



How God Works in You – Part 4

The Sovereignty of God

Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, speaking of kids, there are plenty of kids who grow up in churches like ours that hear the words Jesus Christ so often they start to think of it as they would their own name, Jesus Christ. A first name and a last name. That's how they often think of it. By accident, they think he, I guess in a formal setting, would be called Mr. Christ. And maybe his mother is Mary Christ and she's the wife of Joseph Christ. And, that's how they think of it. And of course, that's not how we're supposed to think about it because Christ is not a surname, it's not a last name. It's a title. And it's important for us to know that and be great if it were translated. But it's not translated. It's transliterated like a lot of words that have come down into English. It just simply transliterated the Greek word Christos. And Christos is the Greek New Testament word for the Hebrew Old Testament word Messiah. And that is not translated in our thinking at least today, we transliterated that simply we say Messiah, Messiah, Messiah, Christos, Christ. And none of it is ever translated in our thinking. But if it were to be translated and you get around the block a few times in the church, you might hear someone say, well, what Christ means, what Messiah means, is anointed, as though that helps anybody. Like what is that, anointed?

Well, to be anointed you might have been around the block even a few more times in church to realize, well, I know what anointed means. Anointed is the thing that we read about in our Daily Bible Reading this week. Are you keeping up with the Daily Bible Reading? We're only in February. Keeping up, right? We read about the special oil that had a particular fragrant aroma that was done by the perfumer and you could only use it for the anointing ceremony that first was for the priest, and then it would be for kings, and it would be for prophets. And they had the oil poured on their heads. The word anointed, the word Messiah, means that someone who has had the oil poured on their head. And that doesn't really help either, right? So we need to get a very simple definition. And let me just offer one for you this morning. If you want to think about what the word anointed means, you might just want to think about it this way. Appointed. To be anointed is to be appointed. If you're anointed, you're appointed to a particular task, right? If you are anointed as a priest, you're then appointed to that task. You're officially appointed to serve in that role. If you're anointed as a king you're appointed to be a king. You're anointed as a prophet then you're appointed as a prophet. To be anointed is to be appointed.

If you think about Jesus the appointed one that makes perfect sense. He was appointed to come to the earth 2,000 years ago. The Father appointed that he would come and that he would serve in a role, a set of roles that actually would fulfill all the roles of the Old Testament that were anointed and appointed. And that is that he would serve as the prophet, priest, and king. And he would live out a life that would fulfill all righteousness, that he would be rejected by the leaders of Israel, that the Romans would execute him on a Roman execution rack outside of Jerusalem, that he would die, be put in a grave, and his body would rise on the third day. All of that was appointed by God. You say, "I know he was appointed to do that," and that's why he assumes the term Christ or the Messiah.



When God planned this all out and Jesus was appointed to fulfill all that, and he fulfilled all that, we said, well, that's how God works, right? He makes a plan. He sends his Son. His Son accomplishes the plan and everything's great. It is. We have no doubt in the minds of people who study the book of Acts, that in the book of Acts they understood that very clearly. And we're going to take a little time to get to Acts 22 which is our passage today. But turn with me to Acts Chapter 4 when Peter and John had been released from prison and they were going to pray and discuss a little bit about how God has anointed / appointed Christ. And, the way it's described, I think is helpful because it puts an emphasis where the emphasis normally isn't in our understanding, at least as we think about how God works in the world, or in particular, as the title of our series would suggest, How God Works In Our Lives. We struggle with this.

So let's read what happens here. Verse 23. Pick it up there. They're released from prison. And "When they had been released, they went to their friends and they reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them," which was don't preach about Jesus anymore is what they told them. "And when they heard of it, they lifted their voices together to God and they said," what are the next two words here? "Sovereign Lord" is how the English Standard Version translates it. Sovereign Lord. Sovereign Lord. Right? When you talk about God appointing things to happen and they happen, that's a word that might gel with that. Yeah, I get that, that sovereignty, God's sovereignty is played out when God appoints something or someone and they carry that all out. That's God's sovereign oversight. The word, there's one word, that translates these two words, "Sovereign Lord" is the word that we transliterate into English "despot." That's the word "Despotes" in Greek. Despotes is a despot. Now, if you look up in the English dictionary, what's a despot? It's one who has absolute power. He's a despotic leader. He has all power and anything he wants. If he wants women to come in and feed him grapes, then that's what happens, right? He wants someone executed that lives, you know, a mile from the palace. Well, he has that happen. If he wants, you know, a cart of bananas brought in, you know, by elephants. Well, that's what happens. He's a despot.

Now, of course, usually because of how we think about absolute power, we think of absolute power, that power corrupts absolutely. And so even in our English parlance of the word, it is describing someone who's evil, a wicked despot. We always think of it with a little, you know, snarl in our voice. He's a despot. That's the word. They prayed after all this happened and they said to God, O despot, O sovereign leader of all things, one who does whatever he wants, who gets what he wants, what he plans and what he appoints he gets it done. He made everything after all. "He 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." Now he's quoting Psalm 2 where David wrote, "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves up, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his," there's our word, "Anointed," appointed one.

Now God's got a plan. Do you think he's going to get it done? Well, what about if the Gentiles start raging or the people start plotting, or the kings of the earth set themselves up against God's plan, or the rulers gather together? Well, then God's plan isn't going to happen, right? No, he's the despot. The despot gets his plan done because he is, as we translate in our



Bible, the sovereign Lord. He's the boss who has all power. The sovereign Lord is in charge. Nothing can stop his plan. "For truly," verse 27, "in this city," Jerusalem, "there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed," there's our word, you appointed him. He's the anointed, appointed one, "both Herod and Pontius Pilate," those are some heavy hitters in Rome in the Roman structure of leadership. They're sitting there as the state of Rome so far away across the Mediterranean. This powerful hand of Rome had its grip on the land but it didn't matter. Even the "Gentiles" chiming in "and the people of Israel," it didn't matter. But ultimately, they played right into what you appointed and anointed "to do whatever your hand and your plan had," here's another word, "predestined to take place."

If I ask, "Could Jesus have come at a different time?" You probably would say, "No." God had anointed / appointed Jesus to come in his plan. His plan that was predestined to take place. He was going to be born when you were going to be born as Galatians 4 says, he was born at just the right time. And if I said, "Well, was he born in the right place?" Maybe it was like, "Oh man, darn, he was born in Greece." No, he was born right where he was supposed to be in Bethlehem. Micah Chapter 5 verse 2. And if you said, well, maybe he would just say some sermon that would just kind of really get to Pilate and Pilate would let him go and he wouldn't get crucified. Nope. God's sovereign plan. He's the despot of the universe. He has all power. He's going to work his plan through his anointed / appointed one. And that plan that was predestined is going to happen. It doesn't matter what people on the earth think that shouldn't happen. It's going to happen. God's going to get it done. This is called sovereignty. God is sovereign over the circumstances of Christ's life. And you would say, I absolutely believe that. Well, that's good that we believe that. And if you said, well, is God sovereign over every detail of what Jesus did? You'd say, "Yeah. Because he's the anointed / anointed one."

By the way, did he ever go through some kind of ceremony with that special blend of oil with all that fragrant that the perfumer was supposed to be? Did that ever get poured on his head? No. He had some spikenard poured on his head with that woman. Right? That prostitute. Yeah, well, that happened, but it wasn't a... He was never formally anointed. So he wasn't the Messiah in terms of the Messiah of some kind of prophet, priest or king that the leaders of Israel had endowed upon him. And even as he's called the Christ, he's not the Christ in any formal ceremony in Israel. But he was in God's mind. And he was anointed in the sense that he was appointed and God was making that clear from the very beginning at his baptism by John. Okay. That's how God works. He takes important people like the second person of the Godhead, appoints him to a task and gets it done and nothing's going to stop it. That's just how he works.

Go back to the book of Isaiah with me real quick. Will we get to Acts 22? We'll get there, maybe. We're going to start in Isaiah 46, just to start again with the concept of despot, the leader, the one in charge who gets everything done, the sovereign one. Here's how he's described, even to the people who think that they can stop God's plan. You say, if we do this, I'm going to do that. Well, that's not going to happen. He says, you transgressors, you need to remember this: Isaiah Chapter 46 verse 8. Let's start there. We'll read through verse 11, 8 through 11. "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." Sounds like a despot, right? He's not evil. He's the best despot ever. He's the most benevolent, kind, holy, best despot anyone could ever have. But he is a despot. He's in charge of all things. He "declares the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done."

Now a lot of people think of sovereignty that way. He's got a great recording system. He recorded it all, looked ahead, saw what was going to happen, came back and said, here's what's going to happen. Just like when you, you know, watch a golf tournament and then your friend sits down to watch it later and you go, "Well, I know what's going to happen. He's going to make this putt, but he's going to miss this putt." Well, that's great because you already saw it. Well, that's what a lot of people think sovereignty is, right? That God just looks ahead at the tape and sees what everybody does. And they think, well, that's how it works. And they might even think that's how it worked with Christ. Yeah, the nations might have plotted against him, but in reality they went right into God's hands because that's how God saw it happen. It really played out by the power of Pontius Pilate and Herod, and it played out by everyone who was in the crowd. Everything played out the way it did because people made decisions. But God just looked at the tape and he looked at the tape and he saw what was going to happen and then he said, well, I wrote it in my book because I saw the end from the beginning, verse 10.

It's impossible in the middle of verse 10 to think of it that way because of these words, "saying, 'MY counsel shall stand.'" In other words, if I want him to make the putt, the putt is going to be made. If I want him to miss the putt, the putt is going to be missed. "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish MY purpose." It's not like I'm going to foretell your purpose. I'm going to foretell what you do. You make those decisions and I'm going to look back and say, ah... nah, nah, nah. I saw it ahead of time. I'm God. No, you're not a despot just because you see things ahead of time, right? You must be the despot, the one who has all power, the sovereign Lord, if in fact this is your counsel and your plan and you appoint these people to carry out your roles, even Herod, even Pontius Pilate, or let's go back to Pharaoh in the Old Testament as we've been reading, even Pharaoh. If God is the God who does that, well, then I guess it is God's counsel and his purpose. "Calling," look at this now, "a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it." Okay. Here in Isaiah 46 I want you to think about what's happening. Isaiah is a prophet talking about how the nation of Israel, in particular the Judean southern part of Israel, is going to go into a captivity in Babylon. They're going to be there for 70 years. And then he keeps giving them the hope and the promise but you're going to come back. And that coming back is what's in the minds of the people who've been reading through the book of Isaiah.

Now go back, if you would, just a little bit to Chapter 44, go to the last verse of Chapter 44. Here's the bird of prey. A bird of prey is someone who swoops down and takes whatever he wants to eat, whatever he wants, he's a bird of prey, big old claws. I saw a video this week, it was hard for me to believe, of a gigantic eagle carrying a goat that it had gone down to attack. Crazy stuff, the bird of prey swoops down, just eats whatever he wants. Picks up whatever he wants. That's a bird of prey. Well, here's the bird of prey that he has in mind. Verse 28. Are you there? Isaiah 44:28. "Who says of Cyrus," says this God that he's just spoken of who

does all these things, does things, what he wants to do with his created world and this God, this despot, this sovereign Lord "says of Cyrus, 'He is MY shepherd,'" right? He's leading those people over there in Persia. He's doing that but he's my leader, "'and he shall fulfill all my purpose'; saying of Jerusalem," way out there in the west, well, "'She shall be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'"

Got to get now the Israelites out of captivity. Now they got there under the Babylonian Empire, the Babylon Empire fell to the Medo-Persians. The Medo-Persians are in charge now. Cyrus is in charge. It's not yet. This is 150 years before this happened. But the name of Cyrus is laid here in the text of Scripture that Josephus, by the way, the historian, non-biblical writer, says that Cyrus knew that this prophecy had been made and that his name had been dropped 150 years before he was ever born. And he read this or heard of this and it was so remarkable back in his day that he said, "I find myself to be a special person in the Scripture of the Hebrews." And that was one of the things that the historian said that made him even interested in doing the things that he actually did. Nevertheless, Chapter 45 verse 1, "Thus says the Lord," Yahweh, "to his anointed." There's our word. What does that mean? Appointed, to his anointed, to his appointed one, "to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him." And he's going to go on to talk more about what Cyrus does.

Now, this is 150 years before Cyrus comes. He's now talking about him as though he already exists because in God's mind he already does. He's going to grasp his hand and he's going to use him to give a decree in the fifth century B.C. to send the people back into Jerusalem to rebuild it and to rebuild the temple, rebuild the walls and he's even going to fund part of it, this pagan king, this bird of prey from the east that's terrorizing the Babylonians and subduing the Babylonian Empire. He's going to be used as God's servant. Therefore, he's called his anointed one. Interesting that this word is used that way, isn't it? Right? What is Messiah? He's the Messiah. He's the Messiah? Well, all I mean by that is he's the anointed one. Did he ever go through that ceremony with that interesting fragrant oil? No. Never did. No. But in God's mind, he is his anointed one. What does that mean? He's appointed. To do what? To do what I tell him to do. I'm going to accomplish, verse 28 of Chapter 44, all of my purpose, he's going to "fulfill all my purpose." And I'm going to use him to send the people back and rebuild the temple. Right? Some think, "So maybe God is that way when he deals with his own Son, and maybe he's that way when he's dealing with like big political leaders, I can see that. But this series is about God's work in me, and I'm just not going to buy that. I'm not God's appointed one."

Go with me to the book of Jonah. You remember the book of Jonah, don't you? Go to the last chapter. Now, a lot has happened, by the way, in the book of Jonah. But at the end he goes up there and he sits to see what's going to happen. He didn't want to go and we know what happened when he didn't want to go. God says, you're going to go and nothing can thwart God's plan and God gets him there. He gets him there. He preaches. People start to repent. He goes up on the hillside looking down at the city of Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, and he is now watching to see what's going to happen. Look at verse 6. See in verse 5 he's waiting. He's built a booth for himself, like a little shelter. Who knows what he made it out of but he made a little shelter. He sat under its shade to see what would become of the city. Verse 6,



"Now the Lord God," and again another compound of strength regarding God's leadership and sovereignty over all things, "the Lord God appointed a plant." There's our word. He's appointed a plant, like this is the anointed plant, right? The Messiah plant. And the plant grew up and it grew quickly. "And it came up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head." I don't know how long he was out there camping but this thing grew quickly and it was there over his head. And man, Jonah was happy. "It saved him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant." That plant was an anointed plant. An appointed plant. It was designed by God to do a particular task.

"But when dawn came up," verse 7, "the next day, God appointed a..." You don't think you're in this text yet? Maybe you can get included here. God appointed a what? A worm. "A worm that attacked the plant." Now I'm going to use this worm over here. I'm not going to let the worm go over there. I'm not going to let the worm go over this way. I'm going to have the worm right here and encounter this great, fresh, newly grown plant. And this worm isn't going to have digestive problems. This worm is not going to be full on other stuff. This worm is going to be hungry to devour this plant. God appointed a worm. There's our word, the anointed worm. And it "attacked the plant, so that it withered." Verse 8, "When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind." And the weather now was appointed by God.

We just need to recognize when we talk about the sovereignty of God you cannot put it in the corner and say the sovereignty of God works as long as I'm talking about the Messiah, Jesus Christ. And it works maybe if I'm talking about God's geopolitics in all the empires of the world in biblical history. There are a lot of appointments, by the way, in the book of Jonah. God appointed a big fish to swallow him up that was just hungry enough for a prophet and ate him up and spit him up on the shore and he marches over to Nineveh and preaches. There are so many things that God is appointing all the time. Jesus put it this way, "There's not a bird that falls from the tree dead" You've seen a bird, a dead bird laying somewhere, right? "Not a bird that falls apart from your Father." This is a statement of God's sovereignty. What does that mean? He's appointing things to fulfill their purpose. Plants. Kings. Messiah. Jesus the Christ. Wind. Weather. Worms. And guess what? You and me.

The Apostle Paul is telling his testimony in Acts 22. Turn there now. And as he's giving his testimony we're dropping into the middle of it. He's been arrested. He's got chains on him. He's bound. He's on the steps of Antonia Fortress. He's looking down at the Temple Plaza. He's got all these Jews who are mad and they would kill him if they could. And he's giving them a speech in their language, in Hebrew. And in this language, whether it's the dialect of Aramaic or Hebrew or not, whatever. We talked about that a couple of weeks ago. The point is he's appealing to them and as he does he tells the story of how he gets knocked off of his horse, you remember the story, as he's on his way to Damascus to persecute more Christians. And he finds out that it's Jesus whom he's persecuting and now he recognizes that he needs to become a Christian, and he does. He repents of his opposition to Christ. He becomes an advocate of Christ. He gets baptized to join the Christ followers. And this guy is completely turned around.

And then he says in verse 17, let's pick it up here. Here's our text for today that we'll run through really quickly. Acts 22:17 through 21. And "When I returned to Jerusalem," by the way, you put together everything said earlier in Acts Chapter 9, everything in Galatians Chapters 1 and 2. But we realize this is three years after he went into Damascus. He went out into the northern Arabian desert, which creeps right up next to Damascus, and he spends time out there and finally says, I'm going to go down to Jerusalem. He goes "to Jerusalem and he was praying in the temple, and he fell into a trance." Trance, three times this word is used in the book of Acts, twice about Peter falling into a trance when he sees that vision come down of the sheet with all the kosher and non-kosher foods in it. Do you remember that? Smile at me if you remember that passage. That's a trance, he's in the middle of the day. And here we have it again, the third time the word is used. "Fell into a trance and saw him," that's Jesus "saying to me," Paul says, "make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me." Well, you seem pretty sure about that. Well, let's check it out. Let's try it. No, no, no, he says, I know they won't, verse 19, obviously, "and I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And when the blood of Stephen your witness, was being shed,' they were stoning him to death, "'I myself was standing by, approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.' And he said to me, 'Go, I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'" Maybe that's plan B for God. Do you think that's plan B for God with that long introductory setup? It was not plan B.

Just like Jeremiah before he was born, God said, you, Paul, are going to be the apostle to the Gentiles. He says in Romans 11, "I magnify my ministry." This is God's calling. I am the apostle to the Gentiles. Now, this is odd for Paul because he's well-versed in Judaism. He would be a great apostle to the Jews. But God does not save him during Christ's earthly ministry. He saves him after the earthly ministry, he makes a fisherman, Peter, the pastor of the church at Jerusalem and then later James, the pastor of the church at Jerusalem. These are not well-educated people. Paul is the best-educated person they got. He should waltz right into Jerusalem and take the pastorate there. But he doesn't. He comes and he goes they're not going to listen to me. And God says, of course, they're not going to listen to you. I'm telling you, they're not going to listen to you. Get out of Jerusalem. And in this trance, he gets this communication from God. You're not going to be safe here. I'm going to, bottom line, send you out of Jerusalem, away to the Gentiles. And he says, in between all my background is certainly led to that, clearly, because of all the things I've done, which I can't change, and they know about it. Are you following the theme here? Okay.

Let's talk about what happens here in verses 17 and 18. All of this is going to contribute to Paul knowing that he is anointed and appointed. Let's just use the word appointed, right? He is appointed by God to fulfill a task as the apostle to the Gentiles. All of this works in that direction. The first thing is and I'd love to have this, let's get direct words from Christ. "Make haste," verse 18, "and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me" there. That would be great. Before I go and apply for a job, I'd like to know whether or not this is going to work out. That'd be nice to know. And God here in this scene has Christ speak to Paul specifically about whether it would or wouldn't. Okay. And all



the people today out there trying to find what do I do, what do I have to smoke to have a trance. I want a trance where I can hear God telling me what to do. That would be awesome.

Three trances that I can identify in the New Testament. Three times the word is used, but I already told you two of them are about Peter. Peter, once described by Luke, uses the word trance and gets direct communication from Christ. The same thing happens as he relays that story in the next chapter and talks about having the trance and having that sheet come down. Paul here now in Chapter 22 talks about the trance that he has as he looks back on his life when he came to Jerusalem and God said get out of town. And then John on the island of Patmos is in a trance, you can argue, though the word is not used in that particular passage. He sees these visions. He's in the Spirit on the Lord's day and he has this big thing called revelation, which is God now giving him this layout of what's going to happen in the future. I'm a futurist. I believe that's what the book of Revelation told. So you have Peter, you have Paul, and you have John getting direct communication through the means of a trance. Okay? So if you think you're going to join that club let me just disappoint you right now. You're not. So don't seek a trance. You don't need to smoke anything, eat anything, take anything, drink anything. You're not going to have a trance. You may get communication but it won't be from Christ. So don't go trancing on me, okay?

But I can tell you this: that when God appoints people to a task he does like to communicate to them very clearly about things in particular with words, words that are now codified for us through the work of the apostles and prophets. Ephesians Chapter 2 verse 20 says, the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone." And the cornerstone is Christ. Christ now the apostles and prophets are speaking of Christ. And as Hebrews Chapter 1 verses 1 and 2 say, "God has spoken," to the people in the past, "your fathers" many portions and "in many ways, but he's spoken to us in these last days in his Son". So the Son now is speaking to you, Christian. You're supposed to be a follower of Christ. He is speaking to you through the work of the apostles and prophets. That's what Chapter 2 verses 1 through 4 is all about in Hebrews. These are the miraculous signs of God miraculously giving communication to his apostles. In our case, we don't talk about trances now, Peter and Paul and John. And that direct communication is helpful for them in two cases and helpful for us in the third case. But all of those things are giving us a sense that we are supposed to take the words of God that have been inscribed by the apostles and prophets and have the same kind of direction given to us the way direction was given to Paul.

Paul is supposed to fulfill this role, sovereignly fulfill the role as the apostle to the Gentiles. These words help him get there and the circumstances of his past help him get there. But I am saying how I am going to, Mike Fabarez in the 21st century, how am I going to fulfill my appointed role in this world? Well, I need some words from God. Do I have any? Compass BIBLE Church, right? Yes. It's called the Bible. The words of the apostles and prophets. Those are God's words. Just as I read real quickly in Acts Chapter 4, did you notice it, that your "father David said by the Holy Spirit"? Now I have words from the Holy Spirit through the medium of the prophet, in this case the prophet David. And so we have God's Word through the prophets. And guess what it becomes for us? It's the direction that I need to fulfill my



appointed role on this globe in this generation. Number one, you need to "See God's Direction In God's Word." It only took 30 minutes to get there. But there it is. Point number one, see God's direction in God's Word. God's direction in God's Word.

If God says get out of Jerusalem and I think I really want to stay, there's a falafel stand, I want to eat here for a few days. I got some friends here in town, and I just want to talk to my old rabbi friends. What should Paul do? He should leave. You should listen to the word. Go to John Chapter 5 with me real quick, simple statement, and we'll go back a chapter and just see how this works out in real life. Paul may want to stay in Jerusalem. He's got a lot of reasons to want to stay in Jerusalem, but he doesn't. He sees his past and those words all conflating together to say, yes, I should leave, and I'll go fulfill my role and my calling, God's sovereign calling for me which is to be the apostle to the Gentiles. Jesus has this bottom-line commitment. You've seen it in the garden. You've seen it elsewhere. But look at it here in verse 30 of John 5. He says, "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just." I'm going to make great decisions and I'm deferring to God. That's what he's saying. And he's going to say it in a very poignant way. "I seek not my own will, but the will of him who sent me." Now he's the anointed one / appointed one. He's got an appointed role. He's supposed to fulfill it. And he says, I'm going to fulfill it. He sent me here and I'm going to fulfill my role. And here's what I got to do. I got to take my wants and I got to subjugate those to the wants of God.

Now, Jesus, by the way, guess what he was reading by the time he was 12. He was well-versed in the words of God through the prophets of the Old Testament. He was submitting himself to the Word of God. And when he sees the Word of God as the second person of the Godhead in his humbled state, the kenosis state, the state of emptying himself of the independent exercise of his divine attributes, he's going to God's Word to learn God's will. There's more than that for him, of course, and he is in a special category. But he knows the will of God and he submits his will to it. That's the great thing about words. You can read them. You can read them again and you can say here's what they say. It's objective, it's codified. It's in black and white. It's propositional. It's objective. It's not subjective. I can read it and if it says this, then I'm supposed to take whatever I want and subject myself. Paul may have wanted to stay in Jerusalem. He didn't. He was going to leave because it basically had to be the same as Jesus. "Not my will, but yours be done." And that's his commitment. I seek not, I want not my wants. I want the will of him who sent me, "will" and "want." That's what the word "will" means, "want."

Now go back a chapter and see how this works. As the incarnate, humbled Christ, the second person of the Godhead, he has all the same problems I have. Well, I got a lot more than he had, but I have a lot of the same problems he had, which is I stay up too late and I get tired. I don't eat enough, I get hungry. I have all the same weaknesses of humanity. Now the Father, which it says of the Triune God in eternity past when Jesus was glorified, he never sleeps, he never slumbers the Old Testament said. Jesus had to sleep, right? Psalm 50, he's never hungry, he doesn't need food and yet Jesus needed food. He's never thirsty and yet Jesus needed water. That's why he's here. He's talking with a woman at the well because he was thirsty on a journey. He goes through Samaria and he's hungry in the heat of the day, he



needs a drink and so he asks for it. While he's getting a drink and talking to the lady at the well-off go the disciples into town. They come back with food. Now take a look at what happens in verse 32. He says to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about. And the disciples," as they often do, "said to one another, who brought him something to eat," has anyone brought him something to eat? And Jesus says, here's what I'm talking about. "My food is to do," he wants, "the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."

We have to come to the Bible with that perspective so that we might fulfill our purpose in this life. And I need to say, I need to subject what I want to what he wants and what he wants is first and foremost going to be given to me in propositional sentences and paragraphs in this thing called the Bible, where those prophets spoke by the Holy Spirit to put down propositional truth. And I'm going to say, what does it say? If this is how it defines marriage? Guess what? That's how I define marriage even if I don't want to define marriage that way. If he said, this is what I've got to do in terms of my work ethic, well then this is what I got to do about my work ethic. It doesn't matter what I want to do. I subject my will to his and that becomes my food. I want to be satisfied in that. I want to say I want to do his will. And I find it first and foremost in his Word.

One passage on this, well I've got three already, but go to the Old Testament book of Psalms and start with Psalm 1. I know you know this psalm, it's very famous, but I want you to look at it in light of what I've just said. This is the thing that directs us. This is the thing that steers us. This is the thing that gives us God's direction so that my appointment on this earth in the 21st century is fulfilled. Verse 1, be good, "Blessed is the man," it would be good, "if you didn't walk in the counsel of the wicked." I don't want to sit here and just do whatever the people say who are wicked. I don't want to hang out "in the way of sinners" and just do whatever they do. I don't want to "stand in the way of sinners," I don't want to sit down and hang out on the couch of the scoffers," their scoffing in the context of God's laws. Do you think there's anybody scoffing at God's laws these days? Don't hang out with them. Don't go over and have dinner with them. No, instead it'd be good by contrast, verse 2, that you would "delight in the law of the Lord." That's what the blessed man does. "His delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night." He delights just like Jesus in doing the will of God. And to do that I got to know the will of God. And I got to get into my head, and I got to saturate my mind with it every single day. I got to meditate on it. It's a great word in Hebrew, the word, the Hebrew word for meditate is the word to chew on it, to chew on it. I mean, the idea literally, it's a phonic word about making the sound of kind of chewing the cud. It's having that sound that a cow would make. And the idea is you've got to get this truth in your mind and your mind is cogitating. That's a good word. Cogitating on it all the time.

And that's what you will be like in contrast to the wicked, the sinners and the scoffers. You'll be "like a tree," verse 3, "that's planted by streams of water." That's exactly what God wants to do with your life. Plant you so that you have sustenance, "yielding fruit," at the right time, "in its season, and your leaf does not wither. And all that you do, you prosper." That'd be good. Prosper. How? In that I don't have a season without fruit. No, no. You have seasons without fruit. Things that aren't going to be great, right? Not spiritual fruit, but you're going to always have that. But you're not going to have the kinds of things you want when you want them.



That's going to happen, but you're going to prosper. Why? Because in contrast to the wicked, verse 4, they're not going to stand on the day of judgment. "They're like chaff, they're driven away." Verse 5, "they're not going to be there when the righteous are standing," there, they're going to get mowed down "in the judgment. But the Lord knows the way of the righteous." He knows it. This is what he's planned. "But the way of the wicked perish." The Bible is the thing that keeps us on track. You've got to get reacquainted with the Bible. You got to dive in. And some of you, I talk about the Daily Bible Reading and, you know, I kind of jokingly chide you for that, but you've got to get in the Bible every single day. It is the thing that God is going to use to direct you.

Can I be personal here? Whatever. I got the microphone. I'm running out of time but... I'm a Christian and I know a lot of you are because of God's sovereign aligning my brain with the book at particular times. At 17 years old, I just turned 18, I heard a message with passages of Scripture preached that in my mind just wrecked me. Just beat me up and brought me to the place of conviction of sin and repentance and faith and become a Christian. And then it wasn't within a matter of months, I was sitting in church under the teaching of my new pastor, who was teaching about our lives and the investment of stewardship of our lives and where we're going in life. And the word that he used in the Scriptures that he used it wrecked me again. And I said, okay, now I'm a follower of Christ. I don't know where to go. And I knew this from that sermon, what I was doing I need to just put that in the backseat. As a matter of fact, let's just open the window and toss it out. And it changed my life. Those texts of Scripture and the explanation of those texts changed my life.

I had my plan, I wanted to be a musician. I know it's silly. I wanted to be a musician, I had scholarships, I was going to do my thing and that was it. A studio guy in LA, that was my plan. And God said, nope. And he did it because his Word aligned with my mind. God put my mind in alignment with his Word, and all of a sudden now my will was subjugated to his will because the Word of God was given it. Now, those are big issues, right? My job, my Christianity. But let's go to the things that happen in my job. Right? Again, it's just personal, autobiographical. I'm preaching through Acts 13 and I'm preaching through Acts 13 on a sermon that started to convict me about the reality of some things I was facing in meetings that week about things that look to me like people were envious, like they were in Acts 13. And I said, God, this passage really keeps coming back to my mind. It's in my mind. I'm seeing it connect with the circumstances of my life. And I took out a sticky note in the middle of a meeting and I wrote it down, it sure would be good if there was a book on envy I could read.

I went and looked for a book on envy. I couldn't find very many, not in the recent past, at least. I'm at a conference just a few weeks later. I'm standing there and I don't know where, Nashville or somewhere. And one of the main acquisition editors at a publisher says to me, "Hey, we've published you before. Do you want to write anything? Anything on your heart?" And I said, "No, no, no, I got enough work. I don't want to write any books right now." Right? I didn't say that. I should have said, "No, no. Nothing's on my heart. Just this meeting, you know, I'm in the meeting. Let's pay attention to the guy speaking." And then he walked away and I went over to him and I grabbed his elbow. I said, well, wait a minute. Conviction of God.



Sermon Acts 13. I said, "You know, I was thinking, there are not any books on envy out there." The speaker started to speak. The publisher went to his corner. I saw him on his phone. I'm like, I hope... what did I say that for? Why do I do that? And, the guy speaks for 15 minutes. The publisher walks over to me. There's kind of a standing meeting at this conference. He says, hey, you got to do that book. Got to do that book. I think, "Nooooo!" Now, you got to write the book. Okay.

I'm getting letters right now and getting feedback right now from people who have just started to read this book. Some people have just read this book and they're saying that's changed my life, really affected my life, it's directed where I'm going. Okay. Was it God's appointed task for me to write a book on envy? I've written several books I never thought, ever! Number one, my seventh-grade English teacher never thought I would write any books. I never thought I'd write any books. I never thought I was going to write a bunch of books, if I thought as a new Christian, here's what I would write a book on, it would not be on envy. I probably would avoid books on sin in general, but that is what I've written now. How did that happen? I look at it from the perspective of God's Word affecting my thinking and leading me to make a dumb statement in a conference to someone who had the power to say yes, you got to write that book. I mean, I say that was dumb. Obviously it was God's will, but it wasn't my will. Trust me. I didn't want to write it, but I wrote it. And now God is changing people's lives because of it. That's one little project in my life, it was a big project for me. But that project was all precipitated on an encounter with God's Word. I'm just telling you, get in God's Word and it's going to do things because it is the primary means of God directing you. All right.

The rest of this hyper-speed, light speed, like Star Trek, the stars are about to turn into lines of white. Verse 19, where we were. Back to Acts 22. God says to him, Christ says to him, "they're not going to listen to you here." Paul says, "I know, I know they're not. Man, everybody here knows, these Christians, I'm not going to be a teacher in this church." "They know in one synagogue after another, I imprisoned them, I beat them," all those, "who believe in you." "The blood of Stephen. When I was there, I was holding their coats. I was cheering them on while they killed Stephen." "I was watching over the garments" of the guys. "There's no way this is going to work. I'd really like to stay here. I would love to be the guest speaker. I would love to take over the pastorate here. I would love to minister here for the rest of my life in Jerusalem." This is what every Jew born in Tarsus or anywhere else trained at the feet of Gamaliel. You'll want to be there in Jerusalem. This is the center, this is the New York City of it. Right? Of course you want to be here. But he said my past is not going to let that happen.

Now again, we're all going to get to this last statement. "Go, I'll send you far away to the Gentiles." And he's going to in Chapter 11 of Romans, he's going to "magnify his ministry." This is God's calling for me. And when he finishes his life after all of this travel, the reason you have maps in the back of your Bible, is because Paul is traveling all over the ancient world, he's going to say, I finished the course, that's my course and I finished it. But this is his past. How did he feel about that past? We know from other passages, you read First Timothy Chapter 1. He feels bad about his past. It's bad. It's bad that I persecuted. It's bad that I killed people. It's bad that I cheered on the first martyr of the Church. That was bad. Have you ever felt bad about your past? No? Nobody here? You were bad in the past occasionally. Things



you look at and I hate that, I regret that, I wish I hadn't done that. I get that. I understand that. Paul felt that way in an amazingly egregious way. "I was just terrible." But his past became part of the direction of his life.

Number two, you need to "Seek God's Direction in Your Past." God is at work in your life sovereignly. Sovereignly. The despot, the benevolent despot of the universe, has orchestrated your past so that it might direct you in your future. He is using your past to direct you. This is a bad thing. I bet, Paul, if you said Paul, if you were the despot of the universe, would you have yourself killing Christians? And the answer would be no. But that's exactly God's plan. It's a bad thing, I get it. God's sovereign plan so that in this particular case no one would want to hear him in Jerusalem, because that's not where you should be. You should be in Ephesus, you should be in Achaia, you should be in Macedonia, you should be in Rome, you shouldn't be here. Your past has just shut a door for you. And all I'm telling you is that God is involved in all of that.

What good did that do for him? Well, it shut the door so he knew exactly where he should be. Not to mention, now that he's back, let's think about the present day. He's shackled on the steps of Antonia Fortress looking down at a bunch of Jewish people who should be sitting at his feet listening to all of his insight on the Old Testament law and how it all leads to Christ. But instead, he's being arrested and he's about to get shipped off to Rome. This is God's plan for the apostle to the Gentiles. And his past is pushing him in that direction. What are some of the upsides? I don't know. I referenced First Timothy Chapter 1. He says there in that passage as he ends with a doxology about the greatness of God, "the immortal, the invisible God, the great King, the only sovereign." There's a great line in that passage, literally that's what it says. The only sovereign. He says that after saying, "You know what? God's grace is so abundant in my life. God's grace to me. Looking at me the worst. I was a blasphemer. I persecuted the Church." But look, I'm just thinking. Do you think you could get the teaching out of the Apostle Paul with the kind of heartfelt like empathy for the fact that anyone could be saved, he would say, "God chose me so that I could be a model and a pattern of the patience of God, the mercy of God, the grace of God." Here is the apostle to the Gentiles. He writes half of the New Testament glorifying the grace of God. Do you think that has anything to do with his past? Of course it did. Why? Because God sovereignly appointed his pastors like he sovereignly appoints worms and plants and weather. So that Paul would live that life as bad as it was that he might become the apostle of the Gentiles and magnify grace the way that he did. And we have in his writings an amazing codification of the depths of the mercy and grace and abundant kindness of God toward sinners.

Even in our passage, look back up to verse 4. We just read this. Acts 22, "I persecuted this Way unto death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priests and the whole council of elders can bear me witness." Here is a statement that is basically a persuasive statement about look how against it I was, and now I'm for it. This is a persuasive yet dramatic turnaround. Talk about a 180 repentance. You see repentance in Paul's life like you don't see it hardly in anybody else's life. It is a persuasive act on God's part to show the repentance that is going to be persuasive in people's lives who need to repent.



I could go on and on, but at least jot this down. Acts Chapter 17 verse 26 when it comes to your life. God has placed you at a particular time on the timeline for you to be born. He determined the boundaries of your dwelling place. You were raised where you were supposed to be raised. You were born when you were supposed to be born, and your past to aim you wherever God is going to aim you. It starts where you were born, when you were born. That's the picture of God's planning, his sovereignty over all people. No mistake that you were born when you were born. No mistake you were born to the people that you're born to. No mistake you were raised where you were raised. All of this is God's strategic plan in your life. Sovereign. He aims you, to quote Philippians Chapter 1 verses 3 through 6, he aims you as someone who is saved now. He's brought you, as it says in Acts 17, to grope for him and seek him and find him. And now what he started in you, as it goes on to say in verse 6, he's going to continue, he's going to complete it all the way until you see Christ. So God has aimed you, he started you in a particular place. He's aimed you in a particular direction. He's brought you to himself. We could tell the stories of how God's Word and God's circumstances have brought you to repentance and faith if you're a real Christian here today, and then he's going to complete his plan for you.

As a matter of fact, let's just quote a passage we should quote way more often, Ephesians Chapter 2 verse 10, "You are his workmanship in Christ." He's created you and filed off the edges the way he wants. You're his workmanship, so that you can do what? That you can carry out all these good works. "He's created you for good works, which he has prepared," here we go, by watching the tape. No. "He's prepared them beforehand, that you should walk in them." God has a plan for you. You're the appointed one. To do what? Whatever it is that God has planned for you, and you need to lean into that and trust that God in your past, God in your present, and all the things, the good, bad and the ugly of your past, all directing you so that you can seek through his Word and the circumstances of your life what's the next step to glorify God. You got to see God's direction in your past.

We're in Acts 22, drop down to the last verse, "And he said, 'Go, I'm going to send you far away.'" Is that plan B? No, I read it and I said, it's not plan B. This plan A, this is exactly what God planned. The most gifted, insightful Jewish person who would be a great apostle to the Jews, he makes him an apostle to the Gentiles for exactly the reasons he wants. God knows the inscrutable plans of God, to quote Paul's own words in Romans 11, "unsearchable, inscrutable." But God gets his work done. As a matter of fact, a few chapters early he says something that's been quoted to you many times, and I hope you believe it. Romans Chapter 8 verse 28. Right? "God works all things together for good, for those who love him and are called according to HIS purpose." It's not about your purpose. It's not good based on what you wanted. The good for me was to be some studio musician, right? That was good for me. It probably wouldn't have been good. I'd be playing at the Hilton this weekend, you know, for tips or whatever. But the reality is that's not what God wanted. I subjugated my will to his will, the Word of God, the circumstances, my past, when I was born, where I was born, and all the circumstances sovereignly leading me to do what God asked me to do. And God has done the same with you. And the question is do you see the wisdom in that? You should see the wisdom in that.



Number three, "You Should See God's Wisdom in God's Direction." He's directed you. He's given you the past he's given you. He's given the gifts he's giving you. All of that is God's wisdom so that he might fulfill his purpose in you. You've got to see that. God has a purpose for your life and you are fulfilling that. No matter what the circumstances are, unemployed, right? It doesn't matter. Infertile? In a one-room apartment? Widowed? It doesn't matter what your life looks like. You have to believe that God sovereignly appoints worms. Right? You have to know that. And he appoints them for his purposes. And we have to lean into that and say that's exactly what God has got me on this timeline for whatever, I'm going to do it, whatever comes next. That was one of my sermons I think I listened on the back. Whatever comes next, I'm going to do it. And I'm going to say, I'm just going to say I'm going to glorify God in this and seek his will.

Paul could have been x, y, or z, but God made him that apostle to the Gentiles, and I love that I've referenced that many times. Romans Chapter 11, starts in verse 11 and crescendos in verse 13. He says, "I'm now speaking to the Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, and I magnify my ministry." I just magnify and you know, what? Is it going to affect the Jews? In fact, it will. I think it might "make some of my fellow Jews jealous and some of them might be saved." But I know I'm going to magnify the thing God's called me to do. I am what I am by the grace of God, I get that. But I am grateful that God has put me on the timeline, given me these circumstances that I can lean into this. God is faithful.

Speaking of that fidelity that phrase about God being faithful, "his mercies are new every morning" comes at a time when Israel was struggling. The struggle itself was part of God's plan. The punishment of them being in Babylon was part of God's plan. As Jeremiah watches the temple being destroyed, that was part of God's plan. And he says, yet in the middle of all that great is your faithfulness, you're faithful because you're sovereign. If God is not sovereign then he can't be faithful. He just can't. If God is not sovereign he can't be God. We have to accept and embrace it. Regardless of the charlie horse you get in your mind, you think, "What about responsibility? And what are we? Automatons and robots? And you know, I'm a fatalist." Stop with all that. The Bible presents God as a sovereign God. We have to embrace that truth and stop with our kind of little mind trying to say, well, I can't buy that because it doesn't compute for me. Yeah, we are responsible agents. We make real decisions. Those real decisions will be judged, we will be rewarded and judged based on our decisions. But those decisions as part of God's sovereign plan are working us to say that God is a faithful God working to quote Ephesians Chapter 1, "Everything after the counsel of his own will." Counsel. He sits down and he is the architect of these things, and in that we rely on him without fear.

Let's pray. God, give us more confidence in your truth. Give us more assurance that your faithfulness means that it's no mistake that we're seated right here in this room, or listening on the radio right now to this message, that we are where we are, whatever the circumstances, no matter if it's my own sin, like the Apostle Paul saw, that it caused this thing that I see as a left turn, that left turn is exactly where I should be. Exactly where God would ask me to glorify him and do what's right. The next step do what we should because we're submitting our will to



your will revealed in your Word, seen in circumstances that ultimately is displaying your wisdom. Help us to appreciate that and worship that even more today.

In Jesus name. Amen.