

Your Threats Can't Intimidate Us Acts 4:13-31 (April 13, 2025)



In 1521, Martin Luther was summoned to Worms by the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V.

He had been declared a heretic and ordered to recant or face death.

Luther stood his ground and famously declared – Here I stand I can do no other.

I was in Germany last year at these historic sites. This morning, I even have on my Luthersocks – emblazoned with – **Here I stand I can do no other.**

Luther knew that humanly speaking the most likely outcome was he was going to be killed.

But he was bold, clear and unmoving in the face of a very clear and present danger to his life.

Why?

Because he believed God was sovereign, the Lord's kingdom would prevail and his own life was actually in God's hand not the Emperor's – and that his calling was to be faithful whatever the outcome.

He knew the likely outcome was one of two things – he would die or he would leave as an outlaw.

And when you read his writings about this trial – he reasoned – God will do with me whatever will best benefit His kingdom.

If advancing the gospel means I die – so be it. I go to heaven.

If advancing the gospel means I am hunted – so be it. His kingdom will come.

God just give me the courage to be faithful and bold.

This has always been the way. The people of God know that God's Kingdom is coming, Jesus will triumph, the world cannot stop it – and that encourages us to be bold and faithful no matter what we face.

Our main point this morning comes in the form of a prayer – a prayer the first church prayed:



Omnipotent Master – Creator and Predestiner. None can oppose You. Your plan will be done. So, fill us with boldness to not turn from our task. Amen.

We are in the book of Acts and we have seen that the message in this book is:



We must strive to see His kingdom come, through the empowering of His Spirit, by witnessing to the nations, until He comes again.

In chapters 3-6, we see the kingdom growing and spreading throughout Jerusalem.



And the message that empowers this growing kingdom is simple.

Our King Has Come And He Alone Saves.

And:

His Kingdom Comes And It Is Unstoppable.

God is on our side and no one can oppose Him.

You should get with His program because you can't stop it.

Last week, we saw that this message did not exactly go down well with the Jewish authorities and you can understand why.

The Apostles were preaching a message that opposed the teachings of the Jewish leaders and threatened their power.

The idea that Jesus is the Messiah and salvation is only through Him opposed their teaching about of the Law, the Temple, the sacrifices – the very things they controlled.

So, when Peter and John healed a man born lame and said – this is done in the name and power of Jesus – this is done to affirm that Jesus is the Messiah the one way of salvation – a line was crossed.

They were hauled in before the Sanhedrin.

It was an intimidating scene. They stood before High Priests, Rulers, Elders, Scribes – the very men who asked Jesus – are you the Messiah, the Son of God?

Jesus affirmed He was and they will see Him coming on the clouds of heaven.

They declared this blasphemy and it cost Him His life.

Now they ask Peter and John the same question but in a different way.

By what power or in what name have you done this?

We warn you – don't keep saying that this healing proves Jesus is the Messiah – just don't.

It was a not so thinly veiled threat – stick with this Jesus is the Messiah line and it will not end well for you.

Peter was clear:

Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing here before you healthy. This Jesus is **the stone rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone**. There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.

We are not backing down one iota because heaven and hell are at stake.

That is where we left things last week.

The Sanhedrin had threatened them – Peter and John refused to be intimidated.

This is the first of a series of dangers in chapters 3-6 that the church faces.



4:13-31	Your Threats Can't Intimidate Us
4:32-5:11	Our Sin Won't Impede Him
5:12-42	Your Persecution Can't Stop Us
6:1-7	Our Division Won't Distract Us

Notice that these dangers are both **external** and **internal**.

There are threats from outside. Sin from within. Outright persecution from outside. Finally, division inside.

The more dangerous threats are actually those from inside the church.

But, the point of these chapters is that God is sovereign and no dangers will derail God's plan.

This section ends with Acts 6:7:

So the word of God spread, the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly in number, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith.

Despite every danger and threat – God worked to build His kingdom and the church just kept growing and spreading.



This morning we will look at the first danger the church faced. Threats from the authorities. And we will see:

4:13-31 Your Threats Can't Intimidate Us

First, we come to:



The dilemma the Jews faced 13-16

Look with me at Acts 4:13–14:

When they observed the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed and recognized that they had been with Jesus. And since they saw the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in opposition.

Remember, this was not the first threat of this kind these Jewish leaders had faced. There were other men who claimed to be Messiah and gathered followings.

They had an established playbook to deal with this kind of stuff.

You discredit them as false teachers to the masses – and you threaten them behind closed doors.

We have all the cards – stop this nonsense now or we will be forced to shut you up.

About the only time this hadn't worked was with Jesus of Nazareth.

But it is not as if Peter and John were seasoned political operatives. They were fisherman – no formal education and training. The Sanhedrin expected to be able to silence them fairly easily with a few threats.

However, what made them different was the fact that they had been with Jesus.

They **knew** He was the Messiah. They had **seen** His resurrection. They **believed** His kingdom would come.

So, they didn't buckle – not one inch.

And the other arm of the playbook – discrediting them before the masses – well there was a problem there too. The decidedly awkward reality of the man who had been so publicly and inconveniently healed.

Threats hadn't worked. Now they had a decision to make. Verses 15-16:

After they ordered them to leave the Sanhedrin, they conferred among themselves, saying, "What should we do with these men? For an obvious sign has been done through them, clear to everyone living in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it."

What do we do with these guys? The normal gameplan isn't working because they actually believe Jesus is the Messiah and because of Mr leaping around praising God.

The Sanhedrin did have a few options.

They could imprison them for a short time – but the problem was that Rome had to OK a longer stint in prison.

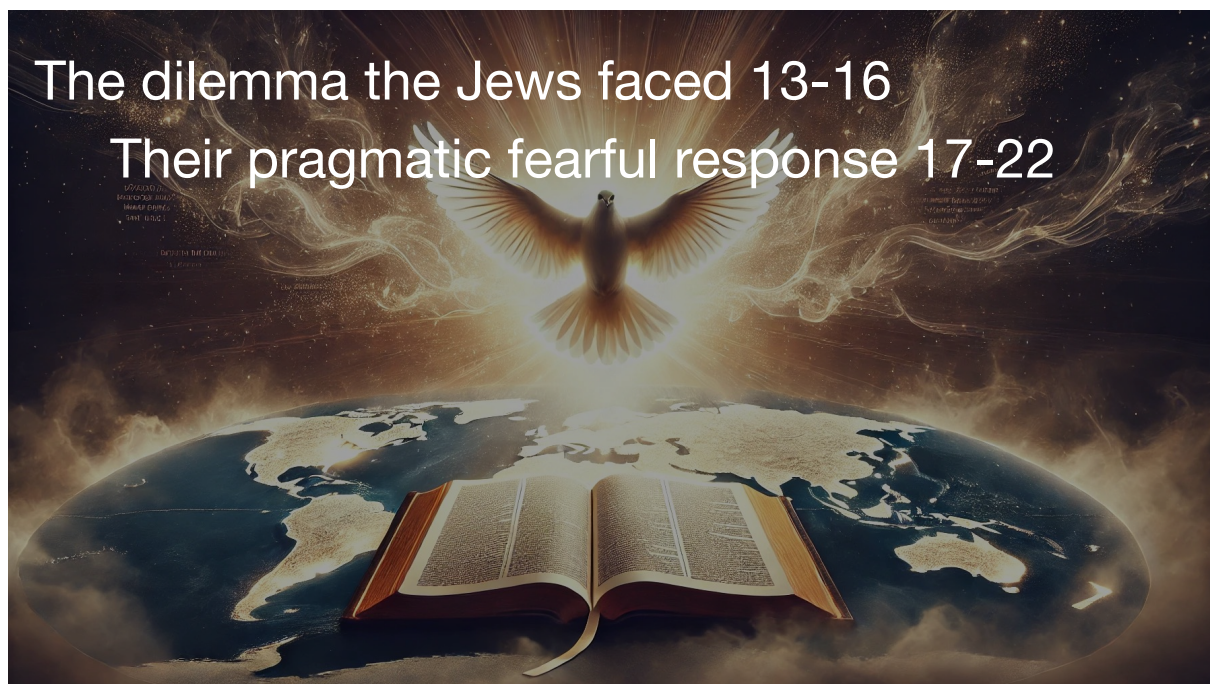
They could take the nuclear route – a la Jesus – and actually follow through with a threat and ask Rome to please kill these men.

But the easy one, the one to buy some time while they worked out their options was to make the threat again – we don't want to do it – but if we need to we will get the Romans to kill you. If you think we won't – remember Jesus.

Their threat is a bit hollow because Rome would want to know their crime – and healing a disabled man is not usually a crime punishable by death.

And then there was the people. Everyone living in Jerusalem had heard about the miracle of the lame man – they can't deny it happened.

Taking it all into account it led to:



Their pragmatic fearful response 17-22

Acts 4:17–18:

“But so that this does not spread any further among the people, let's threaten them against speaking to anyone in this name again.” So they called for them and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

They took the pragmatic route – mainly because they feared the people.

In a sense, this is really embarrassing.

The great leaders of the Jews – who have all the power here – have pulled their great lever – we will punish you unless you stop talking about Jesus.

But Peter and John basically laughed.

Now – I might have hoped someone among these 70 leaders – people who knew the Scriptures – might have said – um should we talk about the elephant in the room – the

lame guy is actually healed – should we even talk about whether Jesus could be the Messiah?

We don't have a hint that this even raised at this time. It seems the thought does cross the mind at least one of them by the next chapter.

But truth was an inconvenience when their authority and power was at stake.

So, they pulled the pragmatic lever – again.

Do not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus – or else. You listening – **OR ELSE!**

Verses 19-20:

Peter and John answered them, "Whether it's right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."

We are good Jews – we know we are supposed to obey you guys – our leaders.

But – you are saying – don't be witnesses.

However Jesus – yes the Jesus raised from the dead – the Jesus who healed this man – He told us – we are to be His witnesses in Jerusalem – all the way to the ends of the earth.

Jesus is the Messiah – the God man.

You have Scribes and teachers here – so tell us – **do we obey God or you guys?**

We have made our mind up – we are obeying God – the God who raises from the dead and heals the lame.

So, we are most definitely going to keep speaking about what we have seen and heard.

Well, the Sanhedrin realized their plan wasn't working. So, verses 21-22:

After threatening them further, they released them. They found no way to punish them because the people were all giving glory to God over what had been done. For this sign of healing had been performed on a man over forty years old.

Three times they threatened them. Probably everything from excommunication all the way to death.

If you have to repeat a threat – it means you won't follow through – or you don't really want to follow through.

You've seen the parent – eat your veges or else.

The kid doesn't touch them.

Right – eat your veges or I am going to tell your dad – and we both know you do not want that.

Heard that before. No about the only think we both know is you won't do anything lady.

Fine – Eat them or no TV for a month and no dessert ever.

Yea right – as if.

I don't think the Sanhedrin's threats are empty.

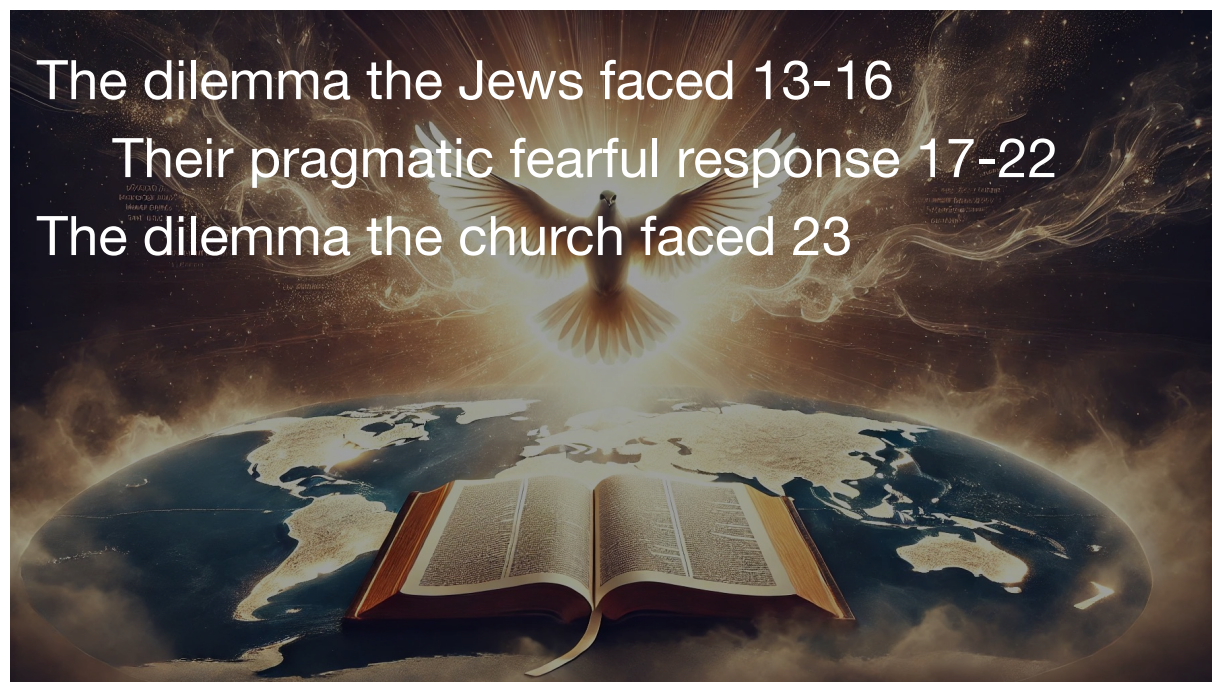
I think the Sanhedrin actually wanted to follow through on their threat – but they were afraid of the people – so pragmatism it is for now.

For now, the thought of having to deal with an angry population who had all seen this healing made them put things on hold.

The leaders of the Jews were afraid of pushing the mob – for now – but they wanted it clear – don't push us too hard. We killed Jesus – if we have to – we **will** deal with you – don't call our bluff.

Look, they will kill Stephen for publicly declaring Jesus is the Messiah. They will unleash a widescale persecution – but only when they realise nothing is stopping these guys.

So – Peter and John – but also the church – now have a decision to make.



The dilemma the church faced 23

Acts 4:23:

After they were released, they went to their own people and reported everything the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

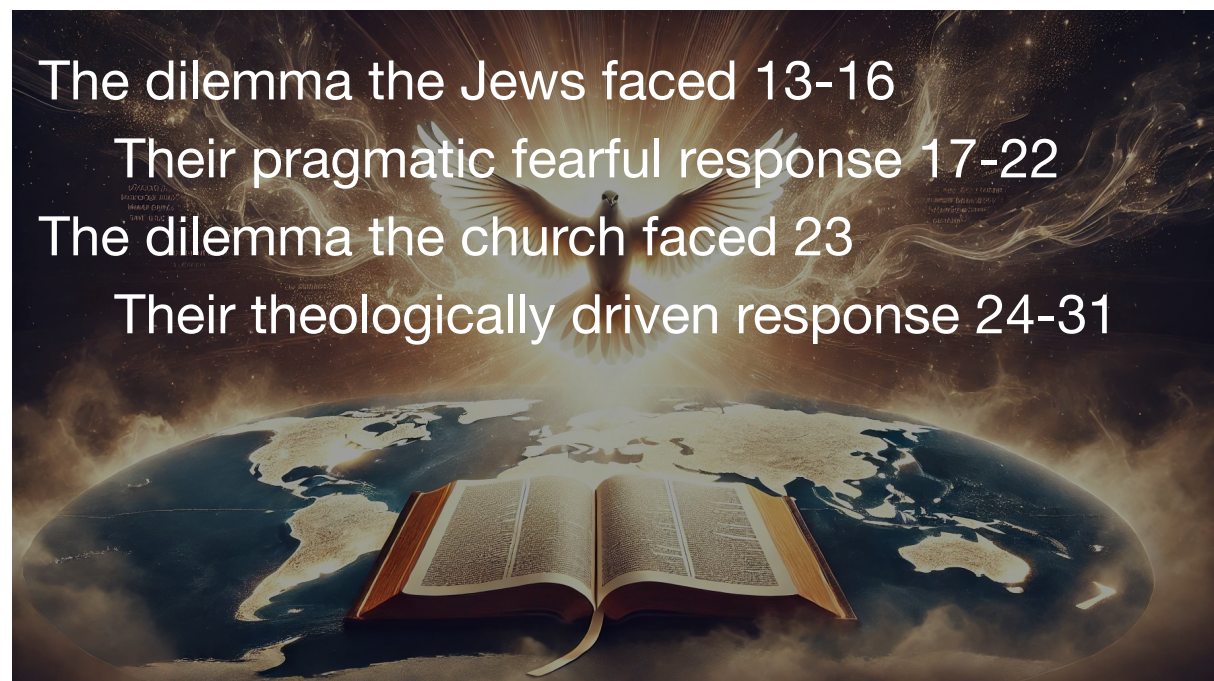
It is one thing for Peter and John to stand up to the Sanhedrin – but this will bring repercussions on the whole church.

Families – old men and women – vulnerable saints.

They told them what happened. They told them about the threats.

They told them we are all commanded not to speak of Jesus – not to share the gospel – or else.

I just love the response of the whole church:



Their theologically driven response 24-31

Basically – there is nothing pragmatic or fearful about their response.

Our God is sovereign and powerful – we do what He says not what man says.

Their view of God drove them to a choice that was humanly unwise, very dangerous – but the only choice a believer can make.

Now, to give you an idea of the choice they faced, imagine the authorities in North Korea captured one of the few believers in that country.

They say to him – we could kill you – and one day most likely we will kill you.

But, today is not that day. We are letting you go. You find your little friends and pass on this message.

Never meet together as a church again, never worship Jesus again, burn every Bible you have and never speak the name of Jesus again. One warning – there won't be a second. Got it.

That person scurries back – calls the church together and says – we have a problem.

If you were part of that church – what do you do?

You have a spouse and young kids.

But you also know the church is barely hanging on in that land by a fingernail – if you all become silent – what will happen to the church there?

You would probably gather and pray. **But what would you pray?**

God – please don't let them find us.

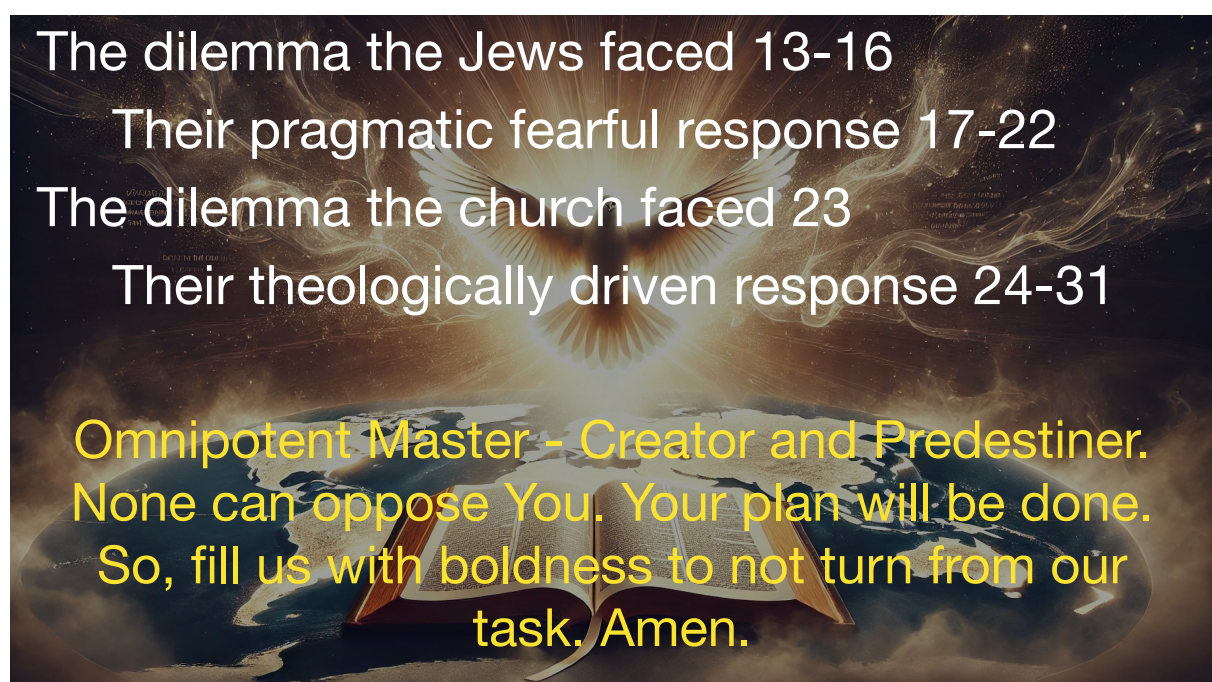
God – please cause a rebellion – may the military overthrow the Kims.

God – how about you make South Korea declare war and free us.

God – please send such a wave of conversions that even the Kims bow the knee and the threat goes away.

Well, this early church faced that kind of situation and they did call a prayer meeting.

And, here is what they prayed.



Omnipotent Master – Creator and Predestiner. None can oppose You. Your plan will be done. So, fill us with boldness to not turn from our task. Amen.

Forget removing opposition – make us bold to face what is coming our way.

They started at the right place – with the key attributes of God.

They reminded each other of just who God is.

Verse 24:

When they heard this, they raised their voices together to God and said, “Master.”

Master is the Greek word – *despotes*.

You can hear our English word – despot.

It is a word that refers to one who has complete power and authority.

Now when it is a man who has complete power and authority – a dictator – that is a bad thing because all men are corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Our English word – **despot** – has a negative connotation.

But when it refers to God who is incorruptible and wholly good – all power and authority – then it is a wonderful thing.

An Omnipotent Master who is good – is great news – the best news.

So we don’t translate this word despot. The translators often use the term Master – or Omnipotent Master – Sovereign Master – Sovereign Lord.

I think the best translation is **Omnipotent Master**.

The church then focuses on two attributes of God the Omnipotent Master.

First – He is **Creator**.

Verse 24:

You are the one who made the heaven, the earth, and the sea, and everything in them.

It is near impossible for us to understand how important this is to come to grips with.

It puts God and man in their right places.

God is Creator – we are creature – and as Creator it is His right to do with us whatever He wills.

As created sentient beings – it is so natural for us to overinflate our place in the universe.

We see ourselves as important, powerful, deserving.

But creation screams that we are but created beings – no more.

Our minds are simply not capable of wrapping around creation.

How big is the created universe?

Scientists have tried to describe it in ways that we can grasp.

Go to a beach – sand everywhere. Trillions and trillions of grains of sand.

I mean how long would it take you to count the grains in one bucket? And there are billions of buckets of sand on one beach.

Now – what if each star we can detect were a grain of sand – how much sand are we talking?

We are talking billions and billions of earth sized planets worth of sand. Forget beaches – we are talking billions of planets worth of beaches.

And that is only the stars we can detect.

And almost all the universe is empty – stars are a micro fraction of the universe.

OK – what about the smallness of the creation – the quantum level?

What if every star is now not a mere grain of sand – but one H₂O molecule – one water molecule. How much water are we talking?

10 drops. Just 10 drops.

How awesome is creation! How powerful is our Creator!

Let alone thinking of the absurd complexity of life – or the intelligence, communication and feelings of mankind.

The Bible tells us – there was nothing – then God spoke this immense, yet complex even on the quantum level universe into existence including living beings.

The creature only has the rights God grants us.

The creature is God's to do with as He wills.

Creation speaks of the **omnipotence** of God – His power. If He can create all of this out of nothing – there is *nothing* our God cannot do.

And creation speaks of the complete **sovereign rights** of God over everything in the creation – including us.

Which leads us to the second attribute – **Predestiner**.

Yes – I did use that word. I nearly didn't.

I know the word *predestine* triggers some of you – sorry – but actually – not that sorry.

Rightly understood this doctrine is one that you should rejoice in not draw back from.

Rightly understood it should fill us with confidence and boldness as it did the early church.

His will be done. His enemies will not prevail. His people will triumph – because He predestined it.

You see – the power to predestine in the hands of a *despotes* – who is not good – would be horrific.

But in the hands of God who is love – it is beyond comforting for us – His people.

Look – predestination is not a doctrine Calvin cooked up in secret that is a bad thing.

It is a truth found right throughout the Bible and rightly understood should be a great comfort to the people of God.

The word is found in verse 28 and sorry for those of you who don't like it, but the word literally means – predestine.

The word is *proorizo*. Pro – *before* – orizo – *determined*.

So, every translation – **every** one uses – predestined – or a similar concept such as – decided beforehand – or determined beforehand.

God determined, planned, orchestrated, designed – the outcome – before the world began.

While this should be a comfort – something inside us often struggles with this idea because we hate the idea that God not us controls our lives.

But, the Bible is clear the One who creates has the right to determine.

The early church understood this theology and it comforted them not made them think less of God.

As Creator God can and will do with His creation – including us – whatever will bring Him glory – and we have no right to say that He is wrong or unjust.

Many of us struggle with this.

But that is what the doctrine of creation teaches us – whether we like it or not.

And the Bible says – you should love it – embrace it – and thank God for it.

Because it means God wins and His people win and our victory is not in doubt because God predestined it.

No one – not even the kings of the earth can oppose the smallest part of God's plan for us.

Do not fear for our lives are in the hands of our Sovereign Master – not men.

Verses 25–26:

You said through the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father David your servant:
Why do the Gentiles rage and the peoples plot futile things? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers assemble together against the Lord and against his Messiah.

None can oppose You.

The church quotes Psalm 2.

Psalm 2 pictures the nations, the rulers, the kings of the earth gathering and conspiring against God and His Messiah.

They say – we don't like your plan for us – we rebel.

How does God respond in the Psalm? – He laughs and ridicules them.

He says – you just don't realise who I am – you can't oppose Me.

I will wipe your rebellion away with an iron sceptre and shatter you like pottery.

Your only option is to pay homage to My Son – bow the knee and take refuge in Him – **or** perish in your rebellion forever.

When we read this, we are supposed to think of episodes like the Tower of Babel.

Come let's gather and build a tower to the heavens – we can overthrow God.

They build this tower – but God still has to come down – they can't build it anywhere near the heavens. He looks at their efforts and laughs and scatters them.

Monday this week I mowed my lawn. Not the highlight of my week.

It got worse – right in the middle of my lawn – there was an ant colony that had appeared – a foot round – maybe an inch high.

I looked at this thing. Who do they think they are trying to take dominion over my lawn?

I don't care how many worker ants you have down there – thou shalt not prevail against the might of me.

I want to tell you – those ants had a very small – but non-zero chance of prevailing in the historic ant vs Craig Lloyd battle that ensued.

Spoiler alert – they did not prevail – I just mowed them into oblivion.

But believe me the rulers chance against God **is** zero – because the battle was decided before we were even created.

Verses 27–28:

For, in fact, in this city both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, assembled together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, to do whatever your hand and your will had predestined to take place.

There are many kings of the earth vs God battles that have occurred throughout history.

Adam. Days of Noah. Tower of Babel. Philistines, Canaanites, Persians, Babylonians, Greeks.

But the battle with the most significance had occurred in that very city. Herod, Pontius Pilate along with the Romans – assembled against the Lord and His Messiah. – in exactly the fashion quoted in verse 26.

They sent Him to the cross and declared – we have won.

And the church is saying – no you did not – not even close.

Why? What happened on the cross was nothing more than what the hand and will of God **predestined** to take place.

God sent Him there to declare victory through the cross.

The Bible is clear – before God spoke the world into existence – the plan was for Jesus to go to the cross. Acts 2:23:

Though he was delivered up according to God's determined plan and foreknowledge, you used lawless people to nail him to a cross and kill him.

I can't explain it – but God is able to plan the cross **and** declare that the choices of Judas, Herod, Pilate were real choices for which they are fully accountable.

The words – **hand**, **will** and **predestined** are clear – God planned, guided and accomplished everything about the cross.

His idea, His plan, His execution – His victory.

But the real point of verses 27 and 28 is that the church knew that cross **was** a victory – *not* for the rulers gathered against the Lord and His Messiah – it was God's great victory.

The rulers did not win – God did.

What is the point?

God **always** wins because He planned the win before Adam took his first breath.

It is always that way.

Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin might think they have the winning hand against Peter, John and the church. They control the Temple, the Priesthood and have the authority.

The church knows – no they don't. These mere men were opposing the Lord and His Messiah and they cannot and will not triumph.

Verse 29 basically declares – **Your plan will be done.**

We know the ultimate plan. The church will spread to the nations.

Jesus will return destroy every enemy and set up the new heavens on earth.

We don't know every step between now and the Second Coming.

What this early church did hold is – God knows – because He determined it.

They don't what will happen to them if they are faithful and obedient.

They might die. Some did.

They might rot in prison. Some did.

Family members may die. Some did.

They may be persecuted. All were.

Or the leaders may repent. Yes – even some of the priests opposing them bowed the knee to Christ.

Or Jesus might come back tomorrow. Thus far He hasn't – but He will.

All they know is – ultimately God wins – His plan will come to pass – so they have to be obedient to the task – no matter what that means for them.

Verse 29:

And now, Lord, consider their threats.

God, you know they threatened not just You and Your Messiah – but us Your people.

We know these guys killed Jesus – and You turned that into victory.

We know maybe some of us will die or be imprisoned – and if that is what will grow the kingdom – we are OK with that.

You can use the blood of martyrs to grow your kingdom.

But, You know us Lord – we don't want to die – we don't love torture and persecution – we would love to see them all convert or have Jesus come back – but ultimately Your will be done not ours.

Verses 29 and 30 – turn to supplication.

So, fill us with boldness to not turn from our task. Amen.

Grant that your servants may speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand for healing, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

Grant that we Your servants may speak Your word with all boldness.

Don't let us be cowed into silence.

Don't let us fear man.

Let us speak boldly – whatever the consequences.

We know You will keep declaring Jesus is the Messiah through healings, signs and wonders – and we want to be faithful to keep declaring the gospel as Your witnesses.

This is the kind of prayer God delights to answer.

Verse 31:

When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God boldly.

The shaking of the place is a sign of the world of the Spirit.

They were filled with the Holy Spirit. This is different from the indwelling of the Spirit.

God fills His people for Kingdom purposes – and in this instance He filled them with boldness and they went out speaking the Word of God – testifying to Christ and proclaiming salvation in His name.

As we read on we find that they filled Jerusalem with the gospel and many came to faith – including some of the priests.

What do you and I take away from a passage like this?

So much.

If you are here this morning – perhaps your worldview does not include a God who has created this world, created us – and moves all things according to His plan.

The evidence for a God who created is clear.

The evidence for Jesus as Messiah is clear.

God's plan includes the cross. A way to escape a judgment that is coming.

Don't oppose God – you will not win – bow the knee to God and His Messiah. Accept the offer of salvation – of refuge – in Christ.

Christians – those who have bowed the knee – we are part of the church and there are those who oppose our God and us.

But we have been commissioned to take the gospel to the nations.

We have been called as witnesses to Christ, His resurrection, ascension and sure return.

We have the words of eternal life the only way to heaven.

And yes – we are faced with a world where most are apathetic and a growing number are hostile to that message.

Here in Brisbane – we don't face the imminent threat of death for proclaiming Christ.

We face something that has proven more effective in silencing us.

Fear of man.

We have been **ridiculed** – science has disproven Jesus, the Bible is riddled with errors, surely you have grown past that stuff.

We have been **vilified** – you are homophobic, transphobic, bigoted and a danger to society.

We have been **embarrassed** – so you follow a God who sends people to hell, lets children suffer and Hitlers come to power.

We have been **questioned** – bad stuff happens to us – illness, loss of a spouse, hardship – where is God?

We have been **preoccupied** – too busy working, family, doing life – to get around to sharing.

We have been **ignored** – just leave them alone and pity them.

Most of us would find it easier to share Christ on threat of death than a threat to reputation or embarrassment.

But, we must remember who it is we serve.

Our Omnipotent Master – Our Creator – the One who determined all things.

In His infinite kindness He calls us to be His witnesses.

These ones who ignore us, ridicule us, hate us – they oppose God – and none will succeed. God's plan will be done.

His kingdom will grow – nations will be reached – and His Messiah will return to vanquish every enemy including death.

Read Revelation 17-20 – no opposition will stand. His King will prevail.

We might fail in our task – but God will not fail.

You know – my illustration about North Korea. If the church was silenced – God would raise up other witnesses – even rocks. God will prevail. His kingdom will come.

And incredibly, God has offered to use us to see His kingdom come. To see the lost saved. To see His kingdom grow.

God could call His people through angels, messages in the sky, putting it on every computer screen.

He could perform resurrections around the world and the dead raised to life could give a very powerful testimony.

He chose to use us – frightened, preoccupied, struggling with faith – us.

And that plan will prevail.

It is an incredibly great privilege to be part of what He is doing.

So, pray – ask Him to fill us with boldness – to not turn from our task – but to be used by Him as faithful servants – whatever the cost whatever the outcome – until He comes again.

Your Threats Can't Intimidate Us

Acts 4:13-31 (April 13, 2025)

Main Point: Omnipotent Master – Creator and Predestiner. None can oppose You. Your plan will be done. So, fill us with boldness to not turn from our task. Amen.

General Questions:

1. Why does the gospel attract such ongoing opposition?
2. Which is more dangerous opposition from without or within? Why?
3. Why did threatening the Apostles and church fail?
4. Why does the little phrase – these men had been with Jesus (v. 13) – explain so much of why they would not be silent?
5. How does the fact that God is an Omnipotent Master shape our response to opposition and trials?
6. Why did the church turn to God as Creator to help them understand their situation?
7. What does the word – predestine – mean to you? Why does it have a negative connotation for some? Why did the early church see it as such a good thing?
8. Read Psalm 2. How does this help us when we face trials and opposition?
9. How does our theology of God help us face trials and opposition?

Application Questions:

1. What can silence our witness?
2. Why is the fear of man such a powerful deterrent to faithfulness?
3. Since we don't know the exact outcome of our faithfulness –and it may lead to persecution and even death – how do we overcome our fears?
4. Write out a prayer that can help you be faithful whatever you face?

What convicted me in the message?

What moved me in the message?

What will I do in light of the message?