

The Decrees of God

Session 2

23 And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. 24 And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: 25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? 26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. 27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, 28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. 29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, 30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.

We looked at the Decree of God last week from the vantage point of Scripturally validating the statement that *God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass*; When the Scripture says ALL THINGS it means ALL THINGS--good, bad, righteous and evil. Since that is true, we must also add a further understanding that is stated this way:

yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established; in which appears His wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing His decree.

So, let's look at Acts 4:23-31 and look at how this truth plays out in Scripture.

Chapter four comes on the heels of Chapter three, where a crippled man had been healed and Peter has preached a sermon and five thousand people who had heard the Word had come to believe. This sermon was about Jesus Christ, the Messiah who was crucified and was raised from the dead. It so angered the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, that they came and laid hands-on Peter and John and put them in jail. Under interrogation, Peter and John had been very bold. Peter had told Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and others who were related to the high priest that there was no salvation in any other, but Jesus Christ and they had taken Him and crucified Him. Peter and John are commanded to stop teaching in the name of Jesus Christ. To which Peter replies, "**Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. 20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.**" Then they go back to other believers. they tell them what has happened, the threats they had received, and they all pray that God would grant them continued boldness. In verse 29, they ask God that He despite their threatening's: **grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word.** They don't ask God to change the situation, they ask God to not let them change because of the situation. They ask God to enable them to remain bold and remain faithful in face of the threats. Their prayer is that their tongues would not go silent in preaching Christ.

I want you to take notice of the theology that is behind this prayer. It is this belief of God that fuels their boldness. What they believe about God is more important than what they ask of God. If you are going to ask someone to do something for you, you better believe that the person is able to do what you ask. It would be a waste of time to ask someone for something you don't believe has the ability to do it. Look at what they say about God as they ask God to do something for them.

Here is the principle: Timid Christians believe in a tiny God, and Bold Christians believe in a big God.

Notice how they address God in their prayer. "***Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:***" This word translated "Lord" is the Greek word, Des-po-ta. It is a word that means one who has legal control and authority over persons, such as subjects or slaves, lord, master. It is a word that puts things in a master/slave relationship. It speaks of one who has sovereign control and ownership. Their prayer is addressing God as the one who has absolute control over ALL THINGS. And they illustrate God's sovereignty and bigness by referencing creation. God has made heaven and earth and sea and all that is in them, and He has made them all out of nothing. They ask God to do a big thing because the God they believe in is a Big God.

Then they appeal to Scripture, in particular Psalm 2, "***25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?***" There is always opposition to God and God's people. They rage and they imagine evil things against them. There is always revolt, opposition, and resistance. But God is not worried about the rebellious. God is not concerned about their rage, their threats, their evil intentions. Why does God not panic when man rages against Him and us? Why are His plans never hindered or halted because of man's rebellion? Why can we pray for God to grant boldness despite the threats of man? God is not surprised. God is not filled with anxiety. Why? ***26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.*** Power men, important men, influential men stand up against God and God's plans and purpose. Rulers, men in authority, are gathered together in opposition to the

Sovereign Lord and against His Christ. Why does that not concern God? Why would that instead make God laugh? Why should it not concern us? Boldness comes from a theology of a Big God, a God who has created everything out of nothing and a God who is not scared of what man can do, might do, and does do.

We get our answer with one final, nail in the coffin illustration--
The Cross of Jesus Christ.

27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, The truth here is that God was not surprised about the crucifixion because He knew it would happen, no, God was not surprised by the crucifixion because He planned it to happen. This is not wishful thinking, this is not God looking down time and seeing what man will do, this is God determining what will come to pass and then bringing it to pass exactly as He has determined it. Notice the participants in God's predetermined plan, Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel. All coming against Christ according to their own evil thoughts, motivations, and intentions. Herod wanted to see God do a trick, Pilate wanted to please the crowd rather than serve justice, The Gentiles did not care about Christ, they just wanted to carry out a good crucifixion, and the Jews wanted Him dead because He threatened their own religious traditions. Four different groups of people with different motivations, but what do they have in common? They have been gathered together by God. The verb "gathered" is not active, but passive, meaning they are not doing the gathering but the action of being gathered is being done to them.

They are gathered tby God Acts 4:28, ***"to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done."*** Everything they did, every evil thought they had, every evil motive they had was included in the predetermined plan of God. They were the means of bringing this event to its appointed end. So, God planned the crucifixion of His Son, Jesus Christ. God anointed Jesus and then gathered men against Him. And every evil thing they did in putting Him to death and in doing so they were only carrying out God pre-determined plan. Every step taken by these involved did and could only do what the hand of God and His council determined before to be done. Every detail planned by God. These men did what God had planned but they are held responsible for their actions. Although they unknowingly were following God's plan down to the minutest detail, they were not forced or made to do what they desired to do, but they did what they did according to their own will and desire and thus are responsible for it and they are named in Scripture as responsible parties. Both are true, God is sovereign, and man is responsible. God planned it and they did it. God's sovereignty does not excuse the wickedness of the people involved. They did as their hearts desired. The evilest event ever to happen in the history of the word was planned by God in such a way that God is not the author of evil and He does not violate the will of the creature

So, here is the bottom line of this prayer. If God has planned and purposed the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, why would we think that God has not ordained and planned our own suffering and why do we think that God cannot bring blessing out of our suffering? Why would we consider that ALL things, good and bad, health and sickness, righteousness and evil don't come from His hand? It is all under His control and we are all in His hand so that we are moved, or we cannot be moved. He plans and plans what we will do. All our days are written in His book. These believers in

Acts 4 did not run from this doctrine, they ran to it, and it fueled their prayer for boldness. Don't shrink God, magnify God. Be Bold in the Bigness of God. Remember Job, Job suffered greatly and had a lot of questions, but one thing Job never did, was question if God had anything to do with it. He knew God had everything to do with it.