



Sermon Transcription • Abbotsford

Let's Pray - Jan. 27/28, 2018 - Jeff Bucknam

On the Right Side of History - (Acts 4:23-30)

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

I don't know if you know this, or if it has occurred to you, but January is almost over. Praise Jesus [laughter], right? I mean, it's the month that's furthest away from the summer (at least it feels that way). Christmas is over and all of us are looking forward to spring break, so we've just got to bear through the next two months. You, of course, know that the Lord our God has endowed certain creatures with the ability to foretell the coming of Spring (the little groundhogs). This week we are going to find out from the groundhogs whether or not we are actually going to have Spring in six weeks or, whatever, seven months or whatever it is. When Groundhog day comes along, every year there is, for me anyway, I can't help but get to Groundhog day and not watch the movie, *Groundhog Day*. Those of you who have seen it know what I'm talking about. It's a movie in the 1990's and Bill Murray was in the film. If you don't know the premise of *Groundhog Day* you should, probably. It's very simple. There's a guy who is from a large city in Pennsylvania, he is a weather man and he is sent "on location" to the little town of Punxsutawney, where he is going to interview *Punxsutawney Phil* (which is the little groundhog who is going to come out of his burrow) and they're going to find out whether or not Spring is just around the corner, from this groundhog. The weatherman does not like Punxsutawney because it's just a little nothing town and he wants to go back to the main city as fast as he can, but he gets stuck in Punxsutawney because of a snow storm. He finishes his day and the next morning he wakes up and the exact same song is playing on the radio that was playing the day before and he meets the exact same people in the exact same order and he realizes, "I'm living the same day, again." He goes to bed that night and he lives the same day again and again and again and again, stuck in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, interviewing the groundhog every day. At first, of course, he's irritated by this, but then he realizes, "Oh, maybe there are some benefits in this arrangement." So I want to show you one of my favourite clips from the film, where he realizes that the benefits of this arrangement. Here we go: [movie clip from *Groundhog Day*] [laughter].

The premise to the film is interesting isn't it? I mean, it's probably the kind of thing, the kind of question, that you've asked around a campfire in the middle of the summer before. You know, you don't have Netflix or anything else out there in the middle of the campground and you're sitting there having to talk to your family, finally, and you're sitting there around the campfire and someone says, "Let's play a game. If you knew that tomorrow morning, no matter what happens, you would wake up well in your bed, how would that change how you'd live today? If you knew that no matter what happens today, you could jump off a building, you could eat whatever you-- just shove this cake in your mouth, whatever, and tomorrow morning you'd wake up safe in your bed, what would that do to



you? Would it change how much you worry?” You and I, of course, know that worry is a problem. It’s a plague for us. There’s not a person who I’m talking to right now that doesn’t worry, who hasn’t worried today, in fact. We worry about everything. Sometimes I sit on the edge of my bed and I am overwhelmed with the sense that I am out of control in regards to almost everything in my life. I worry about my wife, I worry about my kids. If you have grandkids you worry about your grandkids, you worry about their spouses. You worry about everything. It’s a problem for all of us. Sometimes we just want to climb back into bed and put the covers over our head and just hide there, right? Several of our friends are there this morning [laughter]. We worry about everything - our money, our hairline, our weight, our weight, our weight [laughter], our standing in the community, our kids, our parents, our spouses, and if we’re honest, we especially worry about the future, about tomorrow. Hope you have enough insurance for that. Whatever goes on, you just hope you don’t get one of those phone calls, maybe in the middle of the night or tomorrow. Everything that’s going well right now, we just don’t want it to go poorly. How do you live in a world where you have so little control and so many worries? Is it possible, in fact, to overcome some of that worry? Is it possible to, instead of cower before the face of those things, to live boldly? To burst, in fact, out of bed and lunge into challenge with confidence. How do you do that?

This is a story that we’re going to study. In fact, it’s a prayer that the early church prays. It’s in the context of a story and they had a lot to worry about. A lot more, in fact, than we have to worry about, and yet their prayer is surprisingly for boldness in the midst of this. So there is a secret here, of how one lives boldly in the face of impending doom or challenge, that I think we can learn from this prayer. This is the last week in our prayer series and I’m really excited that we get to study this passage in Acts 4:23-30. It’s just this prayer from the early church and in it we are going to see two things:

1. God is Sovereign
2. What Happens When You Believe God is Sovereign

Number one: they are going to pray that God is sovereign. They’re not going to pray for the sovereignty of God, they are just going to pray, “God, you are sovereign.” Most of our time together is going to be spent on that point. God is sovereign, but then, second, at the end of their prayer, they just add this little bit that shows what happens when you believe that God is sovereign. Those two things: God is sovereign and what happens when you believe that God is sovereign.

[God is Sovereign]

So here’s the first of those: Acts 4:23, we start talking about the sovereignty of God in this passage. Here’s how it goes:

“On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.”

Now, I know I’m being a little unfair to you in the sense that I’ve just jumped right into the middle of a passage of Scripture and it’s the middle of a story. You’re like, “Wait a minute. They got released?”



From who did they get released? Who are the chief priests and elders? What?” Okay, let’s go back to the beginning of Acts 4 and one of the things you’ll see is that Peter and John are some of the early disciples. This is happening after Jesus has risen from the dead, right? So they’ve seen Jesus crucified at the hands of the religious leaders who oversee the temple, they oversee Israel, and all those things. These guys then witness the resurrection and they go back into the Temple and they are intending to preach the good news about Jesus and his resurrection to the very people who just killed him. And who, of course, have heard stories (rumors) about the resurrection. So here are two eyewitnesses showing up at the gates of the Temple and they are going to proclaim to everybody, all the crowds there and all the religious leaders, what happened and what this means. When they get to the front door, basically, of the Temple, there’s a guy there and he is sick. He’s a beggar and he’s been there for a long time. Peter looks at him and says, “Look, in the name of Jesus, stand up and walk,” and this guy, who everyone knew because they passed by him all the time, he stands up and he is well. Now, if this happened at the door of our church this morning, if somebody sat out there everyday and everyone knew that they were ill. Some part of our church that was notoriously sick all the time, and that person was healed by the words of two guys who walked in, there probably would be some kind of crowd that formed around that. The guy who could not walk is now walking, so a bunch of people are gathered around and that’s what happened. So Peter sees the crowd and, always being willing to share his thoughts, takes this opportunity and he says, “Okay, so you guys want to know in whose name this man is made well. Well, it’s in the name of Jesus, the one who was crucified but has risen from the dead, that we proclaim healing in his name for this man and forgiveness of your sins.” And he starts preaching to all of these people and, of course, the religious leaders are hearing this, or they get reports from some people about this, and this crowd is so excited and their praising God for the healing and they’re all on Peter and John’s side. “Yay for healing!” The religious leaders see it, though, and they see-- the last time they heard the name of Jesus was when they killed him. So they’re like, “Alright, no, no, no, no, no. We’re not doing this.” So they come out and they arrest these two men and they bring them before what is called the Sanhedrin (it’s the ruling religious council - the same council that just condemned Jesus to death) and they say to these guys, “Listen, you’re going to stop talking about this Jesus or else!” “Or else what?” “Or else you might find that your fate is the same as the one that you’re preaching about, hm? I mean, we hung him on a cross outside the city. Don’t think we won’t do that to you. Now, they can’t do this to these men in this moment because all the crowds are on their side, so they’re kind of stuck. All they can do is wag their finger at them and say, “Don’t you keep talking.” You can read about it in Acts 4:18. Here’s how it goes:

“Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You [guys] be the judges! [‘On a scale: your opinions... God’s opinion. Your opinions...God’s opinions (showing with hands that God’s opinions are higher). Come on!’] As for us [they said], we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and [what we have] heard.”

“So yeah, in the face of your threat, we understand that there’s a great risk here, but we’re not backing down. We’re *not* backing down.” So they go away from there (they have to be released because of the popularity of these two men for healing this beggar at the gate) and they march out of the Temple. The Sanhedrin is thinking to themselves, “We’ll get you later. Remember our warning!” These guys walk



out of the Temple, they go to their friends' house who have been waiting for them, and they show up and report to these folks everything that just happened.

Now, I want you to put yourself in the shoes, in the seat, of some of those friends. What would you counsel these two men? They come and they say to you, "Okay, so here's the thing. We've got a decision to make. Here's what we said to them: 'We're not going to listen to you, we're going to listen to God,' but we, as a church, have a decision to make in this moment. We are either going to go forward, oppose the religious leaders, which probably will mean that they are going to take dead aim at us, and many of us may die or be hung on a cross outside the city. Or we can just quietly go our way. Just kind of meld into the scenery." How would you counsel them? If you were their friends, how would you counsel these men? How would you counsel the others there? What would you do in this moment? In the face of this great worry, these threats, what would you tell them?

I met a guy a few years ago named Isaac. He was the Principal of a Bible College in Delhi, India. He's not just the Principal of this Bible College, he often takes trips into Northern India, where there are about 200 million people who have very little witness of the gospel to them. You could probably count on two hands the number of churches that exist among those 200 million people, right? So it's a huge number of people and so few churches, so when he goes up there, he goes and visits these little, tiny churches and he will preach at the churches, but he will also have these meetings, you know? For inquisitive people in the community. What is Christianity about? They proclaim Jesus and the resurrection - the same kinds of things that Peter and John were proclaiming in the Temple. He will go up and he will do this in a church. When he goes up into this area, though, he shows up at these churches, he'll stand at the pulpit to deliver his message to all who are there, and in the front row, frequently, there are a group of men who will come in, usually a little bit late to the message, and they'll sit down in the front row. As soon as the message is over, they will stand up and surround him, kind of like a gang. The leader will say to him, "We really appreciate you coming up from Delhi to do this, but we want to let you know that we believe the Hindu faith is true, we're militant about it, and if you come up here again we are going to cut your head off. Just know that. When you come back we are going to bring our machettis and we are going to take your head and separate it from the rest of your body. So, see you later. I hope not." So he goes back and he has to go to his home and he has to now sit down with this wife, he's got four or five children, and he's got to sit down with his wife and say to her, "Here's the threats that they have issued about me going and preaching in these regions among these 200 million people who don't know Jesus." If you're his wife in this moment, how do you counsel him? In the face of that worry, do you tell him, "Listen, let's just-- there's no need to go." Or do you tell him to go forward?

This is the question that the early church is facing. What do you say? Here's their answer, the church's answer: Acts 4:24,

"When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. [Listen to what they pray now] 'Sovereign Lord,' they said, 'you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.'"



I want to stop there, okay? That little phrase ‘Sovereign Lord’ is the Greek word ‘Despota.’ It sounds like a Justin Bieber song. I know that, but it’s not that [laughter]. ‘Despota’ what does that sound like when it has to do with leaders? Despot, yeah? Now, in our culture, when we use the word ‘despot,’ we mean it in a pejorative sense. Pejorative means in a negative way. “My boss is such a despot!” “My husband, why are you acting so despotic?” Maybe we don’t use that language, right? “My teacher is a despot.” Most highschool students don’t say that, but when you get to college, it’s a college word, right? “My teacher is a despot!” What you mean by that is that they indiscriminately use their authority to bury people. The reason we use it in a negative fashion is because nobody has that kind of authority in our society. They just don’t. I mean, check yourself if you think that you can just-- whatever your whim is it will come to fruition because you uttered those words. Don’t be such a despot.

In the ancient world, that word, ‘Despota’ didn’t have that negative connotation. It was actually quite common. Somebody who was a despot (a despota) was a person who had authority over their property. If you were the master of a house and you had built, brick by brick, the house that sits on your land and you had earned the money to buy the land, your wife, your children, the land, your servants, everything was under your ultimate authority. You are the despota of that land. Everything that you said came to fruition. Everything. Nobody questions you. So what they are saying in this prayer is, “Oh sovereign Lord, oh despota, oh great master of your house...” and you should be thinking to yourself, “Okay, what house is he the master of?” Well, the prayer tells you. They said, “You made the heavens and earth and sea, and everything in them. [So just like a master builds his own house, piece by piece, you have authority over the world, because, piece by piece, you put it together. It’s all yours. Everything in it is yours. God, you have totally authority and sovereignty over all of it.]”

That’s the way it works right? The things that you make, you have authority over. If you invited me to your house-- there are some men in our church who really enjoy building cars. So you’ve invited me to your house and you have one of these cars being built in your house. I come to your house and, after a little small talk, you say, “You’ve got to come to the garage. You have a look.” I walk into the garage and there, sitting there, is a 1955 Studebaker. Is Studebaker a car? It might be a plane, I don’t know [laughter]. You’re like, “See, look at that! I have purchased every piece of this car on Ebay. Every little piece I’ve put together like a Lego set, but you know, if I did that as an adult people would think I was weird so I did it this way. And I put together this beautiful-- like, I polish each piece when I get it and put it in chrome.” You open the hood and you say, “Each part of the engine”-- I say, “Does it run?” You say, “Yeah, it runs.” You turn it on and, “Whoa, it’s amazing.” Now listen, if, while you’re sitting there behind the wheel and the engine is open, I start grabbing a wrench and I’m like, “Cool!” What are you going to say? “Whoa, Pastor! Back off! Just leave it alone. I have the authority and right to tinker with the engine, but you don’t!” “Why?” “Because I made it.”

Listen, if you make sandcastles on the beach, right? Kids, if you’re out there and you’re making your sandcastle out of the wet sand and you spend 45 minutes putting this together and then your brother comes along, “Hey, cool!” and he kicks it over, what do you do? “What are you doing?” “What? You were going to do it anyway?” “Yes, but I get to do that. If you want to knock over the sandcastle, you should build your own sandcastle. The one who builds it gets to ruin it.” The one who builds a thing, who makes a thing, has authority over that thing. So this church is basically arguing that. “Look,



Sovereign Lord, great master, despota, you have authority over everything. You are sovereign over everything that you have made.” Now look, I feel like I need to demonstrate for you that that is a principle in the Bible. There are lots of people these days that say, “God, he has authority, but not complete.” I want to show you, in the Bible, some examples of how complete his authority is. Statements about the nature and person of God, given by people in the Scriptures about him. I have two examples here to try to demonstrate and illustrate his ultimate, meticulous, complete sovereignty over all things.

Here’s the first one: it’s in the book of Job. If you don’t know the story of Job, even if you do, it’s always good to review it. The story of Job is a story about Satan, who comes to God on one particular occasion up in Heaven, and says to God, “Listen, you know that guy Job down there on earth? He loves you because you coddle him. Look at his life. He’s got a great house, he’s got a great family. Look at all the cars he’s got. I mean, Come on man, this is the perfect life that this guy’s got down there. If you removed all the stuff from him he would curse you to your face.” The Lord says, “Okay, let’s see. You go down and you can remove that stuff from him.” Satan goes down and he removes the stuff from him. I mean, talk about getting a phone call in the middle of the night. It’s like one of our great fears. Job got that phone call, but in the ancient world nobody could call you. They would just show up at your front door. So servants show up at his front door, one after another after another. The first one says, “Hey Job, listen, there were raiders and they came and they destroyed all of the farmland. They stole all of your cattle.” Cattle, by the way, was money in those days. It’s like they emptied your bank account. On the heels of this is another servant. “All of your family was together in a house having a feast and a great wind came and it knocked the ceiling down. And they’re all dead. I’m so sorry Job.”

Can you imagine the 20 minutes of this man’s life? Learning that everything he had and everything he loved was basically gone. It’s just him and his wife left and his wife turns to him and says, “You should curse God and die,” because he won’t. He’s still committed to the Lord. She leaves, he’s left on a pile of ashes, taking pottery and scraping his body with it. He’s got boils everywhere and he’s sick. I mean, everything is going wrong. His friends show up and they start by being quiet (which was a good move), but then they open their mouths. And when they start their argument is basically, “Listen Job, the way it works is that good people get good things and bad people get bad things, so since you’re getting bad things it means you’re bad, dude. So look across your life and realize that maybe there is a hidden sin or something you’ve done wrong that God is judging you for, because God doesn’t do this sort of stuff to people.” And Job is like, “I’ve never done anything. I’m a righteous man. I’ve quietly considered my entire life and it’s all been fine. What is the Lord doing? If I could just get God in a moment and stand before him and declare to him how wrong he’s been. If I could just, like in a courtroom, put him in the dock and question him, “Why are you doing this?” he would see that I’m righteous. He would see my point of view. He would relent and say he was wrong. I just want a moment with the almighty to make my case.” This is one of those classic cases of “be careful what you ask for” because the Lord says, “Okay.” And he shows up. But instead of Job asking the questions of God, what happens is, God starts asking the questions to Job. You know what all the questions are? “Hey Job, where were you when I hung the stars in the sky and when I made the hippopotamus and I created the seas and said, ‘Come this far and no further.’ If you have so much



authority to understand the world and question me, then surely you know the answers to my questions. Surely you have knowledge of all these things that I have knowledge about. You know that great monster in the sea that they call the Leviathan? Can you take a leash and put it around the neck of that thing and give it to your daughter for a walk? Can you do that? Because I can and I do all of those things. I am mighty, Job. Half way through the questioning, Job's like, "Uh, tap out" [laughter]. God's like, "No, no, no, you wanted to have this meeting and I've got some more questions," and he just starts going off. Finally, after like 100 questions, here's what Job says about the character and power of God. After the silence, I'm sure, after those questions, finally these words come out of Job's mouth in Job 42:1-2,

"Then Job replied to the Lord: 'I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted.'"

"There's lots of lessons to be learned here," says Job, but like the first lesson to be learned is that God does what God wants to do. He has full authority and power over all he has made. That's what the church is arguing. "Yes, he is the despota over all things." That's my first example of the ultimate sovereignty.

Here's my second one, okay? There's this story that I shared a number of weeks ago about this guy named Nebuchadnezzar. He was a king in the ancient world and he was starting to feel himself one day, you know, kind of like a basketball player goes up and dunks and is like, "Check me out! I'm seven feet tall and I threw it through the rim!" He stands on the edge of his property and he says, "I am the great king of all these lands. Look at all my land. Look at all the people who bow down to me. Is there any greater person in the entire world than me? Check me out! All you heavens bear witness to my gandure." Now, there's one in heaven to heard those words and was like, "Hm, I'm checking you out and I've got a few thoughts. What happens if I just reach down there and do a little twist in your mind?" And that's what he does. The Lord reaches down and he makes this guy go a little nuts, right? So he sends him out to pasture. I mean that literally. The guy actually ends up out in the field with these long fingernails and hair coming down. Hehehe. "The fat one knows." You know, he's Gollum-ing everywhere [laughter]. He's there for quite a while and finally the Lord reaches down and he switches his mind back. And the man comes to his senses. "What am I doing out here? Look at these fingernails." Here's what he says in Daniel 3:34-35. Here's what Nebuchadnezzar says about God after he's learned his lesson about who truly is great:

"At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes towards heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

There's nobody who holds God to account. There's nobody who stands in his way when he seeks to have his purpose done. Ask Job. Ask Nebuchadnezzar. He is the sovereign despota over all things,



including history. Including the will and decisions that people make. Now, this is where the church goes in their prayer. So they establish that God is sovereign in these massive Nebuchadnezzar/Job kinds of ways. God is that sovereign. Even over history. Listen to what they say in Acts 4:25:

“You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: [now they are going to quote a Psalm. They are going to go back to the Old Testament and say, ‘look at this Psalm that you gave to us all those years ago - Psalm 2] ‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.’”

Now, Psalm 2 was one of these Psalms that was an inauguration hymn. You know, like when the Queen gets inaugurated or she gets crowned. They put the crown on her and they say great things about her. Well, in ancient Israel, Psalm 2 was one of those hymns that people sang as soon as they would crown the new King. And the song is basically a threat to all the nations of the world who might oppose them. “You kings out there, you rulers, don’t plot against us and our King (God’s anointed King) because if you do, he’s going to get you because he’s God.” “Kiss the son,” in fact, is a line in the Psalm. “Bow down, kneel to him, kiss his hand, because he is the great ruler. Don’t oppose him.” Let me just read to you Psalm 2. There’s a line in it I want you to see that is especially appropriate. Psalm 2:1-6, 10-12:

“Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed [so that’s what they quoted in their prayer], saying, ‘Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.’ The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, ‘I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain... Therefore, you kings [in all these lands that want to oppose us, you kings], be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and celebrate his rule with trembling. Kiss his son, or he will be angry and your way will lead to your destruction, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.’”

Isn’t that line in the middle-- The Lord laughs at them. “So in other words, all you kings out there, if you want to stand up against the Lord and his anointed, do you know what the Lord does when he sees you mounting your armies and saying, ‘We’re going to fight back’? He says, ‘Hahaha that’s so funny.’”

So, when my boys were little, we used to wrestle a lot. I was one of these fathers who, if my boys were crawling across the floor, I’d just kind of walk up and go <pushes them over> [laughter]. You know, just playfully wanting them to-- We’d play cards and video games and most of the time it would devolve into wrestling with these little guys, right? Like, if one of the kids beat me in a game I would just throw the thing down <action> you know? And they’d come back and these two little boys on the floor and I’d be taking one and pick him up and put him on the ground or hold him down there and then take the other one and be pushing him away [laughter]. And then you grab them both and put them on the ground and lay on top [laughter]. “Stop, dad! Stop! Oh no, you’re hurting us.” I’m a good



father [laughter]. Come on dads, you laugh, right? When the kids do this and you stand up and they grab ahold of your legs and you're like, "Ha, that doesn't even matter." You laugh because you know, "There's nothing you can do that is going to stop me. You get that. My power, your power, right? It's just so easy for me..." The Lord in heaven laughs when they stand up against him. So the church, you have to understand, the church is seeing these kings and rulers who are standing over and against Jesus and the word about him (the anointed King Jesus) and they are standing there having to make a decision. "Do we go forward or do we back off?" and they are saying, "But Psalm 2 told us about this," and they apply it to their situation. Just look at Acts 4:27,

"Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed."

"That Psalm is about this moment. The anointed king that they should kiss is Jesus. All the nations are raging against him and the Lord in heaven laughs at them. What should we do in response?" They did what your power and will had decided before him should happen. The Psalm is being fulfilled right before their eyes.

So here's the question: the whole beginning of this entire passage is about the sovereignty-- God is sovereign over his world, he's sovereign over everything he has made, he is sovereign over history, we are witnessing his sovereignty coming to fruition before our very eyes. What does that do to you when you see the sovereignty of God? What does it do to your fear and your worry? That's the last part of this, okay?

[What Happens When You Believe God is Sovereign?]

God is sovereign, and second: what happens when you believe God is sovereign? Here is the only request that they make in their prayer. It's at the end, Acts 4:29,

[In light of all your sovereignty, Lord] "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

You notice the prayer is not, "Oh, get us out of this mess! Oh Lord, it's so hard! Would you just get a new king or something? I don't know." The prayer is, "No, no, no, we were promised that they would oppose you. We were told in Psalm 2 and it's happening before us. So God, would you just, instead of having us back off, in this moment of decision don't let us back off. Let us stand forward in boldness." You know, that's what happens when you believe that God is (1) sovereign over all things and (2) that he cares for you as his chosen people, right? That when those two pieces of information, those two truths, saturate your mind, the effect is unbridled boldness. Not cowering, not hiding under the covers, boldness.

I play videogames from time to time. Sometimes in the video game you have to kill the dragon. The only good dragon is a dead dragon [laughter]. It's hard. You don't have the ability and I'm not good



enough at manipulating the buttons to get to the dumb dragon. I hide behind the rock and cower and try my best, but I keep dying and dying and dying, and respawning and respawning and respawning. And eventually you just get sick of it so you go online and you get a cheat code [laughter]. You're like, "I've got to win this game," so you find out that by entering these buttons in this particular order in this particular moment, that you can get invincibility. No matter what happens, my health is not going to go down. Now, I've got to tell you, there is a massive difference. It totally ruins the game by the way. Don't do this [laughter]. But there is a massive difference between playing the game knowing you could die and playing the game with invincibility. When you know you could die you're hiding behind the rocks and freaking out, but when you have invincibility you jump on the dragon's back and just hug him to death. The knowledge of security, the knowledge that no matter what happens you have a guaranteed future, it breeds boldness.

My kids went to a camp a while ago and they have this big pole in the middle of the camp. Grade seven kids were supposed to climb up the side of this pole and stand on this disc at the top and then jump off to grab this trapeze. Man, just the thought of it just freaks me out. The pole is like 40 feet high. Just looking at it I was like, "I'm not doing that. There's no way. I'm not letting my kid do that." "Whoa, whoa, whoa," they'd say to the kids. "Before you get freaked out, see this harness? We're going to put this harness on you and we're going to hook it through this caliper at the bottom and I'm going to wrap it around the guy who is-- I'm trained and I went through this many years of training to do this thing. We check all the instrumentation every week to make sure it's all safe. We're going to hold you. In fact, if you get half way up the pole and you decide that you are kind of done, you could literally kick off the pole and be like, "Hey," and just float in the air and we will lower you down. You're secure." Okay, so some of the kids, of course, go up this pole like seven or eight feet. <action> "Let me down, let me down, let me down!" "Listen, I'm just going to pull on the thing and you'll feel it behind you. Don't freak out." "No, no, no!" Other kids would get six or seven feet up on the pole and they would be freaked out by the height but then they would start to, "Could you pull a little. Yeah, I can feel that on my back," and they'd start to kind of test it. They'd take one foot off and be like, "Oh, okay," and then pull back. <action> to the top, stand up there on one foot, "Wahoo!," miss the pole, but they are swinging in the air. "This is awesome" [laughter]. See, the knowledge of the security just does something to you, doesn't it? To know that you're going to be held and no matter what happens you are going to be secure. It changes everything.

Why do you think the Apostle Paul, when he gets beat up and left for dead outside of a city after preaching the gospel there, gets back up after being beat up and left for dead and goes back into the city? Who does that? Well, somebody knows that they've got the harness on their back. Somebody knows that they have a God in Heaven who loves them and is sovereign over all things. Why would Isaac Shaw go down the aisle? After talking to his wife about going to Northern India and talking to his kids and saying, "I might die. This might be the last time I see you," and he still goes because no matter what happens he is indestructible until his Master in Heaven calls him home.

That language actually comes from a guy named John Paton, whom I've shared with you before. He was a missionary to the South Pacific Islands. He went down there and every day of his life was under threat for gunfire and killing stones being thrown at his head. He used to sleep in his clothes and had a



little dog who would bark and he would get up and run for his life. This happened frequently in the evenings because the natives would come and want to kill him. Can you imagine living four years of your life under that threat and still preaching the gospel to the people who are trying to kill you? When he wrote his book he summarized why it was that he was able to do all these things. Here's what he wrote: he said,

“I realized that I was immortal till my Master's work with me was done. The assurance came to me, as if a voice out of Heaven had spoken, that not a musket would be fired to wound us, not a club prevail to strike us, not a spear leave the hand in which it was held vibrating to be thrown, not an arrow leave the bow, or a killing stone the fingers, without the permission of Jesus Christ, whose is all power in Heaven and on Earth.”

You do realize, Christian, that you are immortal until your Master's work with you is done, yeah? When you're sitting there on the edge of your bed freaked out and wanting to pull the covers over your head, you do realize that you're a child of the King. And all things will work together for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose. Why would you back down? Why would you worry again? Why not, rather, be bold? Or maybe you just don't believe it. Let me pray for us.

Lord, this passage is so meaningful to me on a personal level and I pray this for my friends. And I pray, Father, that you would-- I mean, I can use illustrations all I can, Father, but you're the only one that, by the power of your Spirit, you can take these things and implant them in our hearts, Father, and saturate our minds with the truth of the matter, that we become the kind of people, Father, that we read about in these passages of Scripture and the history of our church. I pray, Father, that those things would happen and that you'd find a kind of contented boldness among us because we have a God who cares for us and will accomplish his will. We thank you for it, in Jesus name, Amen.