

Christmas
God's Gifts:
“God's Sovereign Love”
Romans 8:28-32

We are looking at Romans 8. If you're a guest here today, you may be rather surprised to hear that we're not looking at one of the classic texts. We're looking at Romans 8, because we're looking at the great gifts that God gives to his people through the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ described in above all this statement which is on your bulletin.

It says, *If God is for us, who can be against us?* And it continues. *He did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all. How will he not also with him graciously give us all things?* We're looking at the gifts of Christ to us this year. Romans 8:28-30. Follow along with me.

We know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined. He also called, and those whom he called, he also justified, and those whom he justified, he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

You may be seated, and I'll pray one more time.

Lord, give us, I do pray, ears and a heart and a will to understand what you're giving to us. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

The third gift is God's sovereign love. The third gift is God gives us gifts. He gives us the gift above all of salvation and union with Christ, becoming more like him. And he protects us and guards us and carries us all the way to glory. God has sovereign plans for us. Now, you may feel this more acutely or less if you've had a life free of drama, you might not feel this as much. But I will tell you, I feel it, and I feel it when I look at my children. Because when I look at them and my grandchildren now, I think, humanly speaking, they should not exist.

And it's not because I met my wife on a train to America in North Africa, and we somehow struck up a conversation over blueberry tea. I say it because I shouldn't exist, and I shouldn't exist because my father's family should never have escaped communist Russia. The odds were against them. My family story goes like this. On my mother's side, I know my name is Doriani. It sounds Italian. I'm not. It's a stage name. My grandfather was an opera singer and a painter. Not of houses, but of paintings. And he

had a stage name of Doriani. And because he fled to America with his wife in 1910. Russian Jews were being persecuted severely by the czar. And they have enough sense, enough skill, enough youthful vigor to go to the New World. And they became American citizens. And then, because opera is not so big in America as it is in Europe. After finishing his training, he went to Europe and sang in above all Italy and Germany. And then and then the civil war in Russia broke out, and my great grandfather was on the wrong side of the Russian Civil War.

He was for the Democrats, for the fighters of freedom. And the communists won. And he came with an eyelash of being put to death. And he had what we would call today a breakdown of some sort of. My grandfather had enough freedom in his career to take engagements where he would, and so he decided to take an engagement offered to him in Russia.

And they got in there and the Communist authorities said, welcome back, comrades. And they seized their passports, seized their visas, and they were stuck there for 12 years. Now God's providence, my grandfather was just famous enough. The people agitated for his release. They knew he'd been taken against his will and couldn't escape. And so in 1933, when Franklin Delano Roosevelt decided to have diplomatic relations with Russia, they had to do something to show favor or kindness to each other.

And that year, after a number of years in which 10 to 20, I didn't say 10 to 20,000, I said 10 to 20 people got out legitimately from the Soviet Union. One year, 1934, 1500 people were allowed out. And my grandfather and grandmother and mother were among them. The next year it went back to 20. It's also true.

My father told me this. I looked it up so you can find it. The man who signed the papers that let them go was executed by Stalin's own hands six months later for excessive leniency in immigration. So you see, they should still be there. And that means my mother and father should never have met. And that means that I should not exist, which means my children should not exist and my grandchildren should not exist.

But they do. And I look at them and I think on the one hand, it's impossible that you're here. On the other hand, this world has a whole that is filled by those young adults and their children. It cannot be otherwise. So it seems to me. And so experientially, I resonate with the idea that God has extraordinary sovereign plans for us.

You may not resonate with that. You may think not about great kind providences, but hard providences. A family member who got cancer and died at the age of 7 or 20 or 57, you may think about a lost job opportunity the way things didn't go your way. In other words, experience points in opposite directions. And so what we need is God's Word to tell us how to read, experience.

And what God's Word says to us is that God is sovereign. Proverbs chapter 16:33 speaks even about random events, says the lot is cast into the lap.

But it falls according to the places God ordains. The lot is cast into the lap, but every decision is from the Lord. So says God's word. And God's people know this. Perhaps you know the story of the people of Israel in the book of Genesis and how they were a small tribe, dozens of people. And there was tension at one point between the sons of Jacob, 12 of them.

And Jacob favored Joseph. And his brothers were envious of him, and they were thinking of killing him. But instead they decided to at least make some money, and they sold him into slavery. He went down to Egypt and was a slave, and then was liberated, and then rose to prominence. And when a terrible famine broke out in the land of Egypt and in Palestine, throughout the entire Fertile Crescent, which is fertile, except when there's a drought that lasts for years.

They came down to Egypt, having heard there was food, and they came upon Joseph. And when they spoke, he said, you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good to save many lives. And so we see that in the Bible. Even these terrible events, like brother betraying brother, are viewed as matters that fall under the sovereignty of God, accomplishing his purposes for his people.

And the Bible is very candid about how hard it is to receive that sometimes earlier in Romans eight it says, we groan inwardly as we face travails, as we see our bodies wasting away. Yes, it's hard even in the last years of life, you think, God, why don't you just give us a notice and tell us, you know, in 60 days you're going to die.

And it's just clean and simple. Why does God let us linger in old age and disease? We wonder, what is God doing? God is doing something. God is working all things. God works all things. It's not that all things work out. That's not what it says. And it certainly doesn't say everything works out for everybody all the time.

It says for those who love God and are called according to his purpose, all things work together for good. Not that they're working together by some hidden, mysterious force. Force God is making all things work together, and he takes his people from the beginning, from his foreknowledge, all the way to glory. I'm going to ask you to notice something in this passage.

And it's just a couple words. The words are those who and those and the Greek. There's a constant repetition of the word two to use this kind of almost poetic. And we try to capture it here in this translation that says, we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

For those whom he foreknew, those are the ones he predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. And those whom he predestined, those he also justified, those he also glorified. He's saying that there's one group of people, and a group of people are those whom he knows not just knowing about, but he actually knows personally. And those people whom he knows and calls and predestined and justifies and glorifies.

Those are the people it carries through all the way to the end, come what may. Throughout their lives. All things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose. That means earthquakes. It means evil. Monarchs. It means lost job opportunities. It means everything. God can orchestrate it all so that he accomplishes his good.

There's a gigantic tapestry and he weaves the threads together. Illness, divorce. Pastors have these conversations, you know, with people. They say things like, I was so sick, I thought I was going to die. I was so sick. My energy was completely gone. It was terrible. And yet I give thanks for lessons I learned during that period of great illness, because I never would have learned them otherwise.

Or you have a conversation with someone who goes through an extraordinarily painful divorce and they say, I would never wish divorce on my worst enemy. It's so miserable. So heartrending. And yet there are things that I learned through my divorce that I never would have learned otherwise. And I see how even in that misery of divorce, God was working for my good according to his purpose.

One pastor I know says that this way God never allows meaningless suffering. God allows suffering. We get sick, we face disappointments, but God only allows constructive suffering in the life of his people. And Paul says, we know this now. When Paul says, we know this, which he says any number of times in the gospel of Paul declared to us in Romans, when he says, we know this, he means I know it and you know it.

And he also means we ought to know it. Come on, we know this. He's saying, come on, you know this, don't you? We know that all things work together for good. He knew it. He was shipwrecked twice. Twice he was beaten, left for dead stone tossed in jail, sometimes for a few days, sometimes for months. And you know, he's the apostle, the Gentiles.

How can it be good for the apostle to the Gentiles to be tossed in jail for no good reason, and left to rot there? Well, sometimes it made other people step into the gap and more people went for because Paul's in jail. That's Philippians chapter one. And also while he was in jail, and also sometimes while he was wintering, when it was impossible to travel anymore, he did things called writing letters.

And we have those letters. And billions of people have read the letters that Paul wrote because he couldn't do what he wanted to do. And so you experience the all things work together for good for Paul, even though it didn't seem so when you read the letter she wrote in prison. So we know that all things work together for good.

Now goes on to say that for those whom he foreknew, he predestined that we would be conformed to the image of His Son, so that Jesus would be the firstborn among many brothers. Now I want to walk through some of those words with you a little bit. First of

all, the word for new. Now, some people say that when the Bible says God foreknew, it means that he saw in advance he simply saw what would happen.

And the people he called to himself are those that he knew had more spirituality in them. Or he knew that they would say yes to the gospel. But in the Bible, the word no, no does not mean simple blank cognition. To know someone in the Bible is to care about them, to know them personally. Let me put it this way.

The Bible says that Adam knew his wife Eve. It does not mean that he discovered hitherto unknown facts about her, like her foot size. For example, or exactly how many hairs she had on her head. It says he knew his wife, Eve, meaning he knew her intimately, knew her personally. That's what the Bible means by knowledge. Now, in the Old Testament, we have the fact that God says he knows his people.

For example, in Hosea chapter 13 verse five, God says to Israel, I cared or translations say, I cared for you in the desert. But the Hebrew actually says, I knew you in the desert. So when God knows us, he cares about us. We know this, we know this. Come what may. I'm not sure why, but as I was meditating on this passage, I began to think about the three people I know who were engaged to get married.

And there spouse to be died in an accident before they got married. Three high school friend of mine, college friend of mine, a ministry friend of mine. And for two of them people came over and said, you know, all things work together for good for those who love God, at which point they were seized by desire to say, can you show me that in the Bible and grab the Bible out of their hand and beat them about the shoulders with the Bible?

That's not how we're supposed to use Bible verses to get out of, to get out of listening and grieving with people were wounded and sorry, sad. Remember the friends of Jobe remember the story of Jobe. If you don't read Jobe one and two, death in his family. Loss of all material things and his friends came and their high point.

The peak of their visit with Jobe was that he sat in silence and said nothing for a week. And then they started to talk and everything was downhill from there.

Silence is what we owe someone when they've just experienced friendship. Love cares what we all, someone. They go through something terrible. But it is also true that at some point we know and can say all things do work together for good. For those who love God. Even beatings and imprisonment even ties. They were fearful and trembling. As Paul says, he was.

Those whom he foreknew. He was personally called us to himself. He didn't know about us. He knew us. No meaningless suffering. Now some people have debates about this. They say God saves people that he knew would believe. He predestined people he knows will come to faith someday. But the emphasis in Romans eight is not on the virtue that's in us, but on God's sovereign saving grace is absolute grace.

If God saved people that he foreknew, would be more spiritual, more responsive, more obedient, something like that. Then the virtue would be with us, and we would congratulate ourselves for having enough sense to turn to God. But no, the passage accents that God is saving us from beginning to end.

There are differences between people. Some people have their minds set on the spirit. Others have their minds set in the flesh. Some walk according to the spirit, others walk according to the flesh. But if someone begins to heed the spirit, listen to the spirit. Walk according to the spirit. That's because God moved in them first, not because they had some spirituality in them.

In ourselves we are dead, the Bible says, And God has to give us new life. He has to regenerate us. The process varies. Some people God renews, it seems, in the womb or in the earliest days, and they never know a day when they don't trust in Christ. They've sung hymns and they've gone to church, and they've loved Jesus as far back as they can remember.

And God can quicken us and give us life when we're very little. And others come to faith when they're older. And how might that happen? How does someone come to spiritual life? How would a man or a woman come alive as God calls them to himself, having predestined them? Well, let's suppose a woman is completely indifferent to spiritual things.

She didn't go grow up in church and go to church maybe once or twice a year, and maybe for a funeral or a wedding or something like that. Maybe Easter, and she just skates your life with very little interest. And then a tragedy occurs. Suddenly someone dies at the age of 27, 37, 57. And that's her age. And she thinks, I've got to start thinking about life and death and the meaning of life and the brevity of life and she has a friend who's an atheist, and she talks to that friend, and she has another friend who says, listen, it's all about distraction.

Just enjoy life. If you have these depressing thoughts, go see a movie, go find a good restaurant and go there with a friend. And that's what she hears. But she also has Christian friends and she asks them what to think. And they say you're asking important questions because we do need to think about life and death and about what comes after death.

We have to think about eternity and she finds herself interested in what her friend has to say. She noticed that her friend is not perfect. Her friend has some annoying habits. On the other hand, her friend is a good person, got some good traits, and seems to really care about these issues in her life. And so at her friends request, she starts to read the Bible.

In fact, they read the Bible together. They read Matthew or Mark or Luke or John, and they talk about it, and she understands the gospel. And it seems beautiful to her somehow she is entertaining these ideas she never entertained before. Not only did she

entertain them, but as time goes by, they begin to make sense to her. She's drawn to them.

In fact, one day she realizes that she's singing a hymn because she likes the hymns. Secular people often do. You know. She realizes she actually believes that she's singing, that God has called her to her, to himself. Something's changed in her life now, Jim Packer says. As we move toward God, toward faith, we have a feeling that although we're being pulled along, it's very much our decision to go along.

When we believe in Christ, we say, I believe it's my choice. I chose, I gave my life to Christ. That's all correct. But it's also correct that on the other side, you give thanks to God because you see that throughout the entire process, he was moving you along, that you bumped into that Christian woman who cared about your questions and gave good answers.

And somehow or other, the time was right. You just decided to start reading, and you were drawn to the beauty of Christ and His gentleness and his justice and his courage and his love. You realize that he saved you. You didn't save yourself. God saves. There's another way. We know that God is sovereign in salvation, and that is that when we have a friend who's not a believer, we pray to God.

For that friend. We say, Lord, change their heart. Lord, give them an opportunity. We expect God to act as you understand that God predestined and calls us, and those whom he predestined and calls, he also justifies. Now we've talked about justification a couple months ago, but I want to just pause one more time and very briefly explain what it means to be called and justified, and then glorified, to be justified as to be declared righteous by the judge, by God, the judge, the King.

It's to be acquitted of all charges, moral and spiritual, against you. Now in this church, we have a confession of faith and catechisms that have terrific summary statements about this. And I know I did this just last week and I promise we're not going to start doing it every week. But I want you to look at a marvelous statement.

I've, I've removed the ancient language just a tiny bit, but it says this, and I'm going to read it to you, and I'm gonna invite you to sit with me, if you will. Justification. I'll say at first you say it with me in a moment. Justification is an act of God's free grace. It's a free gift of God, not earned or merited in any way. In justification, he pardons all our sins, and he accepts us as righteous in his sight. Because of the righteousness of Christ, imputed or granted or counted to us, and received by faith alone. Would you like to say that with me? Let's do it. Justification is an act of God's free grace. In it he pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in his sight.

Because of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone. Now, going back to the text, we want to talk about those who, those who, those who, those who, those whom God called. He justified, those whom he justified. He also glorified

past tense. That's interesting because we would probably all admit that we're not very glorious right now.

We might have a little bit of glory, but we're not glorified. And yet the passage says God has glorified us. What might that mean? Let me give, an analogy. It's, still football season, and I'm going to mix professional and college football so no one will think I'm talking about their team. But let's imagine that the Lions and the Bulldogs have been rivals.

I know that's it's terrible. You some of you flinch when I say lions and Bulldogs anyway. So the Lions in the Bulldogs and the Lions or we can make it the Lions in the giraffes if you like. The lions and giraffes have had a rivalry for 80 years, and for the first 60 years it was back and forth and taking turns winning.

And then the Lions crushed the giraffes year after year. And what was once a rival became a pushover. But then, alas, at last the giraffes get a fine coach and they're moving forward, and they have a really good chance to win. And this particular year, finally, the giraffes not only have a chance to win, but they're winning 42 to 7 with two minutes left.

And the giraffe fans, I never anticipated saying those words in church. The giraffe fans start jumping up and down in the stands and saying, we won, we won! Now someone who's a stickler for details will say, well, there's still two minutes left on the clock, don't get carried away. And the answer is no team can score 36 points in two minutes.

We want it's as good as done. Now, of course, I'm not talking about football here. I'm talking about our standing before God. It is so certain that God will carry us from his foreknowledge to his call, to his justification, to the end when we meet him and are restored in glory, that he describes it in the past tense, you have been glorified, he says, because the sovereign Lord will not abandon us halfway through.

Now, as important as that is, I've kind of skipped over one part of the passage, and that is the part that says that we will be conformed. We're called to be conformed. We're predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that Jesus might be the firstborn among many brothers. That is to say, Jesus is not only our Savior.

He's not only our King, he's also the Bible says in some ways a big brother to us and an example to us, and we become like him, which is the way of the world. We become like people that we associate with and especially if we admire them. Let me just pull back for a second. Have you noticed that, hairstyles are kind of uniform in your circles?

For example, have you noticed that as a general principle, there are exceptions as a general principle, lots of exceptions. But as a general principle, the older a female gets, the shorter hair gets. So like little girls have hair down to the middle of their back, and women who are 60 plus have hair that reaches their ears on many occasions.

And furthermore, hair color changes and it kind of goes in waves. And women's hair tends to get lighter the older they get. Not because of whiteness, because they visit a person who has chemicals carefully designed to make their hair look just so. And for some reason, that just so color pick is, you know, often the same, just so color.

Let me put a different way. Let me talk about men. Have you have you counted the number of mob suits on display here today? The answer zero. As always, Mob is a personally perfectly good color, as is pink and purple. But no, men wear more pink and purple suits. Because we dress alike, we become like the people we hang around with again.

I'm not talking about clothes, really. I'm talking about Christ. And if you spend time with Him and His Word in prayer with his people, you will become what God wants you to become. And that is to say, more and more like Jesus. The other is also possible. Paul says in another place, bad company corrupts good morals. He's actually quoting a philosopher from the day saying it's absolutely right.

Bad company corrupts good morals. Choose your friends carefully. But it's more than that. It's not just saying follow the people around you, it's also saying that God is working in you, predestined in you, giving you the means of grace so that you will become more like Jesus Christ. But Jesus says this actually a half a dozen times in the Gospels, in different, slightly different words, but in one place he says it this way A disciple is not above his master, nor a servant above his master.

It is enough for a disciple to be like his teacher, and for a servant to be like his master. Now Jesus is talking about himself as Teacher, master, and I'll tell you, this is one of the great understatements of the Bible. It is enough. It would be more than enough for us to be like our teacher and master.

But Jesus is saying that's where we're headed. We're going to become more and more like Jesus. And how what does that look like, you may ask? Well, did you notice ever that Jesus set loose with possessions, didn't have a house? No where delays had didn't seem to have a lot of money, didn't seem to worry about it. And so maybe we can sit a little bit looser with our possessions.

Did you notice, for example, that Jesus loved his family but didn't let them push him in the wrong way, which is a challenge for some of us? At one time when Jesus was ministering, his mother and brothers came to pull him out of ministry. They were afraid he was losing his mind and and falling into danger for no reason.

He was falling into danger, but not for no reason. And as much as they wanted to get him to stop, he said, I can't. I got to do my father's will, he said, and if you try to pull me away, I need to tell you, my disciples are my true mother and brothers. I love you, respect you, but I don't conform to my family.

That's an important word for some of us. Apostle Paul meditates on this, and you can see it in those passages that have the words just as or as. For example, Paul says in

one place, be kind and compassionate. Forgiving each other. Just as in Christ, God forgave us. Here's another way to live a life of love. Just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us.

Here's one more husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church, and we should meditate on that. We're supposed to become just as Christ. Now I will tell you that when I prepare my sermons, I don't just prepare them for you. I there for me too. And one night this week, as I was meditating in this message, I meditated on how I was doing on the just as.

And I came to the conclusion that I'm often a forgiving person, but not always. And what really makes me unforgiving is when people come at me with ridiculous criticisms that have no bearing in truth. I mean, they're so ridiculous. I think if you just bothered to get to know me, you could critique me so much better. But this is what you came up with, this preposterous statement.

And I have a very you can feel it in me even now. I have a hard time forgiving that I have a hard time being as forgiving as Christ. Now I'm trying to move that way. The Holy Spirit's trying to move that way. As I'm with forgiving people, I can move in that direction. I will never be perfect in that regard, but I can become slowly, more and more like Christ because I'm not just called to enjoy God, which I am.

I'm also called to become more and more like Jesus as you are to. In fact, the Bible says that one day we will become like Jesus because we will see Him as He is. We'll see Jesus in all of his moral beauty, and we'll be like him, and we're supposed to move in that direction. Even now, we see it all very differently.

This passage teach us something that some people love to talk about, and other people hate to talk about God's sovereign purposes. Just predestination, his foreknowledge, his plans. And people tend to think of that sort of in a distant way, like who's in, who's out of my in? Is this person out? And that's not what Romans eight is telling us.

What Roman is telling us is God has invited you into his family, and you may suffer, and you may groan and you may feel face travails. That's also in Romans eight, the same chapter. But God is making all things work together for your good. And a crucial part about that, of that good is to become more like Christ, because Jesus is your big brother.

Christmas time creates a lot of, distress over gatherings in the family home, I read advice columns. Sometimes they're full of questions. What do I do? There's so much tension in my family. We've got these relatives. You know, we disagree politically. We disagree on faith matters. We our careers are completely different. We're arguing a lot. So tense. What shall I do.

And they give their advice. And I want to give you the advice that Jesus gives you, if I may, practical counsel for this moment in our lives.

When we're a difficult family members, they're often very critical of us. How can you take that political position? Are you blind and senseless? They can say, you know, you just care about your career. You don't care about us. You don't love us. They can say you're jealous, you're manipulative, dishonest. They say all kinds of things. And what do you do when somebody says things like that?

Well, what you do is you storm out of the room and say, I'll never go to another meal with them again. Jesus shows us the way. It's a very particular statement. It says that Jesus says the apostle Peter, because he saw Jesus was, as you know, insulted, mocked, reviled. It says this when he was reviled, he did not revile in return.

When he suffered, he did not threaten, but continually and trusted himself to the one who judges justly. Well, there you go. One revile don't revile in return. Entrust yourself to the just judge. God knows if you're guilty of being manipulative or jealous or hateful, take it to him. Let him decide where you stand. One way to say it is this is a church that is Christ centered.

Theologians call it Christo centric, centered on the life, the birth, the life, the death, resurrection of Christ and all he's done for us. Praise God, that's who we are. And besides being Christo centric, we also need to be Christo form, that is to say, formed more and more like Christ, becoming more and more like him, so that when someone reveals us unjust criticism for our politics or our faith or our way of life, we don't revile in return. Minister of silence. People used to call it. When Jesus was accused, he was generally very quiet and just let them go. Some people say that all this teaching makes us lazy. God's sovereign all over all we do. Whatever is going to happen is going to happen. That's not true. But what it actually is, is really good news that when we er, God still accomplishes his purposes.

Many years ago, when I was first in the pastoral ministry, I was small church revitalization work, and we had a man who loved to invite people to church, and he invited a couple people that were really looking for direction in life. And, and he said, look, I bring them, you talk to them. My job is to bring them in church and say, okay, great. And they came to church a couple of times. I said, would you like to meet and talk about life issues? They said, yes, we would. And at the time I was trying to teach myself what you're not supposed to do. a form of evangelism called evangelism explosion. And I was kind of studying it and learning with no tutor.

You're supposed to have a tutor and a guide. I didn't have one. And so when the time came, I made this, evangelism explosion presentation, which had, you know, it was about eight pages long. You had to do everything in a certain order. And there was a step and a step and I, I got the first couple steps right.

I asked them a couple good questions. You're supposed to ask them. And they replied, and then everything fell apart. And I began to go from question one and two to point 11. And then I realized that I forgot point eight went back to that and what I was saying, point eight I realized I forgot points three, four, and five.

And it was generally, it seemed to me, a mess of theological and biblical ideas just tossed together at random. And I had this terrible feeling that I was incomprehensible. And maybe I was, that I was incomprehensible. And when I came to the end, and you're supposed to ask the question, would you like to receive the gift of eternal life?

I was pretty sure they were going to say, of course, that we have no idea what you've been talking about for the last 20 minutes, but instead they said, we would like to receive the gift of eternal life. Why? Because God was calling them to himself, and the fact that I got things in the wrong order doesn't matter that much.

When God is doing his will, and when God has opened someone to his truth. I wasn't lazy, I wasn't a response, I was just flawed. I was just an imperfect person. And God used my imperfect efforts as he uses yours to accomplish his purposes. Our work and God's work are always going to go hand in hand. That's true.

You know, Peter said that on the first Pentecost when he rebuked the people of Israel who killed Jesus. He said, you violent hands, violent men, you put Jesus to death, but God is still accomplishing his purposes. What you were doing with violent hands, God was doing at the same time, because of our sin, our freely chosen sin, God still accomplished all of his purposes, namely the incarnation, the life, the death, the resurrection of Christ, and nothing can stop his purposes.

And if God has called you and you've said yes to him, that blessing is yours. And I pray that you have it, you enjoy it, you seek it. If you don't have it yet, and you understand that it's not just something you receive, but something you're moving toward glory and the beauty of being conformed more and more to the person of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.

And father, I thank you for all that you give us this Christmas season. We have many blessings, friends and family. Energy for life. But most of all, you do give us your son, our Lord, our Savior Jesus, toward whom we are moving. Because you've called us, justifying and sanctifying us and glorifying us above all, when we are full of knowledge of your gospel, that we're your children becoming more and more like our Savior, in whose name we pray, Amen.