything. No one showed him the way. He just knew and he established it according to that great knowledge of his, and so, beloved, what that means is that God decided what would happen based entirely on what would please him. It's exactly what he wanted. He had no obligation to man. He did not consult with man. He did not consult with angels. He didn't consult with anyone. He just did what he pleased.

Now, last time we talked about how this works itself out in the realm of redemption and God in Ephesians 1:4 says that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Do you realize, beloved, that the fact that God established who would be saved before the foundation of the world means that if you are in Christ you have nothing to boast about? There was nothing about you or what you would do or could do that would cause God to show favor to you. If you are in the body of Christ, if you have been saved by God, it is solely and only because it pleased God to purpose that before the beginning of time and that means that all boasting is excluded. It means that I did not do anything to earn favor from God. My so-called faith was not what he saw and then chose me for. He chose me just because it pleased him to do so and as it says in Romans 3, therefore, boasting is excluded. We're saved by grace through faith, that not of yourselves, not as a result of works, lest anyone should boast. We are humbled before a holy sovereign God. We live in a universe that he appointed and that he will bring to a conclusion in his good time, utterly free in everything, under no obligation to anyone.

Now, fifthly, we said that the decree is diverse yet one, the decree is eternal, the decree is fixed, the decree is free. Fifthly, and these things start to overlap a little bit, the decree is certain. The decree is certain. What God has decreed is certain to occur. There is nothing that God intends that will not come to pass. You could say the the 25-cent word that is used to describe this is, the decree is efficacious. It will certainly happen. It is sure. And with that in mind, let me invite you to turn to a familiar verse, a familiar passage in Romans 8. Romans 8 and here we're going to see again the plurality and the singularity of the things that we are discussing. We're going to see how these things give us enormous comfort in everything in life. Romans 8:28 and 29 and 30, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." All things, plural; singular, his purpose. "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." Beloved, all things comprehensively, exhaustively, without exception, work together for good to those who are in Christ. The reason that that statement can be made in Scripture is

because it is premised on the reality that God oversees all events that occur. He ordained them all. All events are linked together in his wise, good, sovereign, loving decree. It's all linked together. Nothing falls outside his will. Nothing falls outside his eternal purpose. God gathers it all in.

Now, many, many, many times you have gone to that verse and found comfort in it where all things work together for good, and you're encouraged by that as well you should be. understand the theological reality that undergirds that is that God purposes things to come into your life and from the beginning, he had a good purpose for everything that comes to you. And that good purpose, we will look at this in future weeks when we talk about, you know, God, providence and sin and evil, we'll talk about all of those things; we're not addressing them now in this message for the sake of clarity but God's purpose even includes the outworking of the way that you have sinned and the way that people have sinned against you. God did not make you sin, it was not God's moral will for you to sin, it was not his revealed will for you to sin, but his secret will, his eternal purpose encompasses everything from the first moment of creation to the fall of Adam and all of the consequences that worked out, to the redemption that Christ accomplished on the cross and the glorification of his people in heaven and all points in between. God comprehensively has it all planned from the beginning so that when we pray, we're not giving him information that he doesn't already have. We're submitting to a will that we're seeing work out in real time. "Father, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." God works all things together for good because he purposed everything to accomplish what he wanted, what pleased him, and so these things are certain to come to pass.

Beloved, God's, and those of you that are wrestling with an uncertain future, discouraged as life seems to just spin in place like a hamster on a little wheel, "It seems like I'm not getting anywhere here. All my plans have turned to dust. What's going to happen to me now? What's going to happen to those loved ones who are so evidently rebelling against Christ?" If you only think about them from your perspective and the purpose of what you want, those things collapse on you and overwhelm you pretty quickly, don't they? It's heavy because life matters and we love these people and we have plans that we want to see take place and, you know, we have goals and dreams and all of that and yet, it doesn't seem like we're getting anywhere. Beloved, understand that even those times of being stalled, of being delayed, of being disappointed, somehow in a way that we don't understand is part of a far greater purpose that God's working out that is certainly good for you if you are in Christ. He will certainly cause all things to work together for good because this is what he planned from the beginning, and so rather than worry and disappointment and despair and discouragement and fear, what this doctrine of the Divine Decree found in Scripture teaches is that you can have confidence even in those times. "God, I don't see any of this working out, but I know who you are and I trust you completely. I don't need to see anything. I walk by faith, not by sight. And I believe in a sovereign God who loved me at the cross of Jesus Christ and I can trust the love that sent Christ to the cross, I can trust the love that bore my sin in his body, even if I don't see it. And though I am weak, you're strong. In my weakness, you perfect your strength. As I struggle with my health, as I struggle to make ends meet, as loved ones and friends disappoint and betray me all around, Lord, I trust you to be working out a purpose that is

perfect, that is comprehensive, and that is good, and that will be shown to be so in the end." Friends, do you have any of that operating in your mind in your response to life? This is the privilege, the prerogative, and the responsibility of those who are Christians to learn, develop, be convinced of these things, and to live accordingly. This is part of having a Christian mind.

Now, sixthly, the decree is comprehensive. The decree is comprehensive. I've been talking around this, I want to just give you three passages real quick to just show you in a macro sense, in a micro sense, in a visible sense, an invisible sense, in a physical realm, in the spiritual realm, in time, in eternity, everything is included in this decree. Everything is included in this decree. I think, well, go back to Isaiah 40. I'm just going to illustrate this with three different aspects of God's sovereign direction of the universe.

We already looked at Isaiah 40:17, but let me go there with you again. What's included in the Divine Decree? The rise and fall of nations. We could have gone to Daniel and seen this. We're just sticking with Isaiah because we're already there. Isaiah 40:17, "All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness." I think I will read from Daniel here just briefly. In Daniel 2:44, it says, "in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever." Oh, oh, in Daniel 2:20, "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him." Kingdoms, light and darkness, all included in his plan, all rising and falling, heaving up and down like the waves of the sea, operating according to precisely what he purposed to bring to pass. What's our response? Daniel 2:23, "To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise," and Daniel goes on and gives him thanks for the help in interpreting the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar that follows. But this decree is comprehensive, nations included in it.

Now that can seem a little, that could seem a little abstract; it's so big and massive it's hard to get our minds around. Look at the gospel of Luke 12. Look at the gospel of Luke 12 and see how this informs courage in Christian living. We need not fear the face of man. If God is sovereign, God is in control, God has appointed things, then there's nothing to be afraid of in any man that we face. No man has authority over us except that God has first given it to him. That was true even of Christ before Pilate. Luke 12:4. Jesus says, "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows." The decree of God, fall of birds. Bird falls over dead, no surprise to God. He appointed that to occur. The hairs on your head? All numbered in his plan.

Beloved, this is all comprehensive, nations, details. Let me take you to one more in Acts 4 as we come more particularly to the heart of the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the events that led to his crucifixion and his resurrection. We've seen nations under the decree, details under the decree, now we see Christ and our redemption under the realm of the decree. Acts 4:23, "When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them." This is Peter and John after they were released from prison. They'd been commanded not to speak in the name of Christ anymore; that command didn't work out too good. "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, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed"--for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,'" now look at verse 28, all of these enemies of Christ gathered together. Peter is now speaking after the resurrection, after the ascension, looking back, and then under the influence of the omniscient Holy Spirit, he is interpreting what just happened in real time, space, and history just a short few months ago. What happened? What did those people do? All of those enemies of Christ. What was it that they were doing? Verse 28, "to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." "God, they acted according to the wicked impulses of their own heart, and they sinned as they did it but you had a plan to use that in order to bring about the crucifixion of Christ, which you would use in a way that they did not intend, you would use in far greater ways to be the fulcrum of the redemption of all of your people throughout all of the ages. They were just being wicked. God, you were working it for good." Genesis 50:20, "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good," and our redemption flows out of what God predestined and planned to occur. It's breathtaking. It's far above us. These are things that we know not because we can reason them out from what we observe, we know these things by faith and what God has revealed in Scripture to be true, and it is premised on the word of God, it is premised on the truth that he has revealed, and therefore it is more certain than what will happen to us tomorrow.

What was the purpose of all of this? Why did God do it this way? Why did God establish a decree and work out, plan everything in advance? If he had a plan – watch this, stay with me here, we're almost done here, sadly – if he had a plan, which he did, we see that, that's undeniable from Scripture, he had a plan, and what was the goal of the plan? What was the purpose of all of this? What was the purpose of the plan? What was the outcome designed to accomplish? Doesn't that question matter? I think that's important to know. Well, point number 7 brings it all together in a glorious, wonderful way: the decree is for the glory of God. The purpose of the divine decree was for a display of the manifestation of the glory of God. God's decree was a means to display his glory throughout all of eternity, that there would be a redeemed people and holy angels that observe and see and understand and ascribe to him glory for the majesty of his wisdom, the majesty of his greatness, the majesty of his goodness, the majesty of his grace. And for those of us that are in Christ, he has graciously, without compulsion, included us in that realm of beings

that would be able to see this and rejoice in it and join in the worship throughout all of eternity.

Listen as I read Romans 11:33 through 36, "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."

In Revelation 4:11, that great scene in heaven. Oh beloved, we get a glimpse. It's like God has given us a peephole that we can look through and see portions of what is to come, see glimpses of it to heighten our sense of anticipation for what awaits us in heaven. There will be gathered around the throne those who are proclaiming his excellency and Scripture says this is what they will say, "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created." Your will, O God, was that by which they were created. It is your will by which they existed and it's also that you would receive the glory that is now yours in the scene in heaven.

Beloved, what can we walk out of with this great doctrine of the Divine Decree? First of all, this doctrine completely humbles us. God is great and we are small. This doctrine comforts us. A great and good God is directing all things to accomplish his purpose. If you are not a Christian, this doctrine calls you and it warns you. We read in Luke 12, fear him, fear him, fear him, fear him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell. Understand that your rebellion against God is a completely untenable way to live and the outcome is catastrophic for you. God is sovereign over all. Your pipsqueak rebellion does not inflame him, but it would seal your doom if you would not repent. You cannot possibly survive as a rebel to the will of God and so why not embrace the call of Christ to come to him and be saved and reconciled through his shed blood while there's still time? You could not walk up to a rolling bulldozer and stop it. It would flatten you quickly in the process. It's a terrifying thought, being sucked into a grinding machine. Beloved, that's what lies ahead spiritually for you, is a certain destruction of your soul unless you turn to Christ. and seek forgiveness by the shed blood in his sacrificial death. For the rest of us, we have a duty here. We have a responsibility. Our supreme duty in life, in light of this teaching, is to submit ourselves unreservedly to him. How glad we should be that we are in the hands of God and that he determines our ways. He is good. He is kind to restrain our ways. He is kind to direct our steps for the best. Beloved, let us bow before his majesty, worship him in silence and give all the glory to God alone.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, from you and through you and to you are all things, including the undivided worship of our chastened and humbled hearts. To you be the glory forever. Amen.

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