



Unified Church – Part 5 Victories & Vindication Pastor Mike Fabarez

I assume we've all seen the difference between a mom and a dad when Junior falls off his bike and scrapes his knee. Moms, at least typical moms, will run up and console their child and kiss the boo-boo and shed a tear. And dad, or at least the way it used to be, and I hope still is in some corners of the world, they're going to call out, not seeing any bones sticking out of any places they shouldn't and say, "Get up on your bike, get back at it, suck it up. Keep going."

And then that little contrast of parenting techniques is God's ingenious plan. That's his plan, right? That's the way he set this up. In a perfect situation, you have that both that strong admonition and that soft consolation, the male, the female, the masculine, the feminine. The idea of someone saying, "that must really hurt and be bad for you," and someone saying, "get over it, get on. This is going to be OK." We need both of those and from two parents, that's helpful. We recognize the distinction in that parenting approach. But when it comes through one avenue, it seems sometimes a little schizophrenic.

In ministry, in particular, you find that there is, as the old adage says, there's a time to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted. Right? And you see Paul dealing with this in his ministry as he tries to reflect accurately the God that is, and God says of himself in Romans Chapter 11, we ought to note the kindness AND the severity of God. I mean, you got both sides of this and you've got to deal with both sides of this because both sides of this are very important and as ministers deal with the word of God and they deal with biblical counsel, as Paul said to the Corinthians, it's a time where the rod of authority comes out and the sternness of that leadership comes out. And then there are other times where there's a gentleness, as he calls it in First Corinthians 4, the gentle love of caring for the people.

To the Thessalonians, he said, you know, we were among you as a father who admonishes his children. And that's a big word, by the way, a strong word "admonishes." And then he says, also, we were among you like a mother who gently or lovingly cares for her children. That distinction is important and it has to happen. And I felt a little bit like that as I'm reading and studying through Acts 12, and the passage itself feels a little schizophrenic. It's like here we have at the beginning of the text, a very sad text, the ominous reality of Satan consigned to oversee the world. Those are the kinds of things that we saw in last week's cross-references, where the whole world lies under the power of the evil one. First John Chapter 5, where he's the god of this world, Satan is, Second Corinthians 4:4, where you have the idea of the ruler of the world, as Jesus said repeatedly about Satan, that you have the "prince of the power of the air" that is actively at work in people's lives to drive them to disobedience. And you say, "Wow, this is a mess. This is the church embattled. This is the guarantee of a hostile opposition to God's people."

And we see James the Apostle in Acts Chapter 12 beheaded and executed. We see the Apostle Peter is thrown into prison and Herod Agrippa flexing his muscles. And we learn the



lesson as we ought to. Well, that's the way it is in this fallen world. We have Satan running "around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour." But then we get to verse 6 and in verse 6 what we have is it's as though things just completely turn around. It's like we no longer are looking at the Church embattled. We're looking at, you know, the Church victorious. We're no longer looking at the opposition coming against the Church and having success. We're seeing the Church responding and God working through the circumstances to bring them out into vindication. You saw the good guys lose in the first five verses of Acts 12 and you see the good guys win in Acts Chapter 12 verses 6 through 19.

I want you to look at that passage and I want us to realize as we consider the juxtaposition of those two things, how important it is for us to understand both of them. That while God has got Satan coordinating a lot of what goes on down here, he's consigned the world to his authority here, we know this, that he's on a short leash, at least the leash that's as long as God decides that it will be. And he still remains sovereign. Matter of fact some of you struggle, and I heard from you this week, you struggle with what I taught last week about what I think is clearly, it's an undeniable biblical truth, that Satan is the god of this world.

And you think, "Well, where's all the talk about God being sovereign? Where's the talk about Jesus still being on the throne?" Well, we talked about that in terms of the eschatology of all of that power being exercised when the coming of Christ and his kingdom arrives. But we realize that even now, God is in charge. And he's in charge in a way that he can break through and step through that kind of evil oversight of the world, all the embattlements of the Church, all the hostile, violent oppression against the people of God. And when he wants to, he can choose to show that he's still in charge. He can still let the good guys win. He can still turn things around.

Now the truth of that is important. But as we look at this text this morning, I just want you to realize that none of it will ever be recognized and profoundly filtered through your mind, your priorities, your thoughts and your attitudes, unless there's one particular spiritual discipline that's active in your life. More active in your life would be a good thing. Probably more active in your life than it has been because you're going to find that the response to these biblical truths, they seem to fall flat or be shallow if in fact we're not engaged in this particular spiritual discipline.

Now we introduced it last week, but we're going to hone in on it today, all against the backdrop of the narrative where God decides to break through into space and time, send an angel and do something good. It doesn't mitigate the pain of the loss of James. We'll talk to James the Apostle's parents or his wife or his kids. He's still dead and beheaded and King Agrippa he still won that inning, right? But here comes God to step in while Peter is waiting in prison and about to be beheaded himself and follow along as I read it for you, beginning in verse 6 of Acts Chapter 12 where the text reads, "Now Herod," of course Herod Agrippa the First as we talked about last week, "was about to bring him out." That's Peter. This is Acts Chapter 12 verse 6. Follow along, please, as I read it for you.

"Herod Agrippa was about to bring him out, on that very night." Bring him out for what? To be executed. That was the point. The Jews wanted him dead. Herod was going to kill him. They waited because of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, which took eight days, so they took a stop. They weren't going to kill anybody, execute anybody during the feast. So the feast was over. So we know it was time to execute Peter. "Peter," on that very night, "was sleeping," it says, "between two soldiers, bound with two chains." Hopefully, they were fairly long chains. "And sentries before the door were guarding the prison."

So we had all kinds of Roman leaders outside watching the prison. We got two soldiers there who are chained to Peter. They've done everything they can to keep him nailed down because we've already seen him get out of prison once. This is now his third imprisonment, and he was let out the first time, escaped the second time with God's help, and now we're going to have a supernatural intervention of God in verse 7.

"And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him saying, 'Get up quickly.' And the chains fell off his hands and the angel said to him, 'Dress yourself and put on your sandals.' And he did so. And he said to him, 'Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.' And he went out and he followed him. And he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but he thought he was seeing a vision." Verse 10, "When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. When Peter came to himself, he said, 'Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel to rescue me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.'"

Verse 12. "When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose other name was Mark." So John Mark, we'll learn more about him in the book of Acts coming up, going to this house, this big house where it says, "where many were gathered together and were praying." It's a large house, they're there and he comes to that house, he knocks on the door, verse 13, "And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but she ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. They said to her, 'You're out of your mind.' But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, 'It's his angel!'"

Angel, by the way, is a transliterated word, it's a Greek word. When you say the word "angel," you're saying a Greek word. It's not translated. If it were translated it would translate "messenger." And usually we like to transliterate it "angel." It's become a defined word for us because we always think in the Bible, the "messenger," not always, but sometimes the messenger is one who is sent from God in the angelic class that comes here. This spirit, disembodied class of beings, right? They're not former human beings who lived in bodies. This special class of people we talked about last week who were created by God before the creation of the physical world and that we now define in our thinking "angel." That means a supernatural messenger.

Well, it may mean a supernatural messenger, and it may not. If it did mean that in their thinking, I guess there was a strange expectation about some kind of supernatural being, which I would think was kind of a leap for us to go to that place. It may have just meant what the word actually means, a "messenger," an "Angelus" means someone who comes and gives you a report on someone. Someone was sent bringing us information about Peter. Perhaps that was the case. Perhaps it wasn't. There's no explanation here other than the fact that they didn't believe Rhoda, poor Rhoda. She was a little forgetful because she left Peter there knocking at the door because it says in verse 16, "Peter continued knocking." Which I mean, think about it. Yeah, they're praying for a lot of things. I would hope some are praying for your release from prison and now you're released and you can't get the door open.

"And when they opened it, they saw him and they were amazed. But motioning to them with his hand to be silent," you can imagine the commotion of joy, "he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, 'Tell these things to James.'" Now, you got to know James, we're shifting now from the leadership of Peter in Jerusalem to the leadership of James, the brother of Christ. This is not James the Apostle who just got executed. There's no one knew more about the fact that James was executed than Peter. He's talking about James, who wrote the Epistle of James, the half-brother of Christ. You remember the epistle after Hebrews is named James because James is writing it to the scattered Jewish Christians. Nevertheless, he takes a prominent role from this point on in the book of Acts regarding the Jerusalem Church. More on that later.

"But tell James," James is transitioning to a place of prominence, "and to the brothers.' Then he departed and went to another place." And that's one of the reasons that James starts to take this center-focused senior pastor role of the church because Peter is going to do ministry elsewhere. And he does though we don't have a lot of information biblically about that. Verse 18, "When day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter." Well, of course. What a strange, miraculous intervention and he's gone. "And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. And he," Herod Agrippa the First, "went down from Judea to Caesarea," that coastal town on the Mediterranean, "and he spent time there." We'll pick up on that transitional sentence and all that happens with that next week, Lord willing.

Interesting story. A miraculous story. God didn't need to do a miracle here. It could have been a hundred ways to get him out within the confines of the natural course of action, right? He could have had a sympathetic guard. You could have done a number of things to get Peter out of jail naturally, but instead God's choosing to do a miraculous sign here. Which I think is to put an exclamation point on the fact that though the world is messed up, though Christians will always be violently opposed, though there are a lot of defeats and setbacks, though the world is just an absolute chaotic mess when it comes to Christians living a Christian life in a non-Christian world, we need to be assured of this: that God is a God who is all powerful, who can step in and does step in through circumstantial means and here through supernatural means, to make sure at times there are victories and vindications and the good guys do actually win.

Do they win consistently in this life? Nope. The Bible says that's not the case, "In this world you'll have tribulation." We're always looking to the next world where God is going to store up for us this great kingdom where he's going to rule and reign and everything is going to be subject to his authority. But now everything's subject to the authority of the enemy. We're constantly working as an embattled Church, but we need to know, punctuated by a victorious Church, by a vindicated Church, at least session to session, circumstance to circumstance. And that is an encouragement to us for a number of reasons.

For one, it will help us, no matter what the situation, to be much more like Peter was in this particular case. Now I didn't want to make too much of the fact that he's sleeping. If you look back up at the beginning of this text in verse 6, it says, "Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping." And as I thought about that, I thought, you know, I think people sometimes make too much of that. And I kind of started to put it on the back burner in my mind as to what's going on here. It's just a statement that he's sleeping. So Peter, sleeping. People sleep at night.

But the more I looked at the things that surround this and the more I looked at how this was explained, the more I tried to put myself in that prison and be Peter, the preaching leader here of the apostolic band, who is running this church in Jerusalem and I'm in prison and I've just seen my associate get his head chopped off, and I've been in prison now for a number of days during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, perhaps a whole week, and I know that the next morning the feast is over and they're going to bring me out to the Jewish people, they're going to jeer at me and cut my head off next, I started thinking to be asleep is kind of a big deal.

Not only that, keep reading here. It says he's "chained between these two soldiers and the sentries are outside guarding everything about this, is not conducive to beddie-by time. Right? This is not making me sleepy. "And behold an Angel of the Lord stood next to him and a light shone," verse 7 says, "in the cell." And I'm thinking, I don't know, when the lights turn on if I'm lightly sleeping, I probably wake up. He doesn't wake up. "He struck Peter on the side and woke him." Even that I'm thinking, OK, what kind of sleep on the night before I'm going to be executed am I going to have? I think it's going to be a restless sleep.

But Peter doesn't have a restless sleep. He's got to have an angel sent not only to flip this supernatural light on in the prison, but to give him a good swift elbow to the ribs to wake him up. That's a big deal. I mean, look at the verb. He "struck" him to wake him up, and then he "said, 'Get up quickly.' The chains fell off his hands and the angel said, 'Dress yourself and put on your sandals.'"

I really want you to think, tomorrow you're going to be executed. The officials are going to have a field day with you. You might be beaten, you might be whipped. You're going to probably get your head cut off just like your colleague got his head cut off a week ago. And you are going to take your cloak off, and you're going to probably, I'm just assuming, it's just logical, I'm going to fold it and make myself a little mat here to sleep on. Then I'm going to bend over there and I'm going to unstrap my sandals and take them off, and I'm going to take these chains, hopefully there long enough for me to somehow situate myself so I can sleep



here. Put a little extra of that cloak under my head to make myself a pillow and I'm going to fall asleep so much am I going to be asleep that it's going to take someone hitting me in the ribs to wake up. I don't think I'm making too much of the fact that he's sleeping. I think that's a big deal.

And if you think that he thinks he's going to have a jailbreak, the text goes on to make it very clear. Look at the bottom of verse 9, "He thought he was seeing a vision." He didn't even think this was real. So he was not expecting to get out and he's deeply asleep. Number one if you're taking notes and I wish that you would, jot this down. You need to "Be Peacefully Resigned to God's Will" because I see Peter peacefully resigned to God's will because I think I'd be pacing a hole in my sandals the night before I get executed. How about you? I'd be praying some desperate prayers crying out to God. I would be like, I can't believe... I wouldn't be taking my sandals off, making a bed with my cloak and being in such deep sleep that you'd have to rock me to wake me up. I'm going to wake up at every sound, every move, every snore of every soldier in that dungeon. I am going to not sleep peacefully if I act in a normal way about circumstances in life that are going from bad to worse.

But Peter has learned something, and he's learned it from the master. And the master that he followed once rebuked him because he was freaking out when there was a terrible storm on the Sea of Galilee, and you might remember the scene, one of my favorites, Luke Chapter 8. And he is there like the rest of them. They wake Jesus up, who's asleep, just like Peter was here in this prison, in the midst of a terrible situation and they say, "Don't you care, Jesus, that we're perishing?" I think there's got to be a parallel, right? Here is Jesus able to sleep in the midst of a storm and it's a beautiful picture. It's really a powerful picture.

It's so powerful once I actually bought... Rembrandt painted so many pictures of biblical scenes. But my favorite of all the Rembrandts is this upright portrait painting that he painted of Christ in the boat, on the storm, on Galilee. I have it prominently hung on the wall in my study. I see it every single day. It's not the original, by the way, just so you know. And if you happen to know where the original is, you should let the FBI know, let me know, because it was stolen in 1990 from a Boston museum. It's an interesting story, but it's lost. No one knows where it is. So you might lean forward to make sure that it's not the original in my office, but I did not steal it. I do not have it. I did not buy it on the black market. I got it from a print shop. Probably only cost me 19 bucks. I put a nice frame on it but it's just a recreation.

But it's a great recreation and you should look at it sometime. You should pull it up on Wikipedia, pull up the big picture and look at Jesus in this boat. He's just been awakened. All the disciples are freaking out. What I love about Rembrandt back in whatever 1630s he painted this painting and he's got a sense of humor. This is one of those paintings where he puts himself in the painting, and I know that not only because I've seen Rembrandt self-portraits. There's one character in the scene. And if you count how many people are in the boat, there's one too many. There are 14. There's Jesus, the Twelve Apostles, and he's put himself in it, and he's the only character in the painting who is facing the viewer of the painting. And he's right there.



He's the closest one to the viewer of the painting and Rembrandt, but look really closely, zoom in on it when you look at that the digital photo of this one on Wikipedia, you can see his face clearly recognizable. He's got his hand on his head holding on to this ship that's about to break into pieces in the midst of this horrible storm. And he's kind of got the o y vey, you know, face as he's like, what is happening? And everyone's freaking out except for Christ. And of course, he painted a little extra focus on Christ and Christ is there. And if you know the scene, you might think back to your Sunday school days, this is a great passage. It's a great passage where Christ shows that "even the winds and waves obey him." That's what they said when he calms the storm. It's wonderful. It's not a wonderful passage. It does do that, but it's not a wonderful passage.

It's like being impressed at how strong your father is when he spanked you because you disobeyed him. It's not like, "Look how strong your dad is. That's cool." No, it's not cool. It's not cool that he calmed the storm because if you know the context there, it's very clear, the apostles make it clear, that this was a rebuke to them. He said to them when he was asleep and they were freaking out, "Where is your faith?" Where's your faith? Why are you freaking out? And I think every apostle, including Rembrandt, who put himself in the situation, "Well because we're dying. And we're concerned don't you care that we're dying? Don't you care that we're perishing?" And Jesus shows by his actions that he can be asleep in the middle of God's will and know everything is going to be just fine.

And it's not because he's the omniscient Son of God. He's laying down a pattern for us that I'm just so glad because Peter was in that boat that he learned the lesson that the day before he thought he was going to die, he was asleep. He'd made a bed. He'd taken his sandals off and needed to be roused from his sleep with a very strong verb to be "struck" by an angel. I think it's good for us to be resigned to the will of God with a peaceful assurance that God is a God who is taking me through life and I'm on the path that he's put me on. I can understand when the world unleashes its vitriol against me. I can see when there's a problem in my family, when there's a lawsuit at work, when there are issues in my neighborhood, when I have problems for being a Christian in a fallen non-Christian culture.

We can see all of that and we should be able to sleep well at night because we understand that God is a God who takes his children and he keeps them in his will and we can rest assured that God loves us, that he cares for us, and that we have no right nor an excuse to be anxious or worried. Now God's going to show that he can do what he actually did. And you can say, "Well, that's nice that you're making the comparison between a sleeping Peter and a sleeping Christ. But I'm really not taking cues from Christ in this situation because Christ knew how we would die. He made it clear that he knew how he was to die. He wasn't going to die in a storm on the sea. But, you know, I don't really know what God's plan is. Maybe I'm James, right? Maybe this is going to end poorly and painfully for me."

Turn with me the Second Samuel Chapter 16. Second Samuel Chapter 16. I'll give you that. Jesus knew exactly how everything was going to play out and you may say, "Well, I don't know that it's fair to compare my life to his." But how about a man who doesn't know the future who has the same resignation, the same peaceful resignation to God's will in his life?

He's willing in the midst of a horrific storm. You want to talk about violent oppression. He's in the middle of it. He is God's man for the job. Perfect? No, not perfect. You know he's not perfect. You understand that. I mean, he's a transgressor just like you and me, but he is there even in the midst of his transgression, repentant, picking up the pieces, moving forward, taking steps of righteousness. And all of a sudden now in Second Samuel 16, there's a coup d'etat when his son Absalom has ingratiated himself to the people, he's taken over the throne, he's cleared David and his closest associates out of the palace and now they're fugitives, and Absalom has promised to kill him.

In the midst of all this, if you could look at this text in Second Samuel Chapter 16, drop down to verse 6. It says, and he looked back up, Shimei, that's the name of this guy who's "the son of Gera, he came and he cursed continually," verse 6 now. "He," Shimei, "threw stones at David and all the servants of the King, and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right and his left. And Shimei said, as he cursed, 'Get out, you man of blood, you worthless man! The Lord has avenged you on all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you've reign, and the Lord has given the kingdom into the hand of your son, Absalom. See, your evil is on you, for you are a man of blood.'"

Now, here's the thing, there's not a chance in the world Shimei is going to be that stupid to say that six months, 12 months earlier. No way. He now is empowered because David has now been stripped of his authority. He's now a fugitive. He's the loser. Shimei knows now David's on the wrong side of history from his perspective, and he can pile on, he can curse him, he can criticize him, and he can say, "You're evil." Now, David is a sinner like you and I. He's done evil things. I get that. He responded to those evil things well. He's God's man, a man after God's own heart, a man that God has promised good things to. God has chosen him to be leader of the nation, and now we have a usurper, his own son, as painful as that is, and here is Shimei, talk about violent opposition, throwing physical stones at David and his men as he leaves.

Look at verse 9. "Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, says to David, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head." Oh, for staff members like that, right? (audience laughs) That's one of those feel-good verses right there. You're right, that lowlife riff-raff of the nation, who would not have a spine to say these things when you sat in your royal palace, is now throwing rocks at you and cursing you and calling you evil. Right? Here's the right-hand man to the king going, "Let me take care of him. I'll just take my sword out of the scabard. I will go over. I will cut his head off."

It's akin to Peter being in prison, being chained to a soldier. The soldiers saying things, maybe cursing Peter, and Peter now has got a choice to make, "What am I going to do? God has in the will that he has laid out for my life put me in prison under the hand and the authority of the Roman officials and fueled by the vitriol of the Jewish Sanhedrin and the leaders of the nation. Everyone is against me. Now I got this soldier next to me saying some things against me. He's criticizing me and cursing me. What do I do?" Here's what David did. Verse 10, "The king said, 'What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah?' Oh, man, you did not expect that. You're now rebuking Abishai? Yeah, but here's why. "If he is cursing because the Lord



has said to him, 'Curse David,' who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?' And David said to Abishai and to all of his servants, "Behold, my own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite! Leave him alone. Let him curse, for the Lord has told him to."

Now I just want you to think about this. You want to talk about being resigned to the will of God. Here he is saying, "Would I expect the Roman soldier not to curse me when his boss and his boss's boss and his boss's boss and all the people fueling his boss's boss is telling them that I'm the bad guy and I am now subject to death and I'm going to die in the morning." Well, of course, I would expect that. The frame is nicely painted here for the picture of opposition and violent oppression, and now I'm getting a few cross words from a soldier chained to me. Well, yeah, I just know this. This is what's happening to me. I'm not going to have you go cut his head off. I mean, it's clear that right now, if my own son, the boss's boss's boss's boss of Shimei wants me dead, of course, this guy is going to say evil things against me."

Now, I know it's not right, verse 12. "It may be that the Lord will look on the wrong done to me," because it is wrong for Shimei to say those things, "and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing today." Maybe God will look at that and see the injustice and maybe he'll fix this. I know that's too passive for some of you, right? You watch the shoot 'em up movies and you think, "Oh, well, I have to do something here." Here's all I'm saying is when you're in the situation and something you clearly can see the context, the trajectory, the season, the category of God's will in your life and you're in that situation, David's not going to say, "Well, at least get what I can and do what I can and try and defy this season of my life. It's like I'm resigned to it. The Lord is clearly opposing my circumstance and my leadership right now. And if this guy is... I get it. I get it. It all fits."

Verse 13, "So David and his men went on the road, while Shimei went along the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went and threw stones at him and flung dust." Of course, he gets the advantage of elevation. Gravity is good when you're throwing rocks and dirt clods and dust. It's all raining down on his men. You can imagine what a low point. Abishai said, "Let me go kill him." Nah, nah. David responds, "Clearly this is a day a defeat for us. We're walking through this, the valley of the shadow of death. It just, you know what? He's just an irritant."

Peter is like, It's not like I'm going to go complain and lodge a complaint against the soldier chained to me at night because he said some bad things to me. It's like, clearly this is God's will right now for my life. I'm in the middle of being oppressed and persecuted. Whatever, this is how it's going to go, I'm peaceful. Let me just... All I care about, can you slide the chain over a little bit so I can get my arm under my cloak and make a pillow for myself?"

"And the king, and all of his people," verse 14, "who were with him, arrived weary at the Jordan," as you can imagine, "and there," I love this, "he refreshed himself." You can just see him wading out into the water, dipping down, taking his hands through his hair. A lot of dust and dirt in his hair thanks to Shimei and his men, cleaning up, washing his face, refreshing. That phrase, by the way, "refreshed himself," sometimes in the Scripture, it speaks of him on



the run from Saul, "refreshing himself in the Lord." Just that idea of like, you know what? Just resigned to the fact that I going to do what I can.

Or just like Peter, "I'm going to take my sandals off, they're kind of binding when I try to sleep with my sandals on. I can sleep in the middle of the storm." That's a man who's learned from Christ's words, "where is your faith?" God wants us to have faith that he has in his plan something architected for our life and we ought to be saying, that's all I want is your will. It looked like it was the will of God for David to be opposed politically. And here's another guy, an irritant, certainly not his son, Absalom. He's sitting here and Shimei..."It's OK. Not a problem. If it's wrong and it's not right, God is going to fix it, I'm OK."

I'm not advocating passivity. I'm just saying there are times when you need to stop fighting the fact that God has you in a particular place. God is taking you through particular things and we can't freak out. We have to instead learn to pray as Christ taught us to pray. And here's the one spiritual discipline that unlocks the key to everything I'm going to say today. We need to learn to pray and specifically in this sub-point of the sermon, this particular point, we need to learn to pray what Jesus taught us to pray. And that is, "Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." That's my prayer. That needs to be the prayer.

That was David's prayer, apparently. "I just want God's will to be done. It seems like the Lord right now has got everyone lined up against me, just another person. Whatever. Everything fits. This piece of the puzzle fits. I just want God's will, and it seems like God's will right now for my life is this. And so I'm not going to fight it. If it's wrong, God will correct it. Your will be done." The only other time we'll see that phrase, at least translated in English Standard Version the way it's translated there, is when Jesus prays it himself in the garden. And if I'm trying to be peacefully resigned to the will of God, you could throw a flag on that play if you know the passage, because the passage says "Jesus was greatly troubled and distressed."

When he goes into the Garden of Gethsemane before he's about to bare the sin of every person he's going to redeem and he's going to suffer on a cross naked on a Roman execution rack, he's in the garden struggling, "If this cup can pass me, God, let it pass. But not my will but yours be done." That transfer of that sense of I want things to be different. I'd like Absalom to be a supporter, not a usurper. I'd like to not be in prison, I'd like to be preaching. Whatever the situation is, I'm going to say, "Here's what I want. I want God's will, and I'm praying for that." And that's the thing I pray.

And just like Jesus, by the way, went from being greatly troubled and distressed at the beginning of the Garden of Gethsemane to getting up calmly and walking calmly into a situation where he's going to get arrested. And when Peter tries to pull out a sword to say, "Oh, stop, stop, stop!" He cuts the servant's ear off. Do you remember the story? And Jesus doesn't say, "Yeah, let me get a whack at him." He doesn't pull a David killing Shimei. He puts his ear back on in a strange, little miraculous scene. And goes, Yep. You can hear him in the echo of his attitude saying the Lord's will be done.



And I'm just wondering how your attitude reflects your thoughts about the will of God in this season of your life and what you're going through and whatever opposition you might be facing, whatever pains and struggles you might have. Is there a peaceful resignation to the will of God? I know that doesn't sit well with the independent maverick, just do something to fix something, give me three points to fix something. I'm just saying there are seasons of life, there are times in life when you've got to say, "God, your will be done. If this cup cannot be passed from me, well, then your will be done."

By the way, do you remember what Jesus said to Peter, James and John, and Peter was there that night? James has just been beheaded. Peter thinks he's going to be beheaded the next day. He rebuked them again for doing what? Falling asleep. When he said, "You fell asleep, you should have been awake," here's how he said it, he said. "Could you not stay awake and watch and pray with me for one hour?" I always pause when I read that thinking that's a long time. An hour? The end of the day. I mean, you guys have been through a lot and you want them to pray for an hour? Right?

Here's the thing, none of what I'm going to say today, nothing of what I am saying today is going to be much good to you at all unless you can engage in this one spiritual discipline in your life. That is like the early church being earnest about their praying, being protracted in their praying, lengthening their praying and saying, at least in this particular point, your will be done. That's all I'm about. I just want God's will to be done. And you can go from being greatly troubled and distressed to being peacefully resigned to the will of God.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego thought their life was going to be over. They said, "I know God can deliver us. Oh King, we don't have to answer you in this matter. We know God can deliver. But even if he doesn't..." Does that sound like peaceful resignation to the will of God? "Even if he doesn't. You want to throw us in the fiery furnace, whatever. We're not going to change from what we know we should be doing, which is every step of the way we just do the right thing." And the next thing, whatever it is, and the next thing, whatever it is. And the will of God sometimes is painful, and we've got to say your will be done.

Speaking of an hour, think of the old hymn. Remember the old hymn Sweet Hour of Prayer? Kind of an oldie, moldy hymn, but the lyrics... You can't get out of the first verse without being convicted. First of all, we're talking about an hour of prayer, right? But in the middle of that, it's such a great line. Let me read it for you. "In seasons of distress and grief, my soul has often found relief, and oft escaped the tempter's snare by then return, sweet hour of prayer!" The hour spent in prayer dominated by a sense of deference to the will of God, I assure you, will bring great relief to the distress and grief of the present circumstances of your life. So I ask you, how is your prayer life? How is your time in prayer? How is it that up at the top of the list and throughout your praying, you're saying your will be done, I just want your will to be done.

Well God's will was being done. Look back at our text. And it's really hard to process, especially if you're James' wife or kids or parents. Maybe if James was teaching your Sunday school class it's hard because James just got beheaded and Peter is about to be released. "When he passed the first and second guard," this is verse 10 of Acts Chapter 12, "they came



to the iron gate leading into the city." They probably going... The big houses were in the northern part of the city of Jerusalem. If he was in Antonio's Fortress, we're not sure where he was, but he was probably coming into that upper sequestered section of the city where the expensive houses were, there are iron gates, which is not like you driving into your gated community where things open automatically, right? This would take multiple men, iron, it's big, there are locks, there are bolts.

"It opens on its own" and that means that God is supernaturally doing this, "and they went out and went along one street, and then this person who struck you in the ribs," and got you up and led you out and had some flashlight, which was strange, that turned on, "he left." He's gone. And then Peter was like, "Whoa, this is not a vision." "When Peter came to himself and said, 'Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.'" Well, all the Jewish people were expecting to kill some of the leaders of the Church, and they did kill James. They were expecting, Herod was expecting to kill and behead Peter. And he did kill and behead James.

So here's the weird thing. James dead, Peter released. Who decided that? Well, the whole point of this isn't like circumstance. That's why God punctuates the Scriptures with miraculous events to show "here's my doing, and there's no question this is my doing." This isn't happenstance. This is not circumstances. It's not ingenuity. This is not just here's what happened. "This is what I chose to have happen. I look at the church. I look at the need. I look at Jerusalem, I look at Judea, I look at the cause of being my witnesses, and it's time for James to check out and go home. And it's time for Peter, though he thinks he's going to check out, to get back in the game."

And you know why that happens? Because the one who has a will has a purpose. The one who's got a complete overriding, orchestrating sense of what is going to happen has a reason for why that happens. Sometimes we think about being resigned to the will of God. "Well, I'm just going to go along with the circumstances. If there's a storm, there's a storm." No, no. The storm has a purpose. Everything that God does has a purpose. And for his church in particular, you think God was going, "Oh, man. I lost James. What am I going to do? I guess I better pop Peter out of jail." No, he knew exactly what he was doing because God has a purpose for what he does, and you need to be assured of that. It's one thing to kind of lean back and go, "Well, I'm going to go with the flow like David did and I'm not going to kill Shimei." No, you need to lean forward and say there's always a purpose in this. God has a purpose.

You need to know that he will provide for his Church. He'll provide for your family. He'll provide for your life. He'll provide exactly what he needs to get his purpose accomplished. Number two, jot it down. "Be Sure of God's Provision for His Purposes." That's a long point but write it down. Be sure of God's provision for his purposes. He said, I know we now need James home and we're going to put Peter back in the game. He was on the bench. Actually, the other team captured him and threw him in a cage on the other side of the field. But here's the thing about God our coach, right? He's actually all powerful. And our coach can decide to



do what he wills with this world, he can take the leash of the enemy and jerk that leash back and say, Satan, you're not going to touch him here.

And here is the great news juxtaposed to last week's reminder of how dark and bleak and pessimistic it all seemed. Listen, God is a God who at any time can step in and vindicate the good guys. God says what I want here, even though it looks like a victory for the other side with James, I'm going to show a victory for our side with Peter, and Peter's going to be back in the game. And James has gotten now down through the corridor. He's gone and taken a shower, and now he's up in his high-rise condo and he's got his fuzzy slippers on and the big screen TV's on. He's got a beverage in his hand and he's enjoying the night because he's already found his eternal rest. But Peter, who was caged up on the other side when the team captured him and threw him behind enemy lines, I'm going to pop him out, put him back on the field.

Now here's the thing about all of us when it comes to the will of God. If I say be resigned to the will of God and you think, "Well, I'm a running back, I'd sure like to be the quarterback." Right? "I got stuck playing middle linebacker. I don't think I'm cut out for this, right? I'd rather be a safety." I'm just saying, here's the thing, you got to know this, that's not your decision. You're not the coach. We have a coach and there are times he says, "It's time for you to go play here. It's time for you to go play there. It's time for you to be sitting on the bench. It's time for you to break your leg. It's time for you to be captured by the other team. It's time for you to go down the corridor and go home." God's got all that planned out.

Every single aspect of our lives is not just what he wants, it's what he plans to accomplish. He's got a purpose in it all. And by the way, he does this in every generation. It's like the enduring, ever-living John Wooden of UCLA basketball or Bear Bryant of Alabama football. It's like he goes through a class and then he's done and another class and another class. And here is Christ for 2,000 years now, coaching the Church. In the Church and in his domain, which is his people, of course, he's always actively accomplishing his will with his people, and he's got us now. We're his Church in this little corner of his kingdom. And he knows what he's doing, not only with our church, not only with your small group, not only with your family, but even with the cells within your body. And he's got a purpose for all of that.

And the ultimate purpose, you think I'm rushing to Romans 8, I'm not rushing to Romans 8 yet. I'm going to go to Romans 11 in your mind. Verse 36. OK? Romans 11 says this, that "all things are from him," speaking of God, "all things are through him, and all things are to him." I want you to think that through. "All things are from him, all things are through him, all things are to him." So God has got a plan and he has a purpose. And here's his purpose. God says, "Ultimately, I'm going to create everything that is. I'm going to now make sure everything consists and is managed and enlivened and purposed and structured. I'm going to have all things go through me and then," here it is, here's the purpose statement, "all things are to me. All things are ultimately for my glory, my plan, my benefit. I'm going to do the things that I want to do in this world that will be for what is appropriate, the king being hailed as the king, the God of the universe being the God of the universe. The center, the hub, being the center of all things. I'm going to make sure that everything works out and all things will glorify me, all



things. In the end, all things will glorify me. And there will be in my plan, all things created by me, all things sustained through me, all things for the purpose to me. All of that is going to be part of what I am planning."

So when I think about, "Oh, here's a season of life, I got cancer. Oops, well, I'm going to go with the flow, I guess. Yeah, I'll go to the doctors. But you know, I guess I'm supposed to be peaceful. I try and sleep at night with my cancer." Well, here's the deal. God has a purpose for all that. And the purpose for all that is for him to, to put in the words of the first question of the Westminster Catechism, is for you to understand that God is great, all things to glorify himself. That's the chief end of man, right? You ultimately are to bring glory, credit, honor, gravitas to God. God is one who is the center of the universe, not you, not me. And if the coach says, "Go in," you go in. If the coach says, "You can't play running back. You're going to play tight end." Well, then that's what you have to do.

And that's the thing that you should in your mind go, "Yeah, I get that. There are a lot of good reasons that I should be the tight end right now. I can see that. I need to start thinking about not what I don't have that I'd like to have," which is, for Peter, freedom from prison, "I'd like to focus on where God has me right now. And I got to think there's a reason for that." And if you want to get down now to Romans Chapter 8, now I can think rightly about Romans 8:28, right? God is a God who "works all things together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose." And the purpose is that you and I glorify God specifically subset in Romans 8 is that you and I be conformed to the image of his Son.

So now I ask the question how are the circumstances of my life? How are they shaping me to be more like Christ, the perfect representation of what humanity ought to be? I need to think about that. Because here's the thing, if I say, let's make sure God's will is submissive to your will and everything that you want and pray for God does and everything you get. James never dies. Peter's always, you know, never arrested. You're body's always healthy. But here's the thing. I think the coach knows better what you and I need to get to the product that he wants to produce, which is his glory and your conformity to Christ. I think he knows that. So he's chosen that path for you. "Well, her life is easier and her husband's better." "And that guy's got a better job and he's got more talent. And I don't know why that didn't happen to him." Listen, God is doing all those things, working them together for good and the good is not my leisure or pleasure or wonderful experience in life. It's that God is shaping me into the image of Christ. And the goal is for God to be glorified.

What I need to do is start thinking about all the things that God is doing and the position that I am playing and the purpose he is accomplishing and saying, "I am going to be thankful." Here's the deal. When there's anxiety, and I know circumstances like being in prison are going to make you anxious, you need to respond, as Christ told us, to not be anxious about anything. Look at the birds and recognize that even God is sovereign over the lives of birds. "Not a bird falls from a tree apart from your Father," which is a neat way of saying there's not a death of a bird that's beyond God's purview. And all I'm saying is, so my death isn't going to be. Psalm 139, "Every day of my life is mapped out in a book before there was yet one of them."



So I got to trust him in this. And I've got to be able to say, I know that God knows what he's doing with my life if he knows what he's doing with the bird's life. And so I'm going to say I will be thankful for the situation I'm in, I'm thankful for the life that I have, I'm thankful for the position I have, I'm thankful for the illnesses I have. I'm going to give thanks in all circumstances.

Turn to one quick passage for me. Turn to the book of Isaiah, which is a short text, but it's worth looking at. Isaiah Chapter 46 verse 10, 10 and 11. Here is God in verse 9, he's talking about the fact there's no other God like him and everyone should listen carefully to who he is. Transgressors should repent and listen to his word because he's the God of the universe. And he talks about his credentials here in verse 10 by saying, "Declaring," God does, "the end from the beginning," Isaiah 46 verse 10. "I declare the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done."

Now think this through. You can read that, and if you don't read the next verse, you can think, well, God just sees everything. He saw that that day the conditions would be right for a storm in the Sea of Galilee. He knew that Herod would kind of go south and kind of take some of the vitriol of his grandfather, and he would probably put Christians in prison and Sanhedrin, he saw that, he knew that would happen. Stop with just saying this is the will of God because he knew it would happen. Get into the next phrase here. "Saying, 'My counsel shall stand.'" Right? What I decide within myself, consult with myself, it's going to happen. "I will accomplish," here's the keyword here, "my purpose."

"I'll even call a bird of prey from the east..." speaking of birds, which I know is representative of some of the leaders in the Babylonian captivity he was going to utilize, particularly in the Persian kingdom, to bring them back into the land. But he says hard times for you in the Babylonian captivity. But I can even "call a bird of prey from the east, and a man of my counsel," someone I decide to enlist, "from a far country. I have spoken. I will bring it to pass; I have purposed and I will do it." I don't know. Read that bottom of verse 11 again. "I have spoken. I will bring it to pass; I have purposed it, and I will do it," even down to the birds. Are you better than a bird? Yes, God says you are far more valuable than the birds. And yet the birds are under the, not only the knowledge of what God knows is going to happen, but under the purpose of what God says is going to happen. It's just so important for us to get.

We need to be thankful, right? We pray for our daily bread, we get our daily bread. We need to say, "Hey God, thank you for my daily provision." Christ gave that example to us. In Egypt they were coming out as God's people, the children of Israel, into the Promised Land, but there was this thing called the desert in between. Much like Acts 14 "through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God." You're going to get into the land flowing with milk and honey. They complained, "I'd sure like some milk and honey right now." Nope, you're going to have to eat manna. But guess what? You have all the caloric intake you need. Eat your manna. It's more like corn flakes. Go out there, scrape it up, put it in the bowl, get your goat's milk on it and you eat it and you will be fine.



And they said, "I sure wish we had the leeks and onions we had back in Egypt." I'd sure like to get to that milk and honey in the Promised Land. They could not be thankful for it. They didn't take it as they ought to. As a matter of fact, they started to, here's a word, an onomatopoeia word, they started to grumble and murmur. And Moses said you're not complaining against me. You're not even complaining against the circumstances. You're not complaining against the food, you're not complaining against the manna. You need to understand when you do that, you're chafing against God, you're complaining against God.

I don't think any of you want to leave today thinking I am a complainer against God and God says I have a purpose. I not only have a will, but I have a purpose in that will that I have created for you and you need not complain against that. In Levi, there was a man named Korah. He had some sons and they got a little uppity about the fact that they weren't the priests functioning in the Tabernacle, and they came to Moses with a complaint. "How is it they get to do that? I want to be the quarterback." And again, Moses says you don't understand. You're not complaining against Aaron, you're not complaining against me, you're not complaining against circumstances, you're complaining against God. Your complaint and your grumbling are against God.

Some of you don't get that. We have a hard time seeing that God's purposes in his will need to be leaned into, and we need to be sure that he is going to provide in all that we are facing to do whatever he wants to accomplish. And I can fall asleep resigned to the will of God, knowing in my mind, in my heart that he's going to do whatever he purposes in the circumstances of life. Take the next step, do whatever is right, do the next thing.

I know it's hard, super hard. There will be times when we learn to be thankful in our praying, that's the medium of thanksgiving. It's not like our secular people will say this November, "Oh, I'm so thankful," thankful to who, right? You have to direct it. That's called prayer. We're giving thanks in all things. We're "letting our request be made known to God," right? Well, that's preceded by this, "Be anxious for nothing and in everything with prayer and petition with thanksgiving." Be thankful in all circumstances. That's the whole point of praying is to get us to the place where we're no longer trusting in ourselves, we're not trusting in our circumstances, we're trusting in God.

Just real quickly, just glance through the last part of this passage, which we have no time to preach on, verses 12 through 19. He shows up at Mary's house, the mother of John Mark. Rhoda has that "rhoda moment" and leaves him at the door. He keeps knocking. She's joyful, she wanted this. I don't know if she was praying specifically for it. Matter of fact, they were praying, it says in verse 12. We don't know what they're praying for. I ended last week's sermon with that third point. Just pray for God's help because I said I don't even have in the text specificity about what they were praying. I hope some people were praying that he'd get out. But I don't know. When they finally went down there it says they were amazed. They were amazed that he had been let out of prison. I don't know. Maybe not everyone was praying that. If they were praying that maybe they weren't praying with the kind of belief and confidence that God could do it because when he did it they were shocked. But they were praying.



And I don't want to castigate their prayers because they were in a nighttime prayer meeting, praying earnestly, they probably pray a lot more than we pray. I'm going to give them kudos for that, give them deference for that. And I'm going to say this: that at least I know what they were doing was doing the thing that every good prayer does, particularly in hard circumstances. It takes our anxiety, hears the word, and it "casts it on the Lord," right? First Peter Chapter 5, I don't want to take my anxieties and I want I want to "cast them on God." I want to throw them on God's lap. I want to say, "God, this is a problem I just have to trust you for." It's a transfer of my trust. That's what prayer does. And in that passage, it talks about the trouble we have and Satan as a roaring lion and all that is preceded by "humble yourself and cast all your anxieties on the Lord." Why? Because he cares for you. And in that care, he's got a plan and in that plan he's got a purpose. The will of God. The purpose of God.

Number three, we need to "Always Be Transferring our Trust in Prayer." Always be transferring our trust in prayer. Your confidence is not in the doctor, it's not in the medicine, it's not in your attorney, it's not in your boss, it's not in your friends, it's not in the counsel you get. It is in God who ultimately is one who can step into any situation and get his will done. And I need to know this: that if God did that supernaturally, it wasn't because he got backed into a corner. It was to make a point to all generations of Christians wherein he was not going to keep doing magic tricks for every family on earth. He was going to tell us, "Trust me in this. I can organize circumstances. I can do whatever it takes." And if it's not opening and the door is slammed shut on your fingers, just know God has a plan. And in that plan, he has a purpose. My job is to take the trust in my heart and to turn this over to God.

That picture, even that image, that gesture of me taking my hands and going here's the burden and the struggle and the pain and the fear and the anxiety, and I'm turning it over to God. It's a great, great image, "Galal" an Old Testament Hebrew word, galal. It means that to roll something over from me to you, I'm turning it over. I'm rolling it over. And it's not just the fact that I'm sitting there with nothing to do and there's nothing I can do. And that may be the circumstance with the church here because they can't go fight Herod. They're not going to overtake the Sanhedrin. They're not going to somehow do a jailbreak with sentries on the outside and Roman soldiers chained to Peter. They couldn't do anything. So all they could do is pray. And you've heard people say that, "all you can do is pray."

Even when there's more that you can do. Even when you're trying to make sure that Herod does not arrest us and throw us in jail. Even when you're working to make sure that Shimei is not throwing rocks at you. Even when you're saying I'd like to sit down and talk with Absalom to see if we can somehow turn this around because I know it's wrong, it's injustice. You want to change things. Great. Great.

Here's a passage for you, and I know you know this text. Proverbs Chapter 16 verse 3. If you are called to do something and there's something you can do. Peter couldn't do anything. David couldn't do much. In a storm fishermen couldn't do anything. All they could do is just try to do their best to hold the ship together. Here's the thing it says, "Commit your work to the Lord," commit your work to the Lord, there's the word galal. It's translated "commit." Roll your



work over to God. I think I'm going to work at something. It's a good purpose. It's the right thing. I think it's the next right step, I'm going to roll it over to God. "Commit your work to the Lord and he will establish your plans."

Psalms 127, it's one of the passages I think I turn you to in your discussion questions this week. "You will labor in vain. Unless the Lord is in the work." "You're going to keep watch over the city in vain unless the Lord guards the city." I need to turn this over in my heart, even when I'm working, even when I'm marching as a sentry on the wall with an AK-47. Right? You better load your gun and that's important. But you better trust God. You better roll the work over, the preparation over, the attorneys over, the medicine over, the chemotherapy over, the counselors over. I turn it over to God. There's no way to have peace in your life unless you're praying and prayer is the avenue through which we transfer our trust to God.

They had a lot of trust to believe. Even Peter. He goes off the scene in our passage. We don't even know where he ends up. James, the brother, half-brother of Christ, ends up becoming the leader of the church in Jerusalem. And then the shift goes to Paul, as Paul is sent out from Antioch with Barnabas and on the rest of the book of Acts goes. But in this situation, we learn this: God is a God who has a will for his Church. He provides in the purpose of what he wants to accomplish through circumstances, through his intervention, whatever he chooses to do. Our job is to put our trust completely in him. And all those relate to prayer. Prayer, prayer, prayer, prayer, prayer.

Let me ask the ushers to come down the aisles and pass out the elements of the Lord's Supper right now. And I'm going to do that now because it's the right thing to do and God told us to do it. But I'm going to do it today in part because the idea of Christ rolling over his distressed anxiety in the midst of pain to the Lord as an example for us was on display on the night he took the bread and broke it and passed that cup around and drank of that cup. The images and symbolism of the body and blood of Christ, all of that was taking place in a time when he was greatly distressed. As those elements go by, I want you to think about this.

Some of you grew up, I call it the Lord's Supper, you may have noticed that. That's just the terminology I use for this act. Some of you grew up calling it Communion. There's nothing wrong with that. That was an old translation in First Corinthians of the word that's translated in the English Standard Version "participation." That we are communing, we're participating in the blood of Christ. This picture of me having the fruit of the vine and this bread. This is my solidarity, my alliance, my affinity to Christ's atoning work on the cross. Right? And that's important. That's what Paul says, it's a participation of the blood of Christ. OK.

In that same passage it says taking the bread and one loaf, and I know this is a kind of a lame modern expression of it, we don't pass around one loaf. But if we did that picture of one thing and this was all made from one flat piece of unleavened bread, but if you were to take this and you take a piece of it, it says you have one loaf in many parts, just like we are many, but we're also one. So even if you think of the word communion, though it's specifically spoken of in terms of my alliance and affinity and solidarity with Christ's atoning work, it's also in that context about, you know, it's a communion with each other. That's why you shouldn't be doing



communion at home by yourself, right? It's for the assembled church, we commune together like one loaf, many pieces, that's a picture of our solidarity.

But even with those two instructed connections that make me think of unity and communion and solidarity and the fellowship and participation with Christ and with each other, there's one more. Not just with his atoning sacrifice, but when Jesus was instituting this on the night he did take the bread, do you remember what he said prior to that? The gospel of Luke records it. He says, "I earnestly desire to eat this Passover with you." These are the elements that came from the Passover meal, modified, I get that, and God just took it down to the bread and the cup because the roasted lamb, he was the lamb that was slain. But in doing that, he preceded this with, "I earnestly desire to eat this meal with you."

The solidarity we have with Christ, the communion we have with Christ in part on that distressing evening should be a reminder to us that we are just like Christ in the sense that we have to depend on the Lord in the midst of circumstances that are hard. That he is a high priest who can sympathize with the weakness of you and I when we're saying, "I don't like it, I don't like it at all." When we're thrown into temptation and we need to pray and watch. When we have to resist the struggle of being defeated or worried or anxious, that we say with the Lord, number one, I'm going to pray in protracted hours of prayer. I'm going to transfer my trust. I'm going to give thanks for what he's given me, the position he's put me in, and I'm going to resign myself to the will of God, not my will but your will be done.

I know there's a lot that should go on, and I'll give you a minute to do that without me yakking at you, but you should examine yourself, you should be a Christian if you're going to take these elements today. If not, just put them down under your chair if you don't know where you stand with Christ. But if you are a Christian trusting in Christ, I want you to identify with his atoning work and want you to identify with each other. We take this together as a group. We'll do it together simultaneously in just a minute. And I want you to commune with the fact that we have a high priest who knows the struggles we face. When you go out there and say, "that was a nice sermon. That was cool. Some good things for me to think about." But on Tuesday, when you are stressed, now we put it into practice.

We pull the blinds, we go in the closet, we get on our knees and we pray. And Christ knew what that was like. Even in this reminder, at this last meal, he earnestly wanted to be together with his people to eat this meal. He is among us. He walks among the lampstands, it says in Revelation Chapter 1. He is here in that sense that he is wanting to identify with us, our great, sympathetic high priest. You talk to him. I'll give you a couple of minutes to confess your sins. Make sure you've examined your life, and then I'll come back up in two minutes. We'll take these elements together.

If you are a Christian in identification in communion with the atoning work of Christ's death on a cross. If you are in communion with his people. If you are in communion with the sympathetic high priest who knows our pains and weaknesses and temptations. We trust in him and not ourselves and invite you in obedience to Christ to eat this bread and drink this cup.



God, we are grateful for your wonderful kindness to us in so many ways. Forgive us, God, when we are discontented, frustrated, anxious. Let us learn even in this sermon, to give ourselves more to prayer this week, to extend those times, to focus those times, to get on our knees or shut our eyes or bury our heads in a corner somewhere and just cry out to you and ask for your will to be done and be thankful for our circumstance that we are in and we'd see the quelling of anxiety and covetousness and envy and strife. We learn that we cannot control this world. We can resign ourselves to your will and work daily to do what is right, and I pray that we would. So guide us in this God. Thank you so much for this reminder.

In Jesus name. Amen.