

“One Last Encouragement”

Fixing Our Eyes Upon Jesus, Our High Priest

Hebrews 13:18-25

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Jeff: Our heavenly Father, we are thankful for so many things when we bow before You. We're thankful for things like life and breath and the sleep that we had last night. We're thankful for the families in which You've placed us and for the friends that You surround us with. We're thankful for our church families. We're thankful for this Brave Men Bible study. We're thankful for the opportunity to be in Your word, unhindered by our government as of yet. And Father, we're thankful most of all for the Lord Jesus Christ in whom we find life and breath and meaning, purpose and salvation. Father, as we gather this morning, we are mindful that our life is hidden in You and specifically in Christ by Your Holy Spirit. We also know that we grow in you. We pray for that this morning. We know that You use means in order to cultivate us. And we pray, Father, that the means that You use this morning will not only be Your Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit using this Word to bring about His good purpose in us.

Father, as we come before You this morning, we think of Kevin Kohn and we ask that Your hand would be upon Him for good. We pray for healing in his life and for the bishop as well. We're thankful for his life of service, and we pray that You would strengthen and encourage his heart. And Father, we pray that You will indeed bless him.

Father, as we round out the book of Hebrews today we pray that You will take this message that we've been thinking about for a long time now and impress it upon our hearts and our minds. We pray, Father, that You would do this for our good and for Your glory. We pray these things in the precious name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jeff: All right. We are going to round out the book of Hebrews today. And whether we actually finish or not, we're finishing. *(Laughter)* So let's try to finish. No, I'm just kidding. Well, really I'm not. So Hebrews 13. And we're going to look at verses 18-25. And let me read God's word to you.

“Pray for us. For we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.”

“Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with every good work, that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

“I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. Grace be with you all.” This is the word of the Lord.

Brave Men: Thanks be to God.

Jeff: All right. Yes, I'm learning.

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Ted: Slowly.

Jeff: Slowly. (*Laughter*) I mean, it takes years! (*Laughter*) A couple of things. First of all, let's look at the outline for today. We're going to think about introductory matters very briefly to get us into this section of the text. And then we're going to look at basically three exhortations. And I think those exhortations arise right out of the text. I'll say more about them in the introduction. But we're going to think about *living vigorously before the Lord*. We're going to think about *living fitted lives before the Lord*. I'll explain what that means in just a minute. It sounds a little bit odd. Then we're going to think about *listening to the Lord*. And that's obviously an important thing for us as believers. So I want us to think about those sorts of things.

But first of all, why don't we get to the introduction? When you look at these last eight verses, here's the way that you might divide them up. If you were looking at them and saying that this set of verses teaches what? Verses 18 and 19, well that teaches us about prayer, maybe. At least that's the way I construe it. Verses 20 and 21, well that's obviously a benediction. You've heard that pronounced over you, I'm sure. And in verses 22-25 you find things like encouragement and news, and there are greetings here. So you look at these verses and you think to yourself, well maybe these verses are a little more disconnected than the verses that we previously looked at.

I mean, the last time we were together we looked at a couple of sections. We looked at verses 1-6. And I said to you that 1-6 was sort of roped off with the word *love*. And so *love* was sort of the organizing theme. And then in the next set of verses, 7-17, we have past leaders and future leaders. And in the middle there, somewhere in that section, we find that it says that the Lord Jesus Christ is “*the same yesterday, today and forever.*” And I said that the organizing feature of that particular section is that whether you have past leaders or present leaders, as long as those leaders are focused on the Christ who never changes and His word and teaching, well then, you're all good to go. And so there was an organizing theme and structure in those verses.

But what about these verses? You might look at these verses and say, “Well, I think he's run out of steam on this. And I think these verses are probably verses that are just the wind-up verses.” These are the ones that he jots down fairly quickly in the end, wishing them well, urging them to pray. “Hey, here's a little news.” And I think maybe that's the case.

But the question I think that we always have to ask is this. How is it that we might be able to see a thread running through any of the verses? How is it that we might be able to make sense of the logic that's here in the text? Not that we might necessarily want to bring something and then impose it upon the text. But the question is, is there something in the text, a theme or a thread that we might be able to sort of get hold of and pull out and see if it works? I think that's always an important thing. It's better to do that than it is to just pronounce that these are a bunch of miscellaneous things.

I'll never forget, just as an aside, that I was preaching through James to my congregation one day, or one year. (*Laughter*) And my first sermon on James was something to the effect that he was just a wisdom preacher and that James was just a bunch of wisdom sayings disconnected from one another. (*Laughter*) And you know, I

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started preaching through James and I started realizing that was a terrible first sermon! (*Laughter*) So you know, those introductory sermons that people preach to kind of give you the lay of the land? I don't preach those anymore. (*Laughter*) I discard them and I just start preaching right through the text because I figure that the text will unfold itself. Why do I need to wrongly do it for them? (*Laughter*)

Anyway, it's always good to look at the Scriptures. You're looking at a particular section. For me one of the most helpful things is to ask myself. Is there a natural theme that runs through this particular text or thread that I can pull out and make sense of what's going on here? And I do think to some extent, to a lesser extent here than in previous sections as we looked at chapter 13, but to some extent here there's a thread that can be pulled on. And we're going to look at that thread today.

So having studied the book of Hebrews you're going to find that very much like the other sections, this particular section has some things that will reach back in the text. For instance, you're going to read about a clear conscience. We've read about clear consciences before. That's been in the body of the text, so it's nothing surprising.

But having studied the book, I really don't think that this is anything particularly new. I think that there may be some notes that are struck with a different emphasis that weren't struck before. But there are going to be some really neat parallels here. We're going to see those as well.

But I think that the question to ask ourselves is, looking at these particular texts, how shall we then live? In other words, I think in these round-out verses what we find is that we find a way of living. I think we find encouragement in living the Christian life. And so I think these verses are very practical. And I think they are very applicable to our lives.

That doesn't mean they're devoid of theology. In fact, I think here's the deal. We're going to see that to some extent that it is theology that produces the conundrums of life. We have to make decisions on the basis of theology and how to live life out of it. So we're going to see that.

So first of all, we'll look at *living vigorously*. Now I want you to feel free to stop me at any point so that I can catch my breath. Just kidding. I want you to feel free to stop me at any point. (*Laughter*) I was only kidding about if we don't get done. If we don't get done with Hebrews, we'll start with Jonah the next time; that's not a problem. This is not very funny. (*Laughter*) All right, so *living vigorously*. We'll talk about Jonah next time.

I want to talk about living *vigorously before God*. Now here's the deal. You know, I find this absolutely interesting. We are a group of guys that have been exposed to Reformed theology. And one of the things that we hold dear, I mean one of the things I hold dear, is the sovereignty of God. I believe that God is absolutely in control.

I want to tell you something. This is not one of those abstract theological doctrines that I've just adopted because it's either logical or I've read it and it makes sense. It's one of those theological doctrines that came together in my thinking with experience.

My brother was murdered. You guys probably know that. I've probably told you that before. He was murdered. And I was asking the question about sovereignty in the midst of that.

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And so I actually had two ministers. One was a friend of mine from Ohio. And he was telling me, “Sometimes accidents happen, Jeff. And God is not in control of everything. God is able to sort of minister through everything.” That’s what he was telling me. And that didn’t make sense, not according to what I was reading in the Bible. But I wasn’t a Reformed thinker yet.

And I had another guy telling me about Reformed theology. And I was kind of repulsed by it, especially when it came to the doctrine of salvation, you know? I was so concerned about the guy who hated God rather than God’s glory, you know what I mean? That sort of thing. So I was really between a rock and a hard place.

But it was through that caldron of having lost my brother and thinking theologically about how I think of this God who I serve, who I want to serve with my whole heart, but. But how do I think about Him in relation to this really heart-wrenching situation in my life? Well, I came out of that believing that God is absolutely sovereign.

And I know that not everybody comes to that point just because they have a crisis in life. I spoke with another minister. One time we were at a gathering. He was a minister from another denomination. We were together and he realized that I had lost my brother. He lost his son. His son was over at a friend’s house playing. And the friend showed him a gun and the gun happened to be loaded, and his son died.

And he said this to me. This is what he said. He said, “I studied under John Gerstner.” And he said, “There was a time in my life when I believed the sovereignty of God like you believe it.” But he said, “Now I don’t.”

And I thought to myself, *Well, that’s a lesson, isn’t it?* Here I was. My life circumstance drove me to embrace the sovereignty of God. And his life circumstance drove him to reject it. So it’s not all about life circumstances. Truth is truth whether our life circumstance confirms it or not.

Brave Man: Amen.

Jeff: If I can just say it like this, either I’m right or he’s right, regardless of our experience and regardless of how heart-wrenching either one of those experiences happens to be. The truth is the truth no matter what. I happen to believe that the sovereignty of God is the truth. And I happen to believe wholeheartedly that it’s the teaching of Scripture. That’s why it’s truth.

Some of us are prone to live vigorously out of that truth. However, I need to just frankly tell you that that’s exactly what we’re called to do from Scripture. We are called to live vigorously in light of who God is. We are to avoid dull, sluggish spirituality. We are instead to be active and lively.

But I want you to know something. Sometimes I think the sovereignty of God produces a passivity in us. And we say to ourselves, “Well, God is sovereign after all.” I mean, I hate to say it, but probably the doctrine most dear to me is probably the doctrine that I see producing the most passivity in people. And I’m not excluding myself in that.

When I think about the sovereignty of God, sometimes I think to myself, *Well, I’m not sure that the sovereignty of God has worked me up to vigor as it should.*

I want to tell you something. I’m going to give you two examples. I want to speak to you about negative and positive examples of God’s sovereignty, because I never want you

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to lose sight of the fact that God’s sovereignty is a positive thing. But it can produce negative responses in us. But that’s not the doctrine’s problem, remember? That’s my problem.

Brave Man: Amen.

Jeff: But it is my problem, and it’s our problem. And because it’s our problem, we’ve got to think through it. That’s what I’m thinking about here.

So I remember that I was in college. I did terrible in high school, but I did really well in college, because it took four years before I went back to college. I got converted. I got called into the ministry. I knew what I wanted to do. And when it’s your own sending you, you have a way of finding yourself. *(Laughter)* Do you know what I’m saying? *(Laughter)*

Transcriber’s Note: Jeff opens his wallet.

Jeff: You get hold of it when you pay for it yourself. You know what? That’s a great idea. Nathan, guess what’s happening next year. *(Laughter)* I digress. *(Laughter)*

Brave Man: Amen.

Jeff: So I’m at Grove City College and I come out of this exam. I was not a Calvinist at the time. I was a dyed-in-the-wool Arminian, very confident in the fact that God had limited His sovereignty or some other such thing in some way. And I walked out with a group of guys who were Calvinists. I could not stand them. *(Laughter)* I just couldn’t. And you’ll see why.

And so we walk out. And one guy says to me, “How did you do on the test?”

And I said, “I think I did really well on the test. How did you do on the test?”

He goes, “I bombed it.” And I think he could see the look on my face. And he felt compelled to explain himself.

“You know, Stivason,” he said, “that’s your problem. You see, your problem is that if you had failed that test, you’d have said, ‘Oh, I failed the test!’” He said, “I failed the test and hey, that’s the sovereign will of God that I failed that test.” *(Laughter)* “I had a tremendous night over that! I don’t lose sleep. You’re going to lose sleep if you failed that test. I’m not, Stivason. That’s the sovereignty of God.”

And I went away repulsed by his explanation of the sovereignty of God. That was terrible! We should never think that way about the sovereignty of God.

I’ll tell you how we should think. If you want to know what a positive way of thinking about the sovereignty of God is, I’ll give you another one. Let’s say that you’re on—

Sig: That was the positive example?

Jeff: That was the negative example! *(Laughter)* What’s the matter with him? *(Laughter)* He leads us for fifteen minutes every morning. *(Laughter)*

All right. Where was I? *(Laughter)* A positive example. So for a positive example let’s say that you have a guy that is on chapel staff. Don’t do that, Rick! Rick, what are you doing? Rick, I’m struggling up here and you’re yawning. *(Laughter)* You know what I mean? It’s coming at you. *(Laughter)* You probably played basketball till two o’clock in the morning. *(Laughter)* You didn’t, did you?

Rick: No, I was talking on my phone.

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Jeff: Rick! *(Laughter)* I love picking on Rick because he is the most verbal guy you will ever meet. *(Laughter)*

Don Nemet: Sig’s replacement.

Jeff: I know! *(Laughter)* We’re going to get Rick up here to replace you the next time.

Sig: How about next week? *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Yes, I want to get Rick up here. Sorry, Rick. Please continue. All right, so college days. You’re a chapel team. And you’ve been asked to do a senior sermon, and you agree to do it. You call up your parents. You say, “Mom and Dad, I’m going to do a senior sermon.”

They say, “Wonderful!”

“Hey Mom and Dad, can you come?”

“We sure can.”

On their way they get into a car accident, and both of them get killed.

Sig: What?

Jeff: It’s made up. *(Laughter)* They both get killed. Now if you did not believe in the sovereignty of God, you would blame yourself the rest of your life that you invited them. And it was your invitation that caused them to be on the road and get killed.

But if you believe in the sovereignty of God, you live life responsibly. You live life happily engaged with your family, wanting them to share in the beauties of the life that God has given you. You invite them to this wonderful moment in your life, giving a senior sermon. And they get killed and what do you say? You say to yourself, “This is going to be devastating. I’m going to mourn this.” But you don’t have guilt because you know that Psalm 139 says that *“all of my days were numbered in your book before one of them came to be.”*

Brave Man: Amen.

Jeff: And so you know it’s not your fault that your parents were killed in a car accident. You know that it was in the sovereign plan and purposes of God. There are secondary causes in all such things. But you know that it was not your fault. And that’s a positive way of letting sovereignty minister to you, okay? Yes?

Tom: But that doesn’t mean God created the accident.

Jeff: We’re not going to talk about that, Tom.

Tom: Okay. *(Laughter)* That’s why I said “secondary causes and other such things.” That was to keep those kinds of comments away, Tom. *(Laughter)*

Tom: It’s only a personal comment.

Jeff: I know. I don’t know if it’s the cold medicine, but I’m feeling a little punchy. *(Laughter)*

Brave Man: Stonewall Jackson held that view. That’s why he was called “Stonewall.” He was killed by one of his own men.

Jeff: Right.

Brave Man: So he believed in the sovereignty of God.

Jeff: Absolutely. Rigorously so, right? Now the reason that I talk so much about sovereignty is because we’re going to talk about one of the realities of the Christian life which is prayer. And I think that sometimes sovereignty has a way of taking the zeal out

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of our prayer lives. I honestly don't know what to say to you other than to say to you that there is truth in that, because if we actually believed that God hears our prayers and responds, we would pray diligently. But I do think that what we end up saying is, no matter how formally we work it out in our heads, I think we say something to the effect that well, I only have so much time. And God is going to do what God wants to do anyway. And so regardless of whether I pray, what's going to happen is going to happen. And so I'll just leave off the prayer.

Now whether we're that conscious about it, and whether we're that forwardly disobedient about forsaking our prayer time is another matter. But I think that we have a tendency to sometimes forsake prayer. And the rationale for forsaking prayer is something about that.

Now it shouldn't be. We should be like David in the Old Testament who knows that God is sovereign and pleads for the life of his child. And when his child is taken from him he takes off his sackcloth and ashes and his servants say, “What gives?”

And he says, “When the baby was alive I prayed. I prayed earnestly. Now the baby is gone. I know God's answer.” It's that simple. Not that he's not grieved about it. But he pursues God while God may be pursued.

I think that's the idea of our text here. Notice what he says. He urges them to pray in verse 18. *“Pray for us.”*

Now here is the interesting thing. It's not simply an admonition to pray. Notice what's next. He says this in verse 19. *“I urge you all the more to do this.”* To do what? What's the antecedent of this? What does *this* reach back to? It reaches back to—

Brave Man: Prayer.

Jeff: Prayer. Do this. Pray. Now here's why. *“So that I may be restored to you the sooner.”* This guy believes that their prayers will be heard and will be effective.

Now I don't know about you. But this guy, this inspired guy believes in the power of prayer. Now I would guess that if you sat him down and said to him, “But do you really believe in the sovereignty of God, too?”, he would say, “With all of my heart, brother.”

Brave Man: Amen.

Jeff: Now here is a happy marriage between doctrine,--the sovereignty of God; thinking rightly about the Almighty,--and Christian practice. I want you to pray because I believe that the prayer of a righteous man is effective prayer. “I believe that your prayers will restore me to you all the sooner.”

I don't know what else to say. In this sense I'm preaching to the choir and I'm preaching to myself. I might as well put a mirror in front of me because I need to hear this just as much as every one of you. God does answer prayer. And here's an example of His word telling us that. Yes?

Bill Stolze: I'm new in this walk, really only two years.

Jeff: Uh-huh.

Bill: And reading the Scripture, and Scripture is the word of God, when I read Scripture I read the word *if*. That leads me to believe that I have some control. *“If you seek Me with your whole heart, then you will surely find Me.”* When I see the word *if*, that tells me that the Lord is saying that I have a choice in that matter. So I know where

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the Calvinists are, and I’m probably leaning more that way than any other way. But when I see that word *if*, that means if you do or if you don’t.

Jeff: Yes. But here’s what you have to understand. You have to understand that there are two ways of looking at freedom of the will or responsibility, or your *if*, okay? The first way is to say (and I’m not saying that you’re saying this), but this is what I used to say. I used to say that God in some way does this. I do a. or b.

Now before I do this you have to understand this. If God knows what’s going to happen tomorrow, in other words, if He is all-knowing and can have no false knowledge, if He knows what’s going to happen tomorrow, must what He knows about tomorrow come to pass when tomorrow comes?

Tom: No.

Don Maurer: Yes.

Jeff: It must, if He’s all-knowing.

Tom: Oh, okay. Yes.

Jeff: If He’s all-knowing and His knowledge about tomorrow is true knowledge, then when tomorrow comes what He knows today must happen tomorrow, or otherwise He doesn’t know tomorrow. Okay?

Now if He knows tomorrow before tomorrow comes, then what He knows about tomorrow must happen. And so the theologian who is not a Calvinist, the philosopher who is not a Calvinist, has to say what? God in some way must limit Himself in order that I might have the freedom to do tomorrow what I want to do instead of what God knows I will do. And so—

Tom: I think there’s a big difference because God doesn’t control that.

Jeff: Now wait a minute.

Tom: He just knows it.

Jeff: Well, right. The question is how does He know it? Does He know it because He looks into the future and sees it, or does He know it because He ordains it? Go ahead.

Tom: He doesn’t ordain the evil things. But He knows they’re going to happen. It’s like when Job—

Jeff: Does He ordain them through active ordination, or does He ordain them through permission?

Tom: Permission.

Jeff: Either way He’s sovereign over it.

Tom: Oh, He’s sovereign; there’s no doubt. But He doesn’t cause those things.

Jeff: That’s a secondary causation that happens. But think about it. Remember when Micaiah and Ahab have that go-round when Micaiah is summoned before Ahab? And Ahab says to him, “Now I want you to prophesy. When we go to war am I going to win?”

Tom: Right.

Jeff: Remember this? And Micaiah says, “Oh, king! Go up and fight; you will win.”

And Ahab turns to (I can’t think of the king from the South who’s sitting with him at that time.) But Ahab turns to that king and he says, “You see, he’s always messing with me.”

Tom: Mm-hmm.

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Jeff: And then he turns to the prophet and he says, “Now tell me the truth!” And Micaiah says, “All right, I’ll tell you the truth.” This is in 2 Chronicles 18. He says, “I saw the LORD seated on His throne. And He said to His heavenly host, ‘So basically how is Ahab going to meet his end?’ And some said this and some said that. And some angels said, ‘We’ll put a lying spirit in the mouths of his prophets.’ And God says, ‘Yes, go and do that.’”

And so what’s happening, what Micaiah is saying, is happening right in front of him. Ahab chooses to believe the lying prophets who are telling him, “Go up and you’re going to succeed.” And Micaiah says to him, “You’re not going to succeed.” That’s the bottom line.

But the point is that through the prophecy that Micaiah is giving, Micaiah is telling him that God appointed the means of his overthrow, the lying prophets, which leads to him going to war, which leads to him getting hit by the arrow, randomly speaking, and so on. So whether He permits it or actively ordains it, it’s His ordination. You can’t get around it.

Tom: That’s true. But it doesn’t mean that He causes everything.

Jeff: No. There are secondary causes that lead up to it.

Tom: Sometimes He—

Jeff: There is no shadow in God. He’s holy. But the secondary causes must have their divine ordination in Him. There’s no way around it. Yes?

Ted: My brain is about to explode. (*Laughter*) It says “*if you will seek Me with your whole heart you will surely find Me.*” That’s one of those verses in Jeremiah 29. You’ve got to be careful about the translation. Often the word *if* that’s thrown in there doesn’t appear in the original language.

Jeff: Yes.

Ted: I’m going to read to you out of Jeremiah 29 what the original language literally says. “*And you will seek Me. Me you will find when you search for Me with all your heart.*” So it’s not *if*; it’s *when*.

Jeff: Yes.

Ted: I think that’s a very important distinction. It’s like “*For God so loved the world that ... whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*” Folks say that is conditional, whosoever believes. But the Greek does not say *whoever*. It says, “*the ones believing in Him.*” It’s a status, not a condition.

Jeff: Yes.

Ted: I have a family member who is an ordained person. We go around with this all the time. And they have a huge problem with assigning God with what they perceive to be evil actions because of what they perceive to be evil. And I say, “Let God be God.” If we look at Him and we look at something He has done sovereignly and it’s evil, that’s our problem. We don’t get it.

Jeff: Yes.

Ted: And this person always says to me, “Well, my God wouldn’t do that.” And I hear this a lot from well-meaning evangelical Christians. They say, “That’s not the way God

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is.” Well, God is who He is. And if He appears to me to be evil in His doings, Then I am wrong, even though it may appear to be an evil act.

Jeff: Yes. I mean, this is exactly what you find in Isaiah 45:7. Can somebody go to Isaiah 45:7 very quickly? And while you’re going to Isaiah 45:7, let me just finish up with what I’m saying about tomorrow and all that.

So what I said to myself when I was in college was this. What will make me free to do what I want to do so that I’m unhindered by God’s omniscience? Well, I said that God puts His own hand over His own eyes. God limits Himself in some way so that He can’t see tomorrow.

But guess who he’s just put in the driver’s seat? Guess who just became God for tomorrow? Me! (*Laughter*) I don’t want to be God for tomorrow. You know what I’m saying?

And so I’ll never forget when it dawned on me that I need to let God be God. And I need to submit to Him. And however the secondary causation works out, God has to be on the throne. And it’s as simple as that, right? And so who’s got Isaiah 45:7? Read it, Paul.

Paul: From the ESV. *“I from the light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity. I am the LORD who does all these things.”*

Jeff: All right. That word *calamity*, if you have a King James Version or you have a New King James Version, it will be translated *evil*. It’s the word *rah*.

Now some people and translators say, “Wait a minute! We only want to make *rah* mean a natural sort of evil,—calamities, hurricanes, earthquakes, and so on.”

But I’ve got news for you. Do a word search on *rah*. *Rah* has more implications than just natural calamities. And that’s a verse you’ve got to settle with.

Now how it is that God ordains those things is another matter. But you’ve got to settle with those things. And I think the best way to settle with those things is to understand that God is God, however you slice the bread. Well, let’s—

Brave Man: Hold on a second.

Jeff: Yes?

Brave Man: You say there were two scenarios. You gave one scenario. What was the second one?

Jeff: What was the scenario I gave? Oh, yes. Either God has His hand over His eyes so that I can be God for tomorrow, or God doesn’t have His hand over His eyes and can see tomorrow. But I’m still responsible. And that responsibility, whether I’m settled with it or not or like it or not, comes out in the Scriptures.

When God is talking about the wicked, listen to what He says. This is in 1 Peter chapter 2 and the last part of verse 8. He says, *“They stumble,”* meaning those who are perishing. *“They stumble because they disobey the Word.”* And everybody goes, “Yes, yes! Don’t you see that?”

Duh! That’s the responsibility that we’ve been talking about, brother! I mean, don’t you understand? Okay, that’s the first part. And then *“they stumble because they disobey the Word, as they were destined to do.”*

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And I submit to you that I don't know how to understand that. How am I in my finite mind going to explain to you how the Infinite can bring together genuine responsibility and His sovereignty? I'm not going to be the guy who's going to try to do that. But what I am going to do is tell you that God is sovereign and we are responsible.

And that's the whole point of prayer. You know, we need to realize that the reason we can trust the God to whom we pray to answer prayer is because He's sovereign. But that can never be a reason for us to be sluggish about our prayer life. But we allow it to be. Go ahead.

Matt: So the first thing about praying is that we need to wrestle through this.

Jeff: Sure we do.

Matt: My evangelistic heart just wrestles with this all the time.

Jeff: You bet.

Matt: Because I'm human. So one of my thoughts is why does there only have to be two? Because God is so sovereign, He's so big. But for some reason He invites us to pray to Him. And we know that praying is one of the things that we need to do, as well as carrying the gospel. It's our responsibility to share the gospel. And if we don't, for some reason things don't happen.

Jeff: That's right.

Matt: And yet God is sovereign. The way I see it is, going from here to Pittsburgh there are many different ways to go to Pittsburgh. But God knows I'm going to get there. How I'm going to get there He can, in His sovereignty, use any one of those paths. But He gives us the freedom to choose how we get there. But we're going to get there.

Jeff: Yes. You know, I think that we have a tendency to want to use sovereignty to avoid guilt. So what we do is we say, if Grandma dies an unbeliever and we know we weren't faithful to pray for her, we'll say, "Well, it just wasn't destined, you know?", instead of saying, "I should have prayed for Grandma while she was alive. I should have persevered for her life."

And people say, "No no, don't do that to yourself." You don't want to feel the guilt of that. And I think that maybe I ought to, right?

Matt: Yes, absolutely.

Jeff: That's the kind of thing you're talking about. It's that passage in Matthew 16. Jesus says, "Peter, I'll give you the keys to the kingdom." (*Unclear*) So my question is what are we missing out on? In this access to God what are we missing out on?

Jeff: I do think we're missing out on the prayer element. You know, there's a good reason why Jesus said, "When I return, will I find people praying?" Yes?

Brave Man: Paul is asking to be prayed for so that he will return. If he doesn't return, the people who prayed are going to be a little disappointed with that decision.

Jeff: Well, I don't know if it's Paul. So I'm not committing to who the author of Hebrews is. So maybe he did come, whoever he was. Yes, Greg?

Greg: We try to comprehend this. We just can't comprehend both our freedom, if you will, our responsibility and God's sovereignty. They go together.

Jeff: Sure. Yes.

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Greg: And also with regard to the ways to get to Pittsburgh, God knows which way we’re going to take, and He has ordained that as well. But really, we still make a choice. That’s what makes habits. The other thing is that if God were not sovereign, why would we pray?

Jeff: Right. I know.

Greg: It’s almost like He’s going to do something different than what He has in mind. So we’re more powerful than God. You make your own choice and we’re just wasting our time.

Jeff: Don’t you love the people who don’t believe in the sovereignty of God until it’s time to pray? “God, please convert her!” Wait a minute! And you know, that’s the great thing. Greg said something really important. We all have a choice, right? But we are under the sovereign administration of God.

I’m holding this. (*this microphone*) I’m not holding this. I made a choice to put that down. Did God know and sovereignly ordain and superintend through His providence for me to do that? Absolutely. I’m going to pick it up again. But that was a choice of mine, right? These are choices I make. But I don’t make them outside of God’s administration. Okay—

Don Maurer: An Arminian is a Calvinist on his knees.

Jeff: Yes. That’s exactly right. *Lives fitted*. I think this is an important thing. I want you to notice that the benediction is a wonderful benediction in verses 20-21. Remember that I said I was going to pull on the thread. So the thread that I’m going to pull on is that we were talking about prayer. He urged them to pray. Now he’s going to show them what it’s like to pray. This is a prayer. So he gives them an example.

Now a blessing, a benediction, is not technically a prayer. But it is. I mean, there’s that sense. “May the Lord God bless you and keep you.” There’s a sense in which the benediction is not technically a prayer, but it is a prayer. So that’s the thread that I’m going to pull on.

Now the benedictory prayer is may God what? “*Equip you in every good thing to do His will.*” Now that’s the wish or the hope. It’s a benediction, so it’s more of a promise to the people. “*May God equip you in every good thing.*”

I want you to notice something that I think is really interesting. It’s a parallel. The word *equip* is *catartidzo*. May God equip you. May He what? Prepare you.

Now go back to Hebrews chapter 10 verse 5, and notice this. This is about Jesus and the Incarnation. “*But a body You prepared for Me.*” Again this is Jesus and the Incarnation. *Prepared* is *catartidzo*. Isn’t that interesting! “*A body You have prepared for Me.*” *Catartidzo*.

For what purpose? 5:7: “*To do Your will, O God.*” Now think about this. The Son is equipped through the body to do God’s will. And in the benediction we just looked at God equips us with every good to do His will.

There’s a parallel here. The parallel is that we are being conformed to Christ’s likeness. Just as Christ was given a body so that He might do the will of God, so we are prepared with every good so that we might do the will of God.

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But it actually extends beyond this. We think in terms of being saved and being like Him. But the parallel extends into 5:7. What does 5:7 say? *“In the days of His flesh He offered up both prayers and supplications.”* And He did it with what? *“Loud cries and tears to the One who was able to save Him from death. And He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.”*

Now my point is that here’s the Son praying, not because He thinks it’s worthless to pray. But the Son is praying because He’s having communion with God. And He’s praying, and He’s learning obedience as the Mediator as He does.

Brave Man: What verse is it?

Jeff: It’s 5:7. Sorry, not 10:7.

Transcriber’s Note: (A cell phone ring tone goes off.)

Jeff: Now I always believe that life should be set to music, especially dance music like that. *(Laughter)* Now here’s the obvious question, right? If we’re supposed to be conformed to the Son, why aren’t we conformed to Him in our prayer lives? I mean, there seems to be in my mind when I look at the benediction, and when I look at this in 5:1-7, that there’s a clear parallel between “prepare to do the will of God”—pray--, to “prepared for every good work”—pray.

I think that our lives are fitted into the mold of Christ. And we see Christ who is the Son of God. This is the ironic thing, right? If anybody should ask, “Why should I pray?”, it should be the Son. And yet He takes all kinds of time to go pray.

And do you know why He prays? He prays because it was prophesied of Him in Psalm 2, where the Father says to the Mediator, *“Ask of Me and I will give You the nations.”* The Son prays throughout His ministry. And guess what He says in Matthew 28. *“All authority in heaven and on earth”,* all authority over the nations, *“has been given to Me.”* “Therefore go into the nations.” And we go, “Hey, this prayer was answered,” right? He was told to pray. He prayed. His prayer was answered.

That’s the idea that we ought to be embracing. You know what we have a tendency to do, though. “Well, He’s the Son of God!” Well, you’re right. He’s the Son of God. But the Son of God did not resist temptation because of Deity. He resisted temptation because of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit took from the gifts and the graces of the divine nature and bestowed them upon the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we possess the same Spirit who takes from the benefits and the blessings that Christ earned for us and bestows them upon us.

No, we’re not going to be perfect like Christ this side of heaven. But we can look like Christ more and more. And that’s the idea, that’s the point.

And then there’s this idea of *listening to the Lord*, which is a pretty important idea if we think about the book of Hebrews. You know, Hebrews starts off with pay attention. Don’t drift. Keep your eyes focused on the shoreline so that you don’t drift.

And he says, “I *paracoleo* you. Hear a word of *paraclesis*.” In other words, look. “Hear a word of encouragement and come stand with me where I’m standing, not because I’m standing there but because where I’m standing is where Christ the Lord is standing.”

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Now look, here’s the deal. Here’s what I want to say to you. There is absolutely no silver bullet to any of this. Let me end with this illustration here. There’s no silver bullet to this. If you think there’s a silver bullet, you’re crazy. There’s no silver bullet to the Christian life.

That’s why I like *Pilgrim’s Progress* so much. *Pilgrim’s Progress* is one of those great books that teaches us about the journey.

Do you remember? There’s a place where Hopeful and Christian run into a certain country whose air naturally tended to make one drowsy. So what do they decide to do? They decide that they’re going to prevent drowsiness by having some good conversation.

Now if you look at that conversation that they have, it’s really interesting. They sing. They have a catechetical exchange and ask each other questions. They do a little self-examination. They encourage one another. There’s no magic bullet in that. There’s no silver bullet in that. They’re just trying to keep awake by the means that God has said are good for us.

And so oftentimes, I’ll never forget. When my wife and I were first home schooling, as a parent you naturally try to find that silver bullet curriculum, the kind of silver bullet curriculum that’s going to make my kid an Einstein by the end of his first year in first grade. *(Laughter)* And you can see that it didn’t work. *(Laughter)* By second grade it did. How’s that? Is that good? *(Laughter)*

My point is that if you look for that silver bullet, you just can’t find it for anything. My wife is still looking for that silver bullet curriculum. I had to sit her down yesterday and say to her, “Honey, think back. Go back to kindergarten and first grade. What silver bullet curriculum is out there? There’s no silver bullet curriculum.”

And you know, she has an idealistic perspective. She says, “I got it, I got it.” And my point to us is that there is no silver bullet in the Christian life. It’s just faithfulness.

Brave Man: It’s an intentional life lived for Christ.

Jeff: Oh, there you go! I can’t think of a better way to say it than that. That’s great. Okay, so I’ll end there with that. *(Laughter)* Don, what do you have?

Don Maurer: A couple of things. If there was anyone who taught about the sovereignty of God I believe it would be the apostle Paul. And yet how many times did he say, “Pray for us; pray for me?”

Jeff: Yes.

Don: And also I have to chuckle at verse 22. *“I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words.”*

Transcriber’s Note: NKJV.

Don: There are people who get antsy after a half-hour or 45-minute sermon. And he says, “I’ve written to you briefly.”

Jeff: Yes. And not something real easy, right? I mean, this is quite a thinker. If this was a sermon, what a sermon it was, right?

All right. Well, let me pray for us. Father, thank You for this day, for the time. And thank You for the book of Hebrews. Father, what a book it is, a blessing to be in. And Father, what a good reminder to us at the end to be faithful in our Christian living, to pray and to remember that we’re fitted for this task of praying as we’ve been brought into

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union with the Lord Jesus Christ. We just need to listen to you and to stand where we are in Christ and to do the things we've been summoned to do because of faithfulness, not because we're looking for some silver bullet, but just because of the fact that You have summoned us to stand in Christ. So Lord, help us to stand, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen. (*Applause*)