

# God's Sovereignty

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**Bible Text:** Isaiah 37:21-38

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I would like to invite you to look with me in Isaiah chapter 37 and I will read from verse 20 down to verse 38 and talk with you about God's sovereignty.

Isaiah 37 beginning with verse 20.

This was Hezekiah's prayer, the end of it. Let's begin up in verse 15 just to get the full context.

And Hezekiah prayed unto the LORD, saying, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth. Incline thine ear, O LORD, and hear; open thine eyes, O LORD, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God. Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations, and their countries, And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD, even thou only.

Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent unto Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Whereas thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria: This is the word which the LORD hath spoken concerning him; The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel. By thy servants hast thou reproached the Lord, and hast said, By the multitude of my chariots am I come up to the height of the mountains, to the sides of Lebanon; and I will cut down the tall cedars thereof, and the choice fir trees thereof: and I will enter into the height of his border, and the forest of his Carmel. I have digged, and drunk water; and with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of the besieged places. Hast thou not heard long ago, how I have done it; and

of ancient times, that I have formed it? now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldest be to lay waste defenced cities into ruinous heaps. Therefore their inhabitants were of small power, they were dismayed and confounded: they were as the grass of the field, and as the green herb, as the grass on the housetops, and as corn blasted before it be grown up. But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me. Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult, is come up into mine ears, therefore will I put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest. And this shall be a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such as groweth of itself; and the second year that which springeth of the same: and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruit thereof. And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward: For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion: the zeal of the LORD of hosts shall do this. Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD. For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. Then the angel of the LORD went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand [185,0000: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Armenia [that would be in Turkey today]: and Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead.<sup>1</sup>

There are a lot of stories that we could read throughout the Scriptures that give us a clear picture and description of God's sovereignty. You really cannot pronounce the name of the Lord without describing his sovereignty. The editors took care every time that you see the name of the Lord written capital L O R D to be consistent to describe the name for God which means Jehovah.

You remember back when Moses was told to go before Pharaoh and he said, "Well..." or go before Israel and tell them that the Lord would deliver them. And he said, "Well, who should I say has sent me?"

And the Lord said to Moses, "Tell them I AM has sent you."

That is what the word Jehovah is. It is the Hebrew verb for I am. Remember when you used to have to conjugate verbs. You know, I am, he is, she is. It is I am the first person.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 37:15-38.

That says a lot when you stop and think about it. He is the God who has always been, is and shall always be. He is.

But there is also another word that is used for God as we see down through here in verse 21, for example.

“Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent unto Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD [I AM] God of Israel.”<sup>2</sup>

That word “God,” is the word which refers to the supreme magistrate. The closest thing that I know that we have to describe that would be our Supreme Court. Who is the chief justice? But even that pales because we know the chief justice of our Supreme Court can’t do anything apart from the others consenting. There has to be agreement with others. But with the Lord God, the supreme magistrate, he consults no one. He determines what he will do and he does according to his will.

So when you talk about God’s sovereignty and to me, dear friends, this is the biggest difference between how the Lord’s people have been taught of God and how the world imagines God. The World—and I am talking even about the religious world, when they say God, it is a god who needs help.

There are preachers today still lying on God, telling people that God would like to do some things, but he can’t get it done without you. And that is the way they preach. He has no hands, but your hands. He has no feet but your feet. He has no eyes, but your eyes. He has no lips but your lips. He has no tongue, but your tongue. That is a work and do religion.

You know, if someone were to describe to me a god like that I would say, “Well, that is an idol. That is nothing but a dumb idol that can’t move unless you move it.”

I remember one time in Africa in a particular village where I had been preaching a man had been describing to me a house fire, a hut fire, I should say, because it was just a stick and mortar round house with grass roof. And he was describing how he was, when the fire took off he was running back into the house.

And I thought it was to try to maybe save some cash that was under a mattress or something of great value to him. And he said, “No, I went in to grab my god.” He said, “I had a little idol that was above the door.” And he said, “There wasn’t any way I was going to let that thing go up in fire.”

And I asked him. I said, “Doesn’t that ring strange that you have go to in and rescue your god from this fire lest it be burned up?”

But that is how many even though this nation considers itself perhaps to be more civilized than that. That is the view that many have of God, that God cannot save, he

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<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 37:21.

cannot deliver unless we help him. And so you have go these prayer meetings. You have got these times where, you know, people will call on you to pray to... they will even say, "Well, whoever your god is," that, you know, that things might be changed.

Dear friends, that is not the God of Scripture. What we see here in this portion that I have just read for you is that nothing, absolutely nothing lives or moves or breathes but what the Lord God is directing it and directing its time. He determines the distance and the length of days.

And we see that clearly illustrated here in how God dealt with the King of Assyria which would be modern day Iran.

You know, people can sit across the pond and kind of throw barbs at each other, but, you know, no one is going to undo the other. And yet here the Lord built up this nation of Assyria and even used it as an instrument to chasten the nation of Israel, take away 10 tribes, cause them to be completely gone, disappear. And then he sends them packing. That is a sovereign God. We are talking about a whole nation here being affected by decisions that God makes even though they in themselves boasted of their own power.

So let's just look at a few thoughts here that the Lord has given me concerning who he is. Whenever we read in verse 21, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel,"<sup>3</sup> that ought to catch our attention.

How many times are we affected by what men say? You know, it might be the mightiest personality in this world that summons you to come before them, but they are but a man. They are but flesh and blood. But they are but dust. How many times, though, have we quaked? How many times has fear been struck in our heart whenever some earthly king or authority has addressed us in a way that is threatening to us?

Just remember that they themselves could never even speak such a word or a threat, but what the Lord gives them the word to speak and the breath to speak it. They are but dust. But we quake.

Why do we do that? Because we forget that even the worst enemies are at the Lord's disposal to do with what he will.

When Isaiah said here, "Thus saith the LORD"<sup>4</sup> it was on the heels of these ambassadors that Sennacherib had sent through one of his generals Rabshakeh to go and scare the people and to stand there and pronounce condemnation on them as a people. It struck fear in their heart. And Hezekiah sought. He did the right thing. He sought one of the Lord's prophets. And Isaiah, you know he was living through this. He was enduring the same affliction. And yet we find the Lord strengthening the king through his Word.

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 37:21.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

It is a reminder that for man even in the greatest position that the world could ever give him is still but a man.

I like to go back and read or listen to presidents, former presidents talk about hours of decision that are crucial in their, during their presidencies. And, you know, you stop and listen to some of the big decisions that have been made of sending young men off to war, you know, other major decisions that they have had to make. Maybe while they are in power they don't like to admit it. They try to always portray a presence of everything is going to be ok, but the truth be known they don't know any better than any man, you know, what direction things should go.

And we know that thankfully that our destiny is not dependent upon what men decide, but upon the Lord God.

So his name tells us something of his sovereignty.

But having said that, it doesn't in any way negate the need to cry unto him and to pray. There are some people that contest that the truth of sovereignty and say, "Well, if God really is sovereign, if he does as he will when he will, where he will, then what is the need even to pray. Let's just sit down, pull up our chairs and see what happens. We don't find that to be the attitude of anybody, that truly the Lord has taught.

Even as we find Hezekiah praying in verse 15 unto the Lord and we find Isaiah seeking the Lord concerning what he should say. And we find here in verse 21 this statement.

"Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Whereas thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria: This is the word which the LORD hath spoken concerning him."<sup>5</sup>

So we find that the Lord will bring his people to pray. You know, that begs the question. What is prayer? You know, is it just repeating a formula? Is it just repeating a set of words? Is it something mechanical that we do or are we truly seeking the Lord? The Lord will be the one that will cause us to seek him. And let us ever be mindful of that. Even during our times of worship to be prayerful. Let's not just walk in and sit down and say, "Well, the Lord is going to do what he is going to do." He causes us to seek him. I seek him when I prepare messages. I seek him as I am preparing to preach. And I pray that you would seek him with me.

Someone has said there is not a more lonely place in the world than to be standing before a people having the Word open and speaking on behalf of God and his Spirit not being with you, just like Samson who got up and shook himself and realized that the Spirit had departed, had taken off his anointing. I pray for you as hearers. You stop and think about the years that you have sat under the gospel and how many times your heart has been hardened and cold and mine as well. And you have gotten up and walked out as if nothing was, hurrying about your business.

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<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 37:21-22.

Are we truly conscious of our need? You know, this is why the Lord brings these things to pass. This was a chastening of the Lord upon the people of Israel that they might know that he is God. And, you know, I worry when everything seems to be going well all the time in my life, because whom the Lord loves he chastens.

You know, we all strive for that. Just give me some rest and peace. Give me this little oasis in life, but do you know what? I fear that the Lord just leave us in a state of contentment when nothing is right. Oh that we would be as children that, you know, are caused to cry out when we are hungry, cry out when we are thirsty or even children probably is too nice of a statement. We be as dogs. You know, as soon as I stir in the morning my dogs are... they are up. They are wanting that food. They are wanting that water. You know, they depend entirely upon me opening that door or Mary opening it and going out and putting water and food in that dish. Otherwise they can't survive. They wouldn't survive.

That is just how dependent we are upon the Lord. And so when we read in verse 15 where it says, "Hezekiah prayed unto the LORD,"<sup>6</sup> and in verse 21 Isaiah says, "Whereas thou hast prayed to me..."<sup>7</sup> See, that is what true prayer is. It is seeking him knowing our desperate need, knowing the urgency for ourselves. And the Lord will be sought of his people. That is his sovereign will.

You know, there is no disparity between his sovereignty and our praying.

But, thirdly, I see his sovereignty in how he brings strength out of weakness. Here in verse 22 it is as if the Lord answers the mockery of these wicked men with mockery. Here they come to reproach the Lord, to make fun of him before the people. And so the Lord answers in verse 22. He says:

"This is the word which the LORD hath spoken concerning him; The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee."<sup>8</sup>

Do you see what he is saying? He is saying this one that you have come up against, the Lord is saying, "My virgin. This is my virgin. This is my daughter." And that one that you consider to be weak, that one that you feel that you are about ready to devour and destroy will actually despise you and will shake her head at you in mockery.

Now was there any strength in Israel? No. But this was the Lord's people. This was the Lord's remnant. He had caused many others to be taken away and be destroyed, but he had purposed at this time and this hour to preserve this people a remnant unto himself even as we read in verse 35.

"I will defend this city to save it."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 37:15.

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 37:21.

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 37:22.

Imagine that you have one that would be a virgin. When you think about that you think about a couple just about ready to get married or a daughter that someone has come and threatened. How lightly do you take that? You don't take it lightly at all. There is a relationship that is there and that is what the Lord is saying.

"I will defend this city. I will defend it for my own sake and," he says, "for my servant David's sake."<sup>10</sup>

It really wasn't anything about them. Those that remained were just as wicked and evil as those that had been taken away, but the Lord purposed to preserve that city, that seed, if you will, because of his Son. It would be his Son that would rise out of those ashes many years later and so the Lord purposed to keep him.

What unconditional love?

When I read here the virgin, the daughter of Zion, how can the Lord look on any sinner as a virgin? We have defiled ourselves. We have prostituted ourselves. We have gone after other lovers in our hearts and yet the Lord looks upon these and says, "The virgin." But he looks on them as one, one people, the daughter of Zion, the daughter of Jerusalem.

Well, that could only be done in Christ. You know, it is like Paul told the Galatians that he had presented them unto the Father as a chaste virgin. How can any sinner be presented unto God, a holy God as a chaste virgin other than the efficacy of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ that put away their sin and not only put it away, but his Son established a righteousness that is just as holy and just as God himself so that when he looks upon his people that is what he sees, a chaste virgin.

There is not a one of us here that can claim any right to being pure and holy in ourselves, but only through the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so the Lord brings strength out of weakness, beauty out of ashes. When you consider what should be our lot, it should be among the number that the Lord has condemned and cast off and yet if he hasn't it is because of his mercy and his grace. That is his sovereign will to do.

When Mike was reading over here in Psalm 74 and I don't... you know, I don't pick how these chapters align themselves, but when he finished reading I thought, you know, he could have been reading Isaiah 37 as to God's sovereignty. But in Isaiah 74 and verse 12 he read:

"For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 37:35.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Psalm 74:12.

You know, it is not everybody that he purposes to save, but any that he does save is because he has worked that salvation in the midst of the earth. He has a people that he has chosen out of every tribe, nation and tongue that he will most certainly deliver. And so all the honor goes to him.

But, fourthly, coming back here to Isaiah 37 and verses 23 to 27 we see God's sovereignty in that all that the Lord does he does for the honor of his own name. This is hard for us even to get a hold of because we still in our depraved selves think that somehow the Lord does what he does for us or, you know, to help our little world. And so when he begins to cause it to fall apart and we cry out to him, we just assume it is going to be, even if it is humpty dumpty, he is going to put it back together again. But we have to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that everything that God does he does for the honor of his own name, even if it would be to strip you of every bit of wealth and riches that you have right now or me and leave us the rest of our days in utter poverty that that would be to his honor and glory, that he would take away our health and put us on our back with a broken neck quadriplegic and lay there the rest of our days with a mind and no body, but just to dwell upon him and give glory to his name.

See, we don't think that way. We think we do, but we don't. And the reason I say that is when he does cause these things to happen and our world is torn out from under us, what bitterness and what anger, what rebellion, rebellious thoughts are raised in the heart. It is just the Lord is stripping it all away.

But may he give us the grace, should that be his purpose, to honor his name, just to do as Job did, to bow and to worship and not to sin with our mouth or heart against a holy God.

Here in verse 23, again, he addresses this matter of his honor. He... verse 23 is addressed to the Assyrians.

“Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high?”<sup>12</sup>

Who are you to address me, a holy God in this manner?

He says:

“...even against the Holy One of Israel?”<sup>13</sup>

How is it that men reproach God? How is that they blaspheme his name? I am talking about religious people that take great care to make sure they never say a swear word and take great pride in keeping themselves from certain activities in this world because they call themselves Christian and yet who blaspheme the name of the Lord and are a reproach unto the holy one of Israel.

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<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 37:23.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



You say, “How?”

Well, by giving any glory to themselves.

See, we live in a world. They call it Christianity, but it is really a world of self religion, of self worship, of will worship. And it begins with the word “I.” And that is really what the Lord... When you look at verse 24 and down to verse 25. That is what he is addressing with these Assyrians.

“By thy servants hast thou reproached the Lord, and hast said, By the multitude of my chariots am I come up to the height of the mountains.”<sup>14</sup>

The me, my, I.

“...to the sides of Lebanon; and I will cut down the tall cedars thereof, and the choice fir trees thereof: and I will enter into the height of his border, and the forest of his Carmel. I have digged, and drunk water; and with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of the besieged places.”<sup>15</sup>

See, that is the blasphemy of which the Lord speaks here. Anything that we have, anything that we are is... the glory is due unto the Lord himself and that is it. And particularly in the matter of salvation. You know, we can’t even talk about us having come to Christ, because Christ said, “No man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.”<sup>16</sup>

You see, but giving any kind of importance to personal success, I don’t care whether it is in business or whether it is in war, whether it is in sports or politics and particularly salvation, it is not in us. It is not in us. But it is in the Lord and to have any other thought is blasphemy.

There are an awful lot of religious people walking around this world and when you ask them how is it that you believe that you are a child of God, the very first word out of their mouth is “I.”

Now you might think that is not a big deal. But it is. What they are doing is giving glory to their name. And they like to write books about it. They love to tell about how they came to a particular decision and how they settled the matter before the Lord and how they made things right with the Lord.

I don’t care who it is that talks that way that are lost and they have blasphemed. They have blasphemed the name of the Lord.

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<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 37:24.

<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 37:24-25.

<sup>16</sup> John 6:65.

There is only one answer that anybody can ever give as to why they are the Lord's, as to why they have a hope of salvation. And don't you ever, ever give them any kind of comfort when they speak otherwise if that word does not begin with, "Thus saith the Lord." It is the Lord. It is by his mercies that we are not consumed. It is by his blood. That is all I can say. Guilty sinner that I am, it is the Lord that has paid that debt. It is because of his unconditional love that I am kept and that I hope in salvation. Other than that it is a false testimony and it is to blaspheme. It is to reproach the name of The Lord.

The fifth point here that I would say concerning God's sovereignty in verses 28 really down to the end of the chapter is that what the Lord purposes no one can alter.

Now we say we believe this, but, you know, when the tide begins to rise and the storm darkens the skies, that is the test of whether we really truly believe this or not. But I pray the Lord will give us that persuasion that nothing can take place, but what he purposes and nothing can alter what he does.

And we are in good health. And everything seems to be going our way, it is easy to say, but when the Lord will take a loved one and before your eyes diminish them and cause them to deteriorate into possibly even a vegetable because of a cancerous illness, reality hits home. And it is a matter of looking at this and saying, "Even in this the Lord is doing his will."

For whether he takes one of your children and causes them to run in a rebellious way, headlong as if they had never ever heard the gospel in hardness, weigh your heart before the Lord. Even that, "It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth good."<sup>17</sup>

That is the reality of his sovereignty. And you are not going to change it. Thumping them with a Bible isn't going to change it. Making them sit down and you listen isn't going to change it. If the Lord has purposed their destruction, they will go that way.

What do we do? We cast ourselves upon his mercy and we bow with our mouths shut. Do we give them direction? Yes. But it doesn't change who God is. God is going to teach us, each one in his time and in his manner. He is going to put the Assyrians at our door at some point in our life to where the only way we have to look is up. The only place to look is to Christ and to trust him and thank him that whether or not he ever saves anybody else or not, if he has been pleased to save a sinner such as I, that is a grace and that is a mercy.

And that is how we see the Lord doing here. You know, he caused many to be destroyed in Israel. He caused many to be wiped out, many relationships as a result of these Assyrians that were affected. And yet what he purposes to do he will do.

Now in this case as we read here, the Lord in verse 28 says that he... he says:

"I know thy abode."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> 1 Samuel 3:18.

Here was Assyria that they had come right to the doors of the city of Jerusalem to take it. He said:

“I know... thy going out and thy coming in, and thy rage against me.”<sup>19</sup>

There was a time that he just let them rage for a season. And yet he says in verse 29:

“Therefore will I put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.”<sup>20</sup>

You know, this is the Lord turning back the enemy, but this is our comfort as well. No matter how strong the rebellion of anyone that we are acquainted with, if they are the Lord's, he is going to get them. He is going to put the hook in their nose. He is going to put the bridle in their mouth and he is going to turn them back from the way that they came.

So we wait. We wait upon him. And we look to him to do what he is going to do. He acts according to his will in his time.

The reality is that his time isn't necessarily our time. And let's be careful not to set deadlines with the Lord. And, you know, for some of these that he has burdened us to pray for right now, we may be long gone before the Lord ever does a work in their heart, but that will be fine. At least the glory will belong unto him, unto his name. But I do know this, that he is going to defend every one of his own and he is going to cause them to live and he is going to cause them to bear fruit even as we read here in verse 30.

“And this shall be a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such as groweth of itself.”<sup>21</sup>

He is not talking to the Assyrians. He is talking to the remnant of Israel. Here they are without any hope. They are thinking at any moment the Assyrians are going to just bust down the gates and come in and destroy the fields. And the Lord said, “No, it is going to be a normal year. You are going to go sow your fields and you are going to eat this year of what grows of itself. You are going to find plenty of food even though this army has been ravaging the land. There is going to be plenty for everyone.”

“And the second year, that which springeth of the same: and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruit thereof.”<sup>22</sup>

Verse 31.

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<sup>18</sup> Isaiah 37:28.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Isaiah 37:29.

<sup>21</sup> Isaiah 37:30.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

“And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward.”<sup>23</sup>

I like that, the word “remnant.” The Lord is going to cause those that he has purposed to save and keep to take root in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And all the fruit of Christ’s work they will enjoy. They will be blessed to enjoy.

Well, we can see in the final verses, 36 through 38, how the Lord in his sovereignty acted upon what he said he would do. In a night took out 185,000 of the enemy. It was an angel of the Lord that did it, caused Sennacherib to turn tail and run back to his country. And as he was face down in front of his god, little god in verse 38, that his very own sons came and killed him and then fled.

You say, “How did that happen?”

They happened to be in the right place at the right time? No. The Lord directed all that, too. In his time he dealt with Sennacherib and he dealt with his mockeries and he dealt with his blasphemies. And so it is with sinners. If the Lord doesn’t bring them to bow in grace and give them repentance to bow to his son the Lord Jesus Christ, they... he will deal with them in judgment, but it is going to be in his time and in his way, such as the sovereign God that we know.

All right. Brother Mike, come lead us in our final hymn.

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<sup>23</sup> Isaiah 37:31.