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# Unshakable Faith in God's Predestined Plan

Scripture: Acts 4:24-31

Sermon Series: *The Acts of Jesus Today*

Topic: God's Will, Predestination



## Acts 4:24-31 (ESV)

<sup>24</sup> And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said,

“Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, <sup>25</sup> who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

“Why did the Gentiles rage,  
and the peoples plot in vain?

<sup>26</sup> The kings of the earth set themselves,  
and the rulers were gathered together,  
against the Lord and against his Anointed’—

<sup>27</sup> for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the

peoples of Israel, <sup>28</sup> to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. <sup>29</sup> And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, <sup>30</sup> while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

<sup>31</sup> And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

## Introduction

There aren't many prayer meetings that end with the house being shaken. However, this one did. These Christians gathered together to pray and the Lord God answered their request. They prayed for God to grant them “to continue speaking the word of God with boldness” (v.29). God gave them what they requested. He shook the house they were in and filled them with His Holy Spirit. God let them know that He was with them. He let them know that He and He alone was the Sovereign God. He shook the house to let them know He was there among them. Then He filled them with His Spirit and we are told, they “continued to speak the word of God with boldness” (v.31). They had just been arrested, mistreated, interrogated, and threatened because of the name of Jesus and now here they are praying for God to give them boldness to keep talking about Jesus. And God gave them boldness.

What will keep you praying when you're suffering for the sake of Jesus? What will keep you believing in the power of God when the power of those who hate God are opposing you with all their might? What will keep you trusting in Jesus when everything looks like Satan is the god of this world? Jesus said that as the end draws near,

Matthew 24:12-13 (ESV)

And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Many people look around and see lawlessness increasing and their love for God is growing cold. Many people look at this broken world and conclude God is not in control of this lawlessness. And their love for God grows cold. Two weeks ago I wrote an email to a friend whom I hadn't seen in a while to check upon on him. He wrote me back, “I don't believe in God anymore, much less Jesus.”

I want to keep that from happening. I want your faith to endure to the end so that you will be saved. What will keep your faith in Jesus growing hotter, rather than growing gradually colder? What will keep your faith enduring and growing as lawlessness increases in the world?

The only thing that will keep your faith firm and solid to the end is an unshakable faith and hope in the power and sovereignty of God. Bold faith comes from an unshakable conviction that the word of God is true and that the power of God will ultimately prevail over all His

enemies. Boldness comes from an unshakable conviction that God is able to keep all of his promises. Boldness comes from an unshakable faith in God's power to keep His word and accomplish all of His will despite all circumstances.

One of the greatest obstacles to unshakable faith in God is a pervasive misunderstanding of the sovereignty of God as it relates to evil and suffering in the world. Most people think that the sovereignty of God means that God would never will (i.e. ordain or plan) any suffering and thus the only right and proper exercise of his sovereignty entails the avoidance of all suffering rather than the entering into suffering and thereby triumphing over it. This misunderstanding has caused many people to wrongly conclude that the presence of evil and suffering in the world necessarily entails the absence of God. We've all heard the argument, in some form or another,

God is all good and all powerful.

It is good to remove all suffering.

Suffering exists.

Therefore, either God is not all good or he is not all powerful or there is no God!

The problem with this argument is found in premise two. The argument is wrong because of a matter of timing. The unspoken assumption of premise two is that 'it is good to remove all suffering **now**.' The Bible does teach us that God is all good and all powerful and that he will **one day** remove all suffering, but that day is not today.<sup>1</sup> That day is coming in the future, but it is not now. It is not today. Thus, the biblical conclusion is that God—for reasons that we may not easily or quickly understand—has willed not to immediately remove all suffering. Since He is all good, He must have some good reason for delaying the removal of all suffering and sin.

If we are to have an unshakable faith in the face of suffering and sin that we experience in this broken world, then what from this passage and this prayer can we learn.

I see three truths. First, God has a predestined plan for his people. Second, His plan includes suffering. Third, that plan will end in victory.

## God Has a Predestined Plan for His People

First, **God has a predestined plan for His people**. We see this in predestined plan that He had for Jesus. Verse 28 cries out to thoughtful Christians for serious consideration. To get the context, let's read verse 27 as well.

Acts 4:27-28 (ESV)

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<sup>1</sup> See Revelation 7:17; 21:4.

<sup>27</sup> for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, <sup>28</sup> to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

In other words, *the sinful opposition to Jesus by Herod and Pilate, was planned in advance by God*. The mockery and mistreatment of Jesus by king Herod and along with Pilate's admission of the innocence of Jesus, yet his caving in to the pressure of the bloodthirsty crowd, eventuating in the unjust condemnation of Jesus and the completely unjustified flogging of Jesus was all part of God's predestined plan. The raging, brutality of the Roman soldiers and the perverse plotting of the Jewish authorities was all part of the predestined plan of God the Father.

How do we know it was predestined? Because we were told in advance that all of this was coming. In their prayer, in the previous two sentences, vs. 25 and 26, they quoted Psalm 2:1-2, which was written about 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus. Psalm 2 was a prophetic psalm. In other words, the content of the psalm resulted from God speaking, through the mouth of David by the power of the Holy Spirit, about what He planned to do in David's future. Through David, God, 1,000 years in advance, was announcing and revealing His predestined plan which He intended to effect through the life of messiah, who turned out to be Jesus of Nazareth.

Peter has already, earlier in the book of Acts, affirmed that everything that unfolded in the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus was all part of God's predetermined plan.

Acts 2:23 (ESV)

...this Jesus, delivered up according to *the definite plan and foreknowledge of God*, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

The sin that delivered Jesus to the cross and the suffering he enduring on the cross, his death, and the grave, were all part of the predestined, predetermined, definite plan of God which unfolded according to His foreknowledge. All of the terrible things that Jesus experienced were part of God's predestined plan for His only Son.

- The **betrayal** of Jesus by **Judas** was spoken of beforehand by David about 1,000 years before the time of Jesus (Psalm 41:9 & 55:12-14).
- That the price of his betrayal would be **thirty pieces of silver** was revealed beforehand by the prophet Zechariah (11:12-13) who wrote about 500 years before Jesus.
- That all of this **disciples would abandon him** on the night he needed them most was spoken of beforehand by the prophet Zechariah (13:7).

- That messiah would **be hated without reason** was announced beforehand in Psalm 34:19 & 69:4 (see also Jn. 15:24-25).
- That he would be **rejected** by Jewish high priests and elders (Psalm 118:22-23).
- That the Jewish people would be **offended** by him was announced by Isaiah (8:14-15) who wrote about 700 years before Jesus.
- That he would be **scourged, punched** in the **face**, and **spat** upon was spoken of by Isaiah (50:6; Mt. 26:67; 27:26, 30; Mk. 14:65).
- That he would be **silent** throughout this unjust trial announced by Isaiah (53:7; Mt. 26:63).
- That he would be **falsely accused** by false witnesses (Ps. 27:12; 35:11; Mt. 26:60-61).
- That his hands and feet were to be **pierced** was revealed by Isaiah (53:5), Zechariah (12:10), and David (Ps. 22:16).
- That the soldiers would **gamble for his clothes** (Ps. 22:18; Mt. 27:35).
- That he would feel **forsaken by God** was announced through David in Psalm 22:1.
- That he would be **crucified with criminals**, affirmed by Isaiah (53:12).
- That he would be **mocked** as he was dying by people saying, "He trusts in God, so let God deliver him," was revealed beforehand by David (Ps. 22:6-7; Mt. 27:39-43).
- That he would be put to **death** (Isaiah 53:7).
- That he would be **buried in a rich man's tomb**, also by Isaiah (53:9).
- That he would be **resurrected** from the dead is explained by David (Psalm 16:8-10; 49:15; 86:13; Acts 2:27; 13:35).
- That messiah would be resurrected **on the third day** (Gen. 22:4-5; Hosea 6:1-3; Mt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19).

There are many, many more details of God's predestined plan concerning His messiah/Son that could be listed, but these should suffice to demonstrate that God had a very specific, predestined plan concerning His holy, only Son, that encompassed his entire life from birth to death to resurrection and even his ascension into heaven.

## God's Predestined Plan Includes Suffering

Secondly, from these examples just cited we can see that **God's predestined, predetermined plan included suffering and the sin that gives rise to them**. Jesus suffered as a result of Judas' sinful betrayal. He suffered as he watched all of his disciples sinfully flee from him in cowardice

on the darkest night of his life. He suffered under the sinful mockery and rejection of his own people, when all he had done was heal and help them.

He suffered as a result of the sinful jealousy and hatred of the high priests and elders. He suffered the defamation of his holy name as a result of the sinful lies of the false witnesses against him. He suffered through a verdict of condemnation by Pilate's sinful submission to the sinful demands of a sinful crowd. He suffered as a result of the sinful physical abuse, brutality, and torturous execution of the Roman soldiers. He suffered the loss of his perfectly pure life even though he had committed no sin worthy of death.

Yet, all of this suffering and sin was included in God's predestined plan.

## God's Predestined Plan Ends in Victory

However, what is the outcome of God's predestined plan? *God's predestined plan ends in victory!* Through all the suffering and through all the sin, God has accomplished salvation. Jesus endured such sin and hostility from sinful people, and yet all the while he was working out and bringing to completion eternal salvation for all who would place their faith unshakably in him! *As sinful men of the world were intending His destruction, the sovereign God of the universe was at work intending salvation.* What they meant for death, God meant for life.

### God's Predestined Plan for Jesus Ended in Victory

Salvation was not effected by the absence or the avoidance of sin and suffering, but rather by Jesus walking into and straight through the heart of it. Jesus did not work salvation by avoiding sin, but rather by entering into it and destroying it from the inside out. Jesus rose victorious over sin and suffering. The resurrection of Jesus destroyed the grip of sin in death. The punishment of sin is death, but Jesus died though he himself had never sinned. This fact allowed him to destroy death by conquering it through his victorious resurrection. Death could not hold him for he never sinned, and yet he submitted himself to death. Jesus allowed himself to die. "He gave up the ghost," as the KJV puts it. He surrendered his spirit. He yielded to death, though death could not hold him. There were no legal grounds for him to experience death and yet he tasted death on behalf of all who would place their faith unshakably in him! Thus, in Christ is our victory over sin, suffering, and death.

### God's Predestined Plan for Joseph Ended in Victory

This is the predestined plan of God Almighty. It is to give life through death. It is to bring about salvation through sin and suffering. This is seen in the life of Joseph. When he was 16 years old God gave him a hint of His predestined plan for Joseph's life. However, before Joseph could ever experience victory by bringing life and salvation to his people, he first had to walk through suffering; the betrayal of own brothers, the separation of loss of his dear family, years of slavery, false accusations, years of lonely nights in the pit of a prison. And yet, in the end deliverance came. In the end victory came. Joseph said to his brothers,

“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. God sent me before you to preserve a remnant on earth, and to keep alive many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God.” Genesis 45:7; 50:20 (ESV)

In the end, God’s predestined plan for Joseph’s life led to life and victory and deliverance and reunion with his family. God’s predestined plan for Joseph’s life ended in victory.

### **God’s Predestined Plan for Paul Ended in Victory**

God’s predestined plan for the apostle Paul ended in victory too, but before victory came intense suffering. Recall the words of Jesus about Paul,

Acts 9:15-16 (ESV) “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

Paul was chosen by Jesus. Jesus had a particular plan for Paul’s life. Jesus chose him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles and yet his will for Paul was that he suffer greatly. When was this plan for Paul’s life put in place?

Galatians 1:15-16 (ESV) But when he who had *set me apart before I was born*, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles...

God had a plan for Paul’s life, that plan was predestined before Paul was even born, and God’s plan for his life included suffering—much suffering<sup>2</sup>—and yet it ended in victory.

2 Timothy 4:6-8 (ESV) <sup>6</sup> For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. <sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Paul’s faith was unshakably hopeful in the full victory he would one day be granted by Jesus. Despite the fact that he suffered greatly for Christ’s sake, his faith in Christ’s ultimate victory was unshakable.

These examples teach us that God is indeed the Sovereign Lord who alone possess all power to fulfill all His word and to accomplish all His will. Therefore, our faith in Him must be unshakable. God has a predetermined plan for the lives of his children. That plan is not

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<sup>2</sup> See 2 Corinthians 11:23-28.

hindered by suffering, but is fulfilled through suffering. God's predestined plan will always end in victory. Therefore, let your faith in Him remain unshakable and unwavering.

## Does God Have a Predestined Plan for Your Life?

The question you're probably now asking is, "Does God have a predestined plan for my life?" If Jesus is to be our example, then the answer is "Yes!" If God had a plan for Joseph's life, then does He not have a plan for your life? If God had a plan for Paul's life, then does he not have a plan for your life? Consider the words of David,

Psalm 139:16 ...in your book were written, everyone one of them, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there were none of them.

Yes, God has a plan for your life and my life, but He has not revealed to us the full transcript of our lives. He reveals to us His overarching plans for our lives, but He does not typically reveal to us every detail of our lives.

## God's Revealed Will (Will of Command)

These overarching plans for our lives is referred to as God's will of command. These are the things that God commands for all his children. For example, the Ten Commandments;

Do not have any other gods before me; Do not make or worship any carved image or any likeness of any created thing; Do not take the name of the LORD in vain; Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy; Honor your father and mother; Do not murder; Do not commit adultery; Do not steal; Do not lie; and Do not desire your neighbors stuff.

Or verses like this,

John 6:40 (ESV) "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

This is God's will for you, that you look on Jesus the Son and believe in him so that you may have eternal life. Or this one,

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 (ESV) For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God;

It is God's will that we all keep ourselves sexually pure. It is never God's will that you anyone be sexually active outside of marriage (which in Scripture is always between a man and a

women). There are dozens and dozens of these kinds of statements throughout the Bible that clearly reveal God's plan for your life.

### God's Concealed Will (Will of Decree)

However, it is not God's will to reveal to you the exact details of his plan for your life. Yes, He has a predestined plan for you life, but He is not obligated to reveal this and He has chosen not to reveal this to us. He did reveal more than 100 specific details about Jesus' life, but that was so that we would know that he is God's messiah since salvation is only found through him. Thus, God revealed in advance with incredible accuracy many of the details of Jesus' life, but only so we would know that He is God's only messiah. For the rest of us God does not reveal the specific details of our lives in advance. There are moments when God may chose to reveal specific details, but these are the exception rather than rule.

### Life's Purpose is Personal Communion with God, Not Impersonal Conjuring without God

However, if God does choose to reveal specific details, He does so by way of *consistent, personal communion, and not by inconsistent, impersonal conjuring*. God reveals to His children day by day all that we need to know in order to walk faithfully with Him every day.

The whole point and purpose of life is know God and enjoy His company. Thus, the goal of life is not to discover God's plan for our lives as if that plan can somehow be detached from His person. *The purpose of life is not to follow an impersonal plan, but rather to follow, know, and love a precious person.* The goal of life is to intimately know the holy, living person who created you. Thus, God says to us,

Psalms 32:8 (ESV) I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;  
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

**This requires daily, close communion.** We must be daily close enough to him to hear his voice in order to receive instruction from Him. We must be daily close enough to him to see His eyes, as it were, in order to receive direction from Him. This is the way the Lord reveals to His children His plan for your life—one day at a time. If you were to think of your life as a book, He would lead you one page at a time, not one chapter at a time. Keep your eyes on Him and He will teach you and instruct you in the way you should go.

We need to stop expecting God to reveal to us the entire script for our lives. We simply need to obey the clear principles that are taught in Scripture and then all the details will all fall into place. Gods

These commandments in the Bible serve to guard us and keep us within the bounds of the life that God blesses. God's commands are like guard rails that keep us on the road that leads to blessing. Or they are like a fence keeping us in God's blessings and

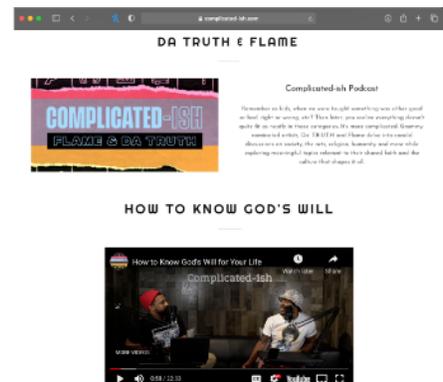
keeping God's curses out of our lives. The commandments are like a fence around the backyard. God says to us, "Go play anywhere in backyard, but just don't go outside the fence." We can then, like little kids, go out and play anywhere in the big back yard of life, so long as we stay within the fence of his commandments.

And God does not need to tell us every detail. He doesn't need to say, "OK, stop running and now go play in the sandbox. Ok, now leave the sandbox and go swing on the swing. Ok, now leave the swing and slide down the sliding board. Ok, now leave the sliding board and go climb the tree." God has given us the whole wide world to enjoy and so long as we stay within the boundaries of his commands, we'll be fine and He will guide us with His eye upon us.

Obey what you know and He will direct you in what you don't. You don't need to worry about finding the one, right woman to marry. Just ask a few simple questions, does she love Jesus? Does she like you? Does she keep her word? Is she willing to spend the rest of her life with the likes of you??? Well then, she's the one. But, it's not God's will that a Christian marry an unbeliever. This is clearly forbidden, so you don't need to ask that question.<sup>3</sup> God's already answered it. It is never God's will that a Christian marry a non-Christian.

Or, it is clearly not God's will that you have a job where you are required to lie everyday. That is incompatible with God's will. Obey the clear directions in God's will and all other areas will become clear as you keep your eyes on Jesus and listen daily to his teaching from his word.

If you're looking for a short, down to earth, honest wrestling with the issue of finding God's will in your life, then check out Da Truth & Flame in their podcast called Complicated-ish. These two Christian rappers together chat about the biblical and non-biblical ways we all try to find God's will for our lives. They offer some helpful advice.



## Conclusion

In conclusion, Acts 4:28 reveals to us that God has a predetermined plan for His people. That plan includes suffering. This was the case for Joseph, Jesus, Paul, and Peter. If God's predestined plan for his perfect, holy Son included suffering under the sinful actions of wicked people, then should we be shocked when God's plan for us includes the same? If the Master suffered so much, should we His servants expect to be exempted from the same? The truth is

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:39.

the servant is not above his master.<sup>4</sup> However, *God's plan always ends in victory*. Remember Jesus' words,

John 16:33 (ESV) "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

While we are in this world, we will experience much trouble and tribulation. But peace through this crazy, broken world is found only in Jesus, for in Him—and Him alone—is victory over this world. Remember the words of Paul.

Acts 14:22 (ESV)... encouraged them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

Here and now life will be filled with many tribulations, but take heart, through an unshakable faith in Jesus "we will enter the kingdom of God."

Does God have a plan for your life? Yes, He does. The form of that plan begins with obedience to the clear commands of God in the Bible. If we obey the commands we know, then He will lead us through what we do not know. We must stay close to Him; close enough to hear His voice and see His eyes. It is through this sweet, intimate communion that the Lord will lead His children.

Thus, do not allow your faith to be shaken when the winds of suffering and adversity blow across and batter your life. Keep your faith unshakably in Him for He has a sweet and good plan for you life. When you must walk through suffering do not allow your faith to falter. Keep your faith in the unshakably strong arms of Jesus. Only in Him will we ever experience victory, but it is certain, if your faith unshakably endures in Jesus and His good, predestined plan for your life, then you will one day enter the kingdom of heaven in victory.

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 10:24-25.