

CHRIST COVENANT CHURCH
Sermon Transcript
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Heidelberg Catechism – Lord’s Day 10
Psalm 139
All Things
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Psalm 139. I invite you to turn there as we begin. We will turn to the catechism shortly, and you can find it printed in your bulletin, Lord's Day 10. We start with this familiar Psalm 139, a Psalm of David. It is a Psalm that exalts in God's omniscience, in his immensity, and in his sovereignty. We read in the first six verses,

O Lord, you have searched me and known me!
²You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
³You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
⁴Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.
⁵You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it.

This is David's way of saying - oh Lord, where I am, what I think, and what I say, you know all of it. Even before I'm there, even before I think it, even before the word is formed on my tongue, such is your omniscience, your all-knowing. We continue verse seven:

Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
⁸If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
⁹If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
¹⁰even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.
¹¹If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"
¹²even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.

This is David's way of saying - not only do you know me, but you are with me. No matter how high, no matter how low, no matter how far away, no matter how dark and mysterious my situation may seem to me, Lord, you are there.

See, his omniscience is that attribute of God with reference to his knowledge. Immensity is the attribute of God that means he fills all in all. It's everywhere. Then verse 13:

¹³ For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.
¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.

David is saying - Lord, you have formed me, and not only have you formed me, you formed all of my days. He's saying, before I was conceived, before I emerged from the womb, before I lived out my days, including the days that are yet to come, all of them were written down according to your sovereign will.

It's a remarkable psalm. It's familiar to many of us, but don't lose the wonder, perhaps even the scandal of it. But it's good news for each of us with this psalm to say, Lord, you know me. Lord, you are with me. Lord, you have formed me and all of my days. And here's what's even harder, you have formed all of the days of those that I love, those that I know. It's a psalm to exalt in the Lord's omniscience, in his immensity, and in his sovereignty. And with that, it's no wonder that we have the response in verses 17 and 18.

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
¹⁸ If I would count them, they are more than the sand.
I awake, and I am still with you.

In other words, after exalting in the Lord and his sovereign disposition of all things, it is a striking metaphor that God has a book, and he's the author, and he's written out your days and the days of everyone that you know. And some of those days go longer than you ever thought possible. Their

nineties or past the century mark, and some of those days end far too short, but all of those days written in His book before one of them comes to pass.

Now, we don't neglect that God means to sustain us by the use of secondary means. That's why we wear seat belts, why we have cancer treatments, and yet it is true that all of us are invincible. You're invincible. Until the days marked out for you come to an end. And ultimately no matter what we do what extraordinary measures are taken when we come to the end of our days that God has already written in his book such will be the end. And so, it's no surprise that David in response to this knowledge about God's own knowledge he says these thoughts you notice the several things he says because it's complicated. They're precious and they're vast.

They're precious. This is a great comfort and yet they're vast. The thoughts of God are more than the sand of the seashore. You can't collect all the thoughts of God. You can't put into a bottle all the things that God knows. They are infinite. But notice what he says, "I awake." Here's the bottom line, "I'm still with you."

The story of the Bible is the story of divine providence. On every page, in every promise, behind every prophecy is the sure hand of God. He sustains all things, he directs all things, he plans all things, he ordains all things, he superintends all things. As Paul says in Ephesians 1, "he works all things after the counsel of his will." Don't miss that middle phrase, "after the counsel." Why wouldn't God just work? He works things according to his will. We know that to be true, but that middle phrase, "after the counsel of his will," would suggest there's wisdom. He works all things according to what is best and wise in keeping with his own will. That's the God of the Bible.

You may have seen the news, it was very sad news from a couple of months ago. So, this was public, I'm not saying anything that wasn't in many places online, but it was revealed that Philip Yancey disqualified from any future ministry, revealed that he had covered up an eight-year affair. Many of you maybe have read some of his books. I had read his books years ago, and there were things that were helpful. He's a good writer, a vulnerable writer. But I have to say, you know, no theological tradition is immune from scandal. I have to say, however, I always found his theology to be rather unpredictable and often unhelpful. Here's an example from a book, *Reaching for the Invisible God*, some decades ago. Yancey wrote, "I find myself stumbling over my friend's phrase, 'the way God arranges things.' Does God indeed position a nail in the road so that I will run over it on the way to the hospital? Does he wind hairs around the sink trap so that it will clog just before the company arrives? I too instinctively blame God when bad things happen." I just want to pause there. Okay, we can appreciate his honesty, but you ought not to instinctively blame God when bad things happen. "Calling into question my relationship of trust should I? Does God arrange flat tires, computer crashes, viral germs in my life as custom tests of faith similar to the tests of faith that Abraham and Job endured. I doubt it. When Princess Diana died in an automobile crash I got a phone call from a television producer. Can you appear on our show? He asked. We want you to explain how God could possibly have allowed such a terrible accident. Without thinking I replied. Could it have

something to do with the drunk driver going over 90 miles an hour in a narrow tunnel. How exactly was God involved?"

Now here's what's tricky about what Yancey lays out there. The Bible does not describe God as maliciously placing nails in the road, malevolently winding hairs around the sink trap that it might clog. Yancey's description there of sovereignty is a clumsy one, whether he realized it or not. Because his description does not allow for any secondary causes. He has confused a belief in God's providence with the notion that God is the actor of everything that takes place. He has confused a belief in God's providence with the notion that God is the one acting and doing all of the things.

So, he says, if a reckless driver killed Princess Diana, then how was God involved? As if those are the only two options. Either the person who was responsible for the crash bears no responsibility, and if he does bear some responsibility, as we all would say, then how was God involved? But those, of course, are not the two options presented in the Bible, and it is, I submit to you, a world away from Psalm 139.

The God who hems us in before and behind, the God who sees our unformed parts, the God who has written all of our days in his book before one of them comes to pass. Divine providence is not a small theme in the Bible. It is not merely a deduction of other truths or something that we distill from a handful of obscure passages. I liken it to this, the doctrine of divine providence is the soundtrack of Scripture. Sometimes you don't even realize that it's there, but it is the soundtrack to everything that is happening in the Bible.

Everywhere present, even if at times it's like you're watching a movie and you don't even know that the music is making you feel comforted or fearful or sure that something bad is going to happen or feeling rapturous. So, providence is the soundtrack of Scripture. Even when you forget and cannot hear it, it's there. Like the book of Esther, where God's name is never mentioned, but in everything from a beauty contest to the king's insomnia, we see that story is about God advancing his purposes.

The God of the Bible is a God who leaves nothing to chance, and he does not simply react, he predestines. He does not merely turn hard situations for our good; he ordains hard situations for our good. Our God is never confused, never caught off guard. To quote Augustine, "His will is the necessity of all things."

Here's what we mean by providence. Said this morning, this is tied with Lord's Day 1 for my favorite Lord's Day question and answer 27.

Providence is the almighty and ever-present power of God by which God upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty—all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand.

Do not miss all that the catechism is saying. God's power is almighty and ever-present. Not just almighty and somehow distant, or ever-present but somehow constrained, but both, almighty and ever-present. That means his power is limitless and boundless. In God, all things live and move and have their being. He rules heaven and earth and all creatures in such a way that whatever befalls them, success or failure, blessing or adversity, life or death, no matter what comes, no matter the situation, nothing around us or to us or about us is the product of random happenstance. We can be confident that all things come to us from the wise hand of our loving heavenly Father. So don't miss that because there are certain philosophies that believe in determinism. Believe that there is a kind of natural or mechanistic determinism, or in a blind fate. This is not the doctrine of blind fate. Providence is not simply the belief that even everything happens for a reason, or simply the understanding that everything was foreordained. Other philosophies can believe those things. But specifically, that all that comes to pass, especially for us as people, comes from a loving, heavenly Father.

Providence is a doctrine for the Christian. Yes, sovereignty is true for all people, but this is specifically a doctrine. This is the catechism saying, what do we believe by God the Father Almighty? What does it mean to call God our heavenly Father? Sovereignty is God's rule and sway over everything. Providence is that sovereign sway for you, for me, for his people, for his children. I'm sure I've used this illustration before, but I would in my previous denomination, and we had, these were our doctrinal standards, so it was fair game. In fact, it was expected as people would come forward for their ordination exams, they would be examined on the Canons of Dorth, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession. And I would often ask this question. I didn't mean to be snarky, but I did mean to be a little tricky. I would say, suppose that you are visiting someone in the hospital. And they ask you, why is this happening? What did God have to do with this? And there's some very difficult situation, some tragic circumstances. And usually people would say, well, I would say, you know, right now we don't know, and we're just here to, just want to pray for you. And we can face those questions later. Okay, maybe some pastoral instinct. And then I would press further and say, well, they really, really want to know. And they say, pastor, I want, I'm asking you, can you tell me? So, I would say, would you feel comfortable saying to that person in the hospital room in their moment of crisis that all things come to us not by chance but from God's Fatherly hand, that health and sickness and prosperity and power, and then I would just very cheekily quote the whole thing, which unfortunately many of them didn't know I was quoting the whole thing, because almost always when I would ask the question, simply reframing question and answer 21, would you be comfortable in the hospital holding that crying mother, daughter, grandparent's hand to say, we know that God is a good heavenly Father and in his mercy even this has come from his hand. He almost always would say, I would certainly not say that. I would not feel comfortable saying that. And I would say later, I'm not comfortable ordaining them. But the exams were sadly almost impossible to fail.

This is meant to be not a theological trick or trap, but the very essence of God's Fatherly care for his people. We see in the Bible again and again that nothing is outside God's control or his

foreordination. The heavens and the earth were created because God said let there be light and the light that did not exist had no choice but to come into existence. The floods came because God sent them. Sarah had a baby because God promised. Joseph was sold into slavery because God had a plan. The Israelites escaped Egypt because God delivered them. They inherited the Promised Land because God fought for them. They were shipped off to Babylon because God punished them. And the exiles returned because God stirred up the heart of King Cyrus to let them go.

Or consider the book of Job. In the first chapter, Satan is given permission to what amounts to ruining Job's life, or so it feels that way. And in one day, Job gets four dreadful messages. Do you remember? Number one, the Sabaeans destroy the oxen and the donkeys and their servants. Number two, a fire burns up the sheep and their servants. Number three, the Chaldeans make a raid on the camels and kill them. And then worst of all, number four, a windstorm rips through the oldest son's house, and all of Job's children are killed. Now, who is behind all of this? Certainly, Satan is to blame. He was given permission to test the Lord's servant Job, so Satan bears blame. Certainly, the Sabaeans and the Chaldeans must be held responsible. There are two natural disasters. There's a fire, and there's a windstorm. But somehow sending and superintending all of it as the planner, not the actor of any evil, but the planner of all these things is God himself, which is why Job's response. These four reports come to him, Sabians, Chaldeans, fire and a windstorm, and what does Job say but, "The Lord gave. And the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

If ever there were an opportunity to say that was Satan, to say it was simply a drunk driver in a tunnel, to say what in the world does God have to do with a fire or with a windstorm. Job does none of it. In fact, you don't need the 42 chapters of Job if God is not a sovereign God. All Job has to say after that at the end of chapter one is God's not in control. Life is terrible. There's pain. It's horrible. God's not in control, and he's not sovereign. That's the one answer that never seems to enter Job's mind.

Later, he cries out in the midst of unthinkable pain and unbelievable faith, "Though he slay, me I will hope in him." To be sure, people are often in the Bible asking that question, "Why?" A cry of lament. There are all sorts of bewildered cries for help and many cries of despair. The Psalms are filled with them. God's people then and now, including in this room, you struggle to understand what is God doing? I never knew something could hurt this much. Why has he done this? As you go to God's people in the Bible, however, you will never find them concluding that God is not the sovereign hand appointing these difficulties. No matter how debilitating the pain or how shocking the circumstances, the assumption is always operative, this somehow is from God.

They struggle to make sense of the suffering, but they never make sense of it by minimizing the superintending sovereign power of God. When famine strikes the land of Judah and Naomi loses her husband and her two sons, she says in her anguish, "Do not call me Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me." She has business to do with God, and there's going to be some wrestling in prayer. It seems to never have occurred to her. Well, obviously God had nothing to do with this. She sees the struggle and is wrestling to find God's purpose, but she does not doubt

that - I have to run to God with this. The God of the Bible is the God with power and sovereign sway over all things.

Psalm 33: 10, “the Lord foils the plans of the nations. He thwarts the purposes of the people.” Psalm 135: 7, “he makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth. He sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses.” 2 Kings 17: 25, “he shuts the mouths of lions to preserve the righteous.” That's Daniel 6. And then 2 Samuel 17, he unleashes lions to judge the wicked. We know from Exodus and elsewhere, he hardens hearts. Now, let's be very clear here: God cannot sin. It's blasphemous to suggest that God would sin. So, he is not the author of the evil that takes place. He is not the one to act out the evil, and yet we mustn't say simply that he allows. There's, this is not a theology lecture, so, we won't go to the Westminster Confession, but it's very interesting in the Westminster Confession, there's a distinction in a couple of chapters between God's permission and his bare permission, B-A-R-E. His bare permission would be God just kind of covering his eyes, just the world spins off, and it just happens. And the confession says, that's not God. There's nothing that happens by his bare permission. But it does say in other places, his will to permit. See, theologians want to make this important distinction, that God is not the actor of evil, as He is the actor, the one who carries out the action of the good. He superintends both, but there is not a...the ultimacy is the same, and yet the carrying out of the action is distinct. God uses secondary causes. So that Edwards, Jonathan Edwards, dares to say that if we mean that God is the one who has so written all of our days that everything comes to pass, in that sense he is the author. And yet Edwards says the very phrase, the author of evil, carries with it the assignment of some blame for evil that we are best not to use that phrase. Yes, everything that transpires in the world is according to God's sovereign plan, and yet the willing of that plan takes place in different ways. There are things that God wills to permit to take place, not by a bare permission, but willing to permit as evil people carry out evil activities.

We mustn't lessen the many passages that speak of God carrying out his work in the world in these sovereign terms. Judges 9:23, “God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem.” Now that was to frustrate their plans and a judgment. 1 Samuel 16:14, “Wow the spirit of the Lord has departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him.” Isaiah 45: 6 and 7, “I am the Lord and there is no other. I form light, create disaster. I bring prosperity and create disaster. I, the Lord, do all these things.” Amos 3: 6, “When a disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it? Even death is in the Lord's hands. The Lord brings death and makes alive. He brings down to the grave and he raises up.” 1 Samuel 2: 6, “There is no other God besides me. I put to death, and I bring to life. I have wounded, and I will heal. No one can deliver out of my hand.” Deuteronomy 32: 39, not just the big picture but the tiniest details. People say, well God's not a micromanager. Praise God, he is. Some people liken God's sovereignty as if it's an ocean liner crossing from the United Kingdom to America, and God is sort of steering the ocean liner, and he makes sure that it's all getting to its final destination, and yet aboard the ocean liner people are free and they're doing all sorts of things. Sort of the big picture he's getting us there. Well, that sounds sort of nice, kind of theodicy, maybe to let God off the hook. But of course, if he's really in charge of the ship that needs to cross the Atlantic, and he's really let everyone aboard the ship have complete

freedom of will to do whatever they want, who's to say that one of them doesn't sabotage the decks, or fire the torpedoes, or run aground into an iceberg? Now to safely superintend the big picture, God has to foreordain the smallest details. And this is the testimony of Scripture, Proverbs 16:33, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord."

You ever wonder why the old, you know, the Puritans and old ethics manuals were always against card games or games of dice or chance? It was because of that verse, "the lot is cast into the lap, every decision is from the Lord." They considered that games of chance was calling upon the Lord. It was sort of casting lots to ask God to make the dice do something, and that therefore it was a violation of the third commandment, it was taking the Lord's name in vain. I don't know that that's persuasive, and yet I appreciate their sense of wanting to take seriously that even in the smallest things, a game of chance, all of it comes from the hand of God.

"A man's steps are directed by the Lord. How can anyone understand his own way?" Proverbs 20:24. Jeremiah 10:23, "I know, O Lord, that a man's life is not his own. It is not for man to direct his steps." And what we read earlier from Psalm 139, "all the days ordained for me were written in your book." Daniel 4:35, he says, "God does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth." God so rules over all things with sovereign power and authority so that he immutably appoints whatsoever comes to pass.

Now, at this point, you may say, okay, I believe it, I understand, this is a Reformed church, this is Presbyterian, we believe in God's sovereignty. And if that's all we did, and we said, I see it in the Bible, it yet might not be a comfort to us. Because it might seem like, well, there's God, and he's God, and by a raw exercise of power, I suppose he can do whatever he wants. But the doctrine of providence goes farther than that. And it asserts that all of this power, all of this authority, all of this sovereign predetermination is for you if you belong to Christ. It comes not from a tyrant, but from a Father.

If you were blessed to have a good father, and they're all imperfect, our earthly fathers, but if you had a good earthly father, don't you want him to be strong? Don't you want him to be powerful? If he was abusive or he was dictatorial, then you want him to be stripped of his power. But the degree to which he is good is the degree to which you want him to have as much power as possible. It's like that line from *Chariots of Fire* where Eric Little's father remarks to a skeptic that God may be a dictator, but I, a benign loving dictator. The power of providence has a benevolent purpose.

You remember after 9-11, the story of Todd Beamer came out, and there was a book, *Let's Roll*. His widow, Lisa Beamer, Todd Beamer was on flight 93 and with some other passengers stormed the cockpit, crashed the plane, but avoided further damage into the Pentagon. They were heroes. Lost their lives. They were Christians. Lisa Beamer reflected on how after that, well-meaning people would sometimes do more harm than good by refusing to acknowledge that God had a plan in what had taken place in the death of her husband. She writes, "On Monday, as I listened to the well-intentioned speakers who were doing their best to comfort but with little, if any, direct reference to

the power of God to sustain us, I felt I was sliding helplessly down a mountain into a deep crevasse. As much as I appreciated the kindness of the wonderful people who tried to encourage us, that afternoon was actually one of the lowest points in my grieving. It wasn't the people, or event, or the place. Instead, it struck me how hopeless the world is when God is factored out of the equation." He said, you weren't helping me when you took God out of the equation. You're trying to rescue God, a kind of theodicy, and you weren't helping me.

How does the knowledge of providence help us? The catechism gives a wonderful threefold answer. We can be patient when things go against us, that's how I learned the catechism here, it says, in adversity. We can be thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing will separate us from his love.

Let's make those our three points of application. Number one, what good is this doctrine of providence? It means that we can be patient when things go against us. Providence is not only believing that God is the one writing the world's history. It is the belief and the trust that God is writing your story, and it's a good story. When Joseph was in prison, when baby Moses was floating down the Nile, when Haman was plotting to kill the Jews, who except God could have known the good that was in store? We love those stories because it's like seeing the end of the game when your team wins, and you're happy to see the very pit of despair because you know how it ends, but they didn't at the time.

You will not find a story anywhere in the Bible of someone in their great trouble who trusted in the Lord and found that their trust was in vain. Think of all the famous stories of Abraham, Joseph, Rahab, Ruth, David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Daniel. The list goes on and on. Godly men and women, every one of them trusted God in the midst of trial and discovered that providence was on their side. Spurgeon said in the midst of his sufferings, suffered from gout and physical ailments and melancholy and depression, he said, "It would be a very sharp and trying experience to me to think that I have an affliction which God never sent me, that the bitter cup was never filled by his hand, that my trials were never measured out by Him nor sent to me by his arrangement of their weight and quantity." You think about the drinking some bitter, horrible potion, and you hate it, and there's an aftertaste, and it's gross beyond words, and that the taste doesn't leave you. But what helps you? Someone says, where did that bitter potion come from? I don't know. It came from the devil. What truly helps you? It tastes just as bitter, but it came from my heavenly Father. And there's a reason behind this potion. I don't see it now. You, some of you, are in the midst of difficult situations. Pain has gone on for weeks, months, maybe years. I wish I could say exactly what God is doing, so do your friends and those who love you, but we don't know all the particulars, but we know from the Bible that God, for his people, every one of his people is writing a good story. Do you trust him in that? You may be in the middle of a terrible chapter, the worst chapter in the whole book, and it may have been a rotten plot twist in your life. The Bible is full of people lamenting those plot twists. They're awful. But providence gives us hope not to lose heart. The story is not over. It is not the final chapter. God is a skilled author, and we can be sure that for each one of his children he has penned already a happy ending.

We can be patient when things go against us. We can be thankful when things go well. We saw that this morning, the importance of honoring God as God, is giving thanks. Calvinists should be the happiest people on the planet because we have more reasons to be grateful than anyone else. We know that all things come to us from his Fatherly hand. No gift is by accident. No good thing has come to us by chance. Every blessing in your life, it is not just the inexorable chain of some list of events or the product of your libertarian free will. It's from God. If you have a job, it's from God. If you have a family, it's from God. If you have good memories, it's from God. If you have a good church, it's from God. If your life is made better in some small way by your dog, even by your cat, by pizza, or popcorn, or ice cream, or a birthday, or clothes, or friends, or a baby, then you thank God for that. The God of providence is way better than Amazon because he delivers packages of new mercy every morning, and the shipping's always free.

And then third, for the future, we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father. Some of us know the Bible so well, we've lost wonder at what God really does for his people. We read Genesis 3.15 and we just love it. We say, yes. The seed of the woman's going to crush the seed of the serpent. And we think, yes, that's Jesus. And it took a long time for all of that promise to come true. And we're still waiting for the final consummation of all that was inaugurated in the coming of Christ. God's people in the Bible lived a long time with promises that seemed to have been forgotten, but every one of them came true. How did Joseph feel those years when it seemed his life was utterly ruined? We think about the promise to Abraham, he would be a great nation. And we get excited for the Sunday school lesson about trusting God, and we forget that Abraham and Sarah waited decades for that child to come. And they almost then had to kill him. And then Isaac's twins go nuts on each other, and Jacob can't get things figured out with his wives, and his sons are acting so stupid. And his family almost dies of famine. And then they all come into slavery in Egypt and exile in Babylon. And along the way, David's whole line seems to be snuffed out by Queen Adalia. And then the prophets go silent for 400 years. And then the one prophet who comes, John the Baptist, is killed by Herod. And then the Messiah gets crucified. That doesn't look like a happy ending.

But we can be confident with the future. That promise to Abraham was an absolute surefire, can't fail promise. And so here we are, children of Abraham, children of promise, children of providence, now looking back to see that God has been at work all along. He's been guiding us, prompting us, leading us, steering us, carrying out his purposes. And he does the same even today. Not just are these stories from the past. He's the same God. You are his son or his daughter and he loves you. And he wants you to grow in whatever days he gives you. And like any good father, he wants what is best for you. And like a wise parent, he knows what is best.

We love Psalm 139, that's why I started there. One of the things we forget about the Psalms is they're also meant to be read as the songs of Jesus. Jesus would have grown up singing the Psalms. And in every way, all of them are in some way to be found on the lips of Jesus. And so, you think of Jesus saying, the Son to his Father, you know me. I can go into the grave, and there you will be with

me. No matter how far away I seem, even if it feels to me as if I have been forsaken by You, my heavenly Father, yet you are with me. Even if there is the very darkness of night, you will be as light to me. For you formed me, the Son being joined to human nature in the womb of the virgin, fearfully and wonderfully made. And the Lord Jesus of all people knew what it was three times he predicted his death and his resurrection. He knew that his days were written. And he said in the garden, if it be, O Lord, if there's another way with this cup, because he knew it was a bitter cup he had to drink. And yet he said, nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done. Acts 4: 27 through 28, for truly in this city, here's the apostles preaching, "in Jerusalem they were gathered together against your holy servant whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." See what it says there? These were wicked people who put Jesus to death. There's no question about that from the sermon in Acts 4. And yet they were only doing what God had predestined to take place. There is no greater evil that has ever been perpetrated in the history of the world, no greater suffering ever experienced than the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. And right there in black and white, God says, they only did what I had already determined would happen.

It's a good story that he was writing for his Son, and a good story that he's writing for all of his adopted sons and daughters. We do not have to be afraid of the future. We do not have to be anxious about trials. We also don't have to be nervous about blessings as if you said thanks to God too many times, he would suddenly get wise to the fact that you've actually had a few too many blessings. You've had too much spiritual Mountain Dew, and it's time for the spiritual broccoli to come. He's going to balance out all the things. Wait a second, Gabriel, they've gotten too many good things. It doesn't work like that. There's no balancing of the scales with God because he is always for you. Doesn't make you pay for the fun stuff in your life with more pain. He's only interested in your good, always interested in your good. He does not vacillate between loving you and loathing you. His affections are set upon you. His providence is fixed upon you for your spiritual well-being in Christ. That's the story of the Bible. And that's your story if you belong to Jesus. No matter what chapter you're in right now, no matter how much you would have loved to have a different chapter written for you, God is all-seeing, all-knowing, all-planning, and here's the good news of his providence. He is always on your side for the sake of Jesus.

Let's pray. *Loving heavenly Father, what a gift and a kindness that we can call you our heavenly Father. And know that you so rule over all things, leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty, not just some things or most things, but all things, in fact, come from your Fatherly hand. Help us to trust. Help us to love you. And help us to know how much you love us in Jesus, we pray. Amen.*