

# His Purpose Will Stand

*Mark*

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**Bible Text:** Mark 6:14-29  
**Preached on:** Sunday, May 28, 2023

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Please turn with me to Mark 6, yet again, I told you we would be going for the hat trick and we are doing it this week. So we will be wrapping up our time in Mark 6 this week and considering what God has for us throughout the course of this passage as we have been there the last two weeks and Lord willing, I say Lord willing, we will wrap up this week. I do want to say a few words of recognition and thanks, specifically, first of all, to our orchestra. There was one time that I sang in a choir, not necessarily here, but at another church – I did sing in the choir here and then bailed out pretty quickly – but I sang in the choir at my previous church and while I was there I was singing behind the pianist and at one point he turned around during a practice and said, "I just want to remind you the Bible says that you are to make a joyful noise, not necessarily a skillful one." So I took that both as an encouragement and a slight. The encouragement was that my task is to worship joyfully. The slight is I'm not very good at singing. But we are so blessed here at Providence to have so many skilled and joyful worshipers of the Lord, those that use their gifts and talents to help the congregation worship our great God. So we're very thankful for our orchestra and those that use their skills for the glory of the Lord.

I do want to say over the last few weeks as I have been taking on my normal load and responsibility in the office as well as preaching, I have understood why Pastor Ty needed a vacation. It is exhausting work and he is a man that does it so joyfully and faithfully and we're thankful for him. He is on vacation right now and hopefully will be rejoining us, Lord willing, this week. And there is one particular couple on that trip that is really important this morning and we want to take a moment and recognize them, though they are not here. John and Connie Blackburn have been such a blessing to this congregation for so many years. They serve so faithfully here. John is a gift from the Lord as an elder here at Providence. Mrs. Connie is a blessing not only to me but to everyone here. And today, by God's grace, is their 60th wedding anniversary. Sixty years. In a day and age where marriage is not held in a very high esteem, where our culture comes after the sanctity of the marriage covenant, they have stood the test of time and continue to be faithful to one another and to the Lord. So let me invite you, if you have their phone number, email address, blow up their phone congratulating them on their faithfulness and the Lord's faithfulness, most importantly, in their marriage.

Let's go now to Mark 6 and consider what the Lord has for us this morning. Mark 6, starting in verse 14.

14 King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some said, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him." 15 But others said, "He is Elijah." And others said, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." 16 But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." 17 For it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. 18 For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19 And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, 20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly. 21 But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. 22 For when Herodias's daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. And the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you." 23 And he vowed to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom." 24 And she went out and said to her mother, "For what should I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." 25 And she came in immediately with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." 26 And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. 27 And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison 28 and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. 29 When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Let's go before the Lord in prayer.

*Almighty God, we thank you that you have given us the opportunity these last three weeks to consider your truth. We thank you that you have revealed yourself to us in this way, that even in a difficult passage like this, we can know that you are good and greatly to be praised and that your purpose will stand. Lord, we have come face to face with many hard truths these last weeks as we have considered the death of a good man, as we have considered the wicked and sinful heart of Herod; we have thought about just how destructive sin is and yet through it all, we know that you are glorified. So God, this morning as we yet again wrestle with this text, we ask that you would give us wisdom and clarity. Help us to understand in all of this that your purpose stood, that your glory was achieved and that you are ruling and reigning over all things. Lord, work in me in these next few moments, strip away any form of pride that might be in my heart, humble me that I might preach your word faithfully and use your Spirit to speak through me, O God.*

*We thank you for this time that you have given us and we ask that everything that is about to happen would be done for your glory and for the edification of your body. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Over the last few weeks, we have considered this passage at great length. We have looked at the tremendous power of what God was doing through John and through Herod. The first week, two weeks ago, we considered the life and ministry of John the Baptist. John was a great man. In fact, Jesus said there was no man born of woman greater than John the Baptist. He was an awesome and powerful man used by God for many glorious purposes. So we went back even before he was born and we traced from the first time that his birth was foretold by the angel to his parents, we went from there all the way up to his death. We considered the prophecies concerning his life, that he was to be the prophet of the Most High who was to come. We looked at his ministry, how God called him into the wilderness to preach a ministry of repentance and baptizing people, inaugurating the coming of the Messiah. As we considered his life and ministry, we focused specifically on the confidence that John had in God. He knew who God was, considered his awesome power, his glorious truth, and was so confident in God that he was willing to risk his own life to stand up for truth, and as he took his stand, he went joyfully with the confidence and confirmation that Jesus truly was the one who had been promised to come. Last week, we shifted gears looking at the confidence of John and the truth of God and we then moved to Herod who was only confident in himself. We spent time focused on Herod and his great sin and the three major sins that we pointed out, the fear of man, pride, and his sexual sin. His fear of man led a powerful king who had almost absolute authority over the land to be terrified of John, to be terrified of the elites, of the crowds, and even his own wife and his fear led him to being indecisive and it cost the life of a good man. As we looked into the fear of man, we discovered that the fear of man is a snare as the Scripture says. It traps its victims and destroys all who get caught up in it. The true source of the fear of man is an unholy pride, a pride in oneself, a pride in other people and their opinions that focuses on the self and the approval of others over a righteous fear of God. Herod was also a man marred by sexual sin, so much so that it destroyed his own life and it cost the life of John and he was willing to do whatever it took to protect it. In all of this, we were reminded that we are not alone in our fight against sin. We are not alone in our fight against sin and yet we cannot stay in sin. We must confess our sin, repent, and trust in the hope of Jesus Christ, and as we closed last week, we considered the remedy, the remedy of taking action, of good and faithful discipleship and being willing to speak truth no matter the cost.

So that is what we have done over the last two weeks. Now this week, we have another challenge before us. The title of this message is, "His Purpose Will Stand." His purpose will stand. As we have looked at everything that has happened in this passage over the last two weeks, I think one major question has probably come up, why? Why? Why did it have to happen this way? Why did God not intervene? Why did a good man die because of the sin of a wicked man? And what was God's purpose in all of it? This is the question that we were likely thinking through as we approached this passage and the reason I know that is because the first week, that was a question that I was asked. A group of you came up to me and asked that very question. Why? It is one that runs through our brains

constantly as we try to understand what God is doing in our life, as we try to understand what God is doing through our suffering. And when things are going well, it is very easy to say that God is in control of all things. We've got that one. Things are good, God is in control, I have nothing to fear. But when the flames of suffering grow ever higher, when the sorrows of this life seem to mount, and they will, and when our faith is being put to the test, do we have the strength to say, no matter the situation, no matter the circumstance, God's purpose will stand? That is our task this morning, to seek to understand the purpose of God, and to rest in his sovereign power.

Now we need to consider what is happening in this moment, before we get there. What is happening in this moment. So all of you are here to worship. I don't think anyone has major or ulterior motives for being here. You are here to worship our great God. But let's consider how you got here. You woke up this morning. If you are like me, you woke up at 6 in the morning with a dog barking at you. You started getting ready for worship, whether it was a cup of coffee, or a bowl of cereal, or whatever you like to eat on Sunday mornings. If you have kids, you struggled to get them ready for church and it felt like you were probably running late out the door. You got in your car, freely. You drove here, freely. And now you are seated in comfortable chairs, freely. You are here to worship God, freely. As Ted had mentioned, we do recognize Memorial Day, those that have laid down their lives for the freedoms that we enjoy. We are a blessed people. We come to worship God freely with no real pressures or persecutions. And yes, I know our culture is opposed to us, we see that in the world around us, and everything that's gone on in our country and in stores, and in advertisements, and all of that, but let's be honest, we don't really feel that much. None of us had a gun held to our heads and told, don't worship God. None of us were threatened that if you speak about Christ, or you gather with the local church, you will be arrested.

For us, it was easy coming here this morning. But we're not the only ones worshipping this morning. All around the world, there are people gathered to worship in secret in countries that are completely closed off to the hope of the gospel, that we're told, if you even hint at the name of Jesus, you will be arrested. So people gather in house churches, often by the cover of night. They will gather underground. Gather in secret. If they have a copy of God's word in their own language, they will read it. They will sing so quietly that no one else is able to hear them. And they will sneak back home. Some of them know that doing this could cost them their life, that they might be beheaded. And if you look at church history, and you look at the events of our current day, that's a reality. If you've ever looked at the Voice of the Martyrs, you know that to be the case. There are stories, after stories, after stories of Christians all around the world that have been arrested, beaten, mocked, and even put to death because of their faith.

Now Pastor Ty is going to be teaching a class on church history, which I'm kind of bummed about. Shameless plug, Neil and I are going to be teaching another class on Christian disciplines based on Dr. Whitney's book, "Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life." You should be there. If you're not, Pastor Ty is teaching on church history and he's going to be looking at the early part of church history, which I kind of wish I could be in there, but I'm excited to be teaching what we're teaching. But throughout all of church

history, the pages of the history books are soaked with the blood of the Christians that have come before us. Persecution is no new thing. When you look at, even in recent years, past couple hundred years, in a time that we would say is a little bit better, comparatively speaking, depending on where you're at, persecution has continued to happen and it is ramping up in the world around us. And it forces us to again ask the why question. Why? Why is there suffering in the world? Why is there persecution happening around the world? Why does God not intervene and step in to protect his people? What could be God's purpose in all of this?

So this morning, I want us to consider the purpose of God, to think through the will of God and what he might be doing in our lives. The first point that we are going to consider is discerning the will of God. Discerning the will of God. That's an important thing to consider. We here at Providence are unapologetic in our belief that God is sovereign over all things. We will not back down on that one because the reality that we see in God's word, it is the truth of who God is. He is sovereign and in control of all things. But we spend a lot of time as Christians, specifically those in the Reformed camp, trying to understand and discern the will of God and I think we do so outside of the bounds of which God has called us to do so, and I'll give you an example in just a moment. To define the will of God is God's sovereign purpose over the order of all things, how all things unfold. So we know before the foundation of the world, before we were ever created, God had a plan for all things and he is carrying out that plan for his glory.

So let's ask this question: can we discern the will of God? I would say both yes and no, and you will see why in just a second. Turn with me really quickly over to Deuteronomy 29:29. Deuteronomy 29:29 as we are seeking to know if we can discern the will of God and his purposes on earth. Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." So the reason I say no as to whether or not we can discern the will of God is because there is a secret will of God. There is a mysterious will of God. There are things that we don't know.

Now the question is why? Why are there things that we don't know? I think there's a lot of different reasons as to why we don't know them. First of all and foremost, is God is God and we are not. You can just stop right there and be done with it. But we are not God. We are limited creatures. We have a limit to our faculties and understanding. We have a limit to that which we can know and comprehend and if God were to reveal to us literally everything that there ever was to know, it would blow our minds. We would not be able to comprehend what God has decreed and willed. In fact, we don't even know a percentage of it. There is not a decimal point small enough to tell you how much you know of the will of God. We are very, very limited creatures trying to understand an infinite God.

So we won't know his entire secret will because we are not God. The second reason why God does not reveal his entire will to us, his entire purpose for all of creation, is that God owes us nothing. I think far too often we think way too highly of ourselves. We think that we are a great creature, we are a great person, we are very smart. In fact I did an exercise with the kids one time back in Adventure Club. I drew a big circle on the board and I said

if this circle was everything that God knows, I want you to take a marker and color in how much you think you know. And just for the record, our children's ministry has to be the smartest children's ministry in the world. I had one go up, colored in probably about a sixteenth of it, and I had another one go up and probably colored in half of it, and then I had another one go up that colored in all but maybe two percent of it. But there was one that kind of figured out what I was doing and put just a little tiny dot on the board. So I went back after they had almost colored in the entire thing saying as a group they knew almost everything that God knew, and I took an eraser and said so this is what you think you know, and I erased a quarter of it and said what if I told you that you don't even know that much? And then I erased another quarter of it, what if I told you you don't even know half of what God knows? And by the time I got done, there was maybe a smudge of marker, there was maybe a smudge of marker on the board. They couldn't even see it from where they were sitting. I could barely see it and I said what if I told you that was still too much? Their eyes got huge because they realized they weren't as smart as they thought they were. And we laugh at them but we think the same thing of ourselves. We think we know most of what God knows. We think we are a very special and smart creature and we're not. But we also think that God owes us something, as if we were really that significant.

Now I am not denying the fact that we are God's special creation. He created us very specifically in his image for his glory but the fact that we are a special creation is not because there is something special about us, it's because there is something special about the God that created us. So we are not special in and of ourselves and God owes us nothing. We are a creature from the dirt. God did not owe you the breath that is currently filling your lungs. God does not owe you the chairs that you are sitting in. He does not owe you the clothes that you are wearing, or the car that you drive, or the home that you live in, or the freedom that you feel here in our country. He owes you nothing and yet as we will find out in just a moment, he has graciously given us far more than we deserve.

So God owes us nothing and the last reason why I think God does not fully reveal his mysterious will to us, the things in which we cannot comprehend and understand, is because it causes us to be dependent upon him. Let me give you an example. As a single man, I want to be married one day. Now, if God, and I really wish he would do this which I've had this conversation several times with people. If God would just give me a few details, I'd be good. Like if he would say, "You're going to meet this person at this coffee shop at this time," I'd be good. I don't need to know all of the details, just a few of them. But, let's imagine, case study here, let's imagine God did do that, came to me and said, "You are going to meet your future wife in this coffee shop." Didn't even tell me a time or a date. What do you think I'm going to do every day for the rest of my life? I'm going to that coffee shop. I will be there from sunup to sundown until that day comes, and I will be so hyper-focused on trying to get to that point that I ignore being faithful in the days leading up to it. God does not reveal his entire will to us because we would be far too focused on what we see as the end goal and we would ignore what he has called us to every single day.

So there is a mysterious will of God. There are things that we cannot know, there are things that we cannot comprehend or even fathom because he knows that we cannot

handle them, because he owes us nothing, and it forces us to depend upon him, to trust in his goodness and in his sovereignty. I was having a conversation with someone yesterday and I was just kind of working through my sermon. Some of you have had to live through this. If you are a close friend of mine, I have to talk about my sermon all week to really get ready for it and sometimes it's people just sitting there for 30 minutes while I just run my mouth so that I can bounce it off of them. I was having a conversation with a family member yesterday and I said, "What if I told you God was in control of everything and yet he doesn't reveal everything to us?" And he said, "Well, I have really two options. I can accept it because it's true and rest in it. Or I can not accept it, even though it will still be true, and struggle with it. So I'm just going to choose to accept it because God's word is truth and I can rest in that."

There are things that we will not know. Actually, there's a lot of them that we will not know because God is God and we are not and it forces us to draw near to him every single day on our knees pleading that he might grant us grace and mercy for that day, pleading that he might provide the strength that we need for that day, and no matter what happens that day, that we might seek to glorify him in all things. So God does not reveal his mysterious will to us so that we might depend upon him, but the reason why I answered yes to whether or not we can discern God's will is because he has revealed his will to us.

Turn with me to 2 Timothy. Actually, hold on, pause just for a second. Don't turn there yet. Stay in Deuteronomy 29:29. God says, "The secret things belong to our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of God." So it says that there are secret things only God knows but there are things that have been revealed to us that we will have forever and you see what those things are at the very end, "that we may do all of the words of his law." So the law of God is God's reveal will for us.

Now turn to 2 Timothy 3:16. 2 Timothy 3:16. Hopefully a lot of you know this passage very well. Actually, let's back up to verse 14. Paul was writing to Timothy and encouraging him in his ministry and says in 2 Timothy 3, starting in verse 14, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." So if you want to know God's will for your life, here it is, this is it right here. God has been gracious far beyond what we deserve to reveal himself and to reveal our purpose in life. He has showed us who he is. He has shown us his great power and glory and might. He has revealed to us the way of salvation through Jesus Christ. And he has revealed to us how God has called us to live in this life, how we are to be obedient to him. So God's revealed will, which we can know, is in his word.

Let's do a case study for just a moment. So thankful for Dave and Gina who just wrapped up the Sunday morning Bible study on following the wonderful counselor and considering what biblical counseling and discipleship is. It is a blessing to our church and

to so many churches around as it focuses truly on what discipleship and one anothering is. But let's do a case study. So every Christian, this is an important reminder, is called to be a counselor, if we want to word it according to what the word of God says, a disciple maker. That's the task of every Christian. So say someone comes up to you, looks you square in the eyes and say, "Can I meet with you because I am really struggling to understand the will of God in my life." So the next thing that you're going to do is information gathering. You're going to try and figure out what's going on in their life that's leading them to this question or conclusion. You're going to try and understand what they mean by the will of God because information matters. You're going to try and understand what's going on in that current situation that they're trying to figure out the will of God. After gathering all of that information, you'll sit down with them. Now I can be a little sarcastic if you haven't picked up on that, and if someone came up to me and said, "I am struggling to discern the will of God," all I'm going to do is take my Bible and slide it across the table. Now, it sounds like a good joke. God has revealed himself and revealed our calling and our purpose in life in his word so if we want to discern the will of God, we go first to God. We go to him in prayer and we seek what he has called us to in the word of God. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable. So we go to the word of God and consider what he has called us to in this life.

Now I can hear the wheels spinning of some people saying, "Well, it doesn't talk specifically about that exact situation." It might not use the words you're looking for, but God's word is fully sufficient. This is one of the foundational pieces of this church, inerrancy of the word of God and the sufficiency of Scripture, that God's word is sufficient to answer all of life's questions to lead us and direct us in obedience to God and Christian discipleship. So the word of God is sufficient. So if you want to know God's will for your life, go to him in his word. Look to see what he has called you to in this life. And the summary statement of what God has called you to is to be faithful unto him. That is God's will for your life. We ask it in the way that the Catechism asks, "What is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever."

So if you want to know your purpose in life, God's will for your life, it is to glorify him, but we are a detailed people, aren't we? We want to know all the little details. So most of the time when we're talking about "I want to discern the will of God," what we're really meaning is "I want him to give me every little detail that I want. I want him to tell me when this is going to happen, how it's going to happen, and the exact way that I want it to happen." That's often what we mean when we are trying to discern the will of God. So we need to rewire our brains in understanding God has not revealed that to us for very particular reasons, but he has revealed himself to us so that we can faithfully follow him in all things, so we can discern the will of God as he has called us to pursue him and his word.

Now, what does this have to do with John? Look over at Luke 1. What was God's will for John? We will look at verse 13. We considered this two weeks ago. Very beginning of Luke's gospel account, he introduces the birth of John the Baptist being foretold and in Luke 1:13, "But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will



be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." That was God's will for John's life, to prepare the way for the coming Messiah.

Now, if you're about to argue with me and say, "Okay, God spoke directly to what John was supposed to be, he has not done it for me," let's consider for just a moment where are the actual details here? Tell me. Where does it say that John is going to end up wearing camel clothing? Where does it say this dude is going to be eating bugs? Where does it say that he is going to be arrested at this time and at this day? Where does it say that his life is going to end with him being beheaded? It doesn't. His task, prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. The details were up to the Lord.

Now, John could either come back and say, "I need more information. I need you to give me a little bit more." Or, "Yes and amen." That was a response of John. He did not try and figure out every little part of the mysterious will of God. He just trusted in the truth that God had called him to something very particularly and he was going to be devoted and obedient to that task. And Christian, if you are in this room, you have actually been given a charge and a task in this life and a very detailed one. Matthew 28:19 to 20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." You want to know what your task is in this life, first of all, obviously, it's the glory of the Lord through making disciples. That's God's will for your life, if you are a Christian. That's your job. The details are not there. How you will do it, who you will talk to, when you will talk to them, and what will happen, is not up to you. Your task, faithfulness. Pursue the lost and the broken of the world. Follow God in perfect obedience to making disciples.

Now, you will mess up because even as Christians, we still struggle with sin in this life and so you are called to repent and trust in him, confess your sins gladly to him and continue to pursue your life in obedience to him. If you want to know the will of God for your life, it's simple: glorify him by making disciples. We can discern that. How it will happen and what will happen is up to the Lord. Some of you in this room will live the rest of your lives out maybe even to 100 years old. I've told people that I want to be 105 years old because that will mean that I lived in three different centuries and that's kind of cool to say. Some of you will make it to maybe 100 years old. There is a chance that one or two of you might not even make it past today. We don't know the details of what our life will be. That belongs completely and totally to God. But we do know that we are called to be faithful with every single moment that we have on this earth. To seek the lost. To make disciples. To glorify God and enjoy him forever.

This is God's will for your life and he has been so gracious to us to reveal it in his word, but that brings us to the second point that we are going to consider: your days on this earth are numbered. That is not an easy truth. Your days are numbered. Turn with me to two different passages. First, Job 14:5. Job 14:5, it's an important reality that we must

come face to face with as we consider the way that the Lord works in our lives and what he is doing. This was Job responding to what was going on in his life and the death that he thought was coming soon. And Job in the midst of such great persecution, not persecution, suffering says these words in Job 14:5, "Since his days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass, look away from him and leave him alone, that he may enjoy, like a hired hand, his day." Now there is a greater context to this but there is an important truth for us to remember: our days have been determined.

So as we are seeking to know what God's will is for our lives, our days have been numbered very particularly and specifically. As we consider the life of John the Baptist, his days were completely and totally numbered. And in this life we can wrestle with the fear of death and yet we shouldn't because if God is in control of all things, and if God has determined the number of days that we will have on this earth, and if God truly is powerful over all things, then you will not live one moment longer than God has ordained and you will not fall short of it one moment. You will live exactly what God has purposed for your life.

Another passage for us to consider. Psalm 139. Psalm 139:16. Verse 16, "Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them." When we consider the mysterious will of God, before we were ever born God had a plan for our lives that had an ending. Unless Christ returns, every single one of us in this room will die. And I know that sounds like I'm being a Debbie Downer but that's the reality. Every single one of us will die. Our days are numbered and our response to that is either we live in fear constantly trying to think about, "Well, when am I going to die," so when we get sick we start to be fearful, "Could this be it?" Or when we get in a serious situation that looks a little bit more dangerous than what we bargained for, we start to think maybe this is the time. And you spend all of your time focused on trying to prevent your death or make your life longer that you are ignoring the truth that God has every single day numbered.

So either you live in fear or you live for him and trust in his sovereign provision. As it relates to John, the first week that we were in this passage we considered that John was a man who was confident in God, and I can almost guarantee you he knew that exact passage, that God had ordered every single day of his life and he did not live in fear. I mean, consider for a moment, John comes to Herod, a man of almost absolute power and authority who he knows is not a good man from a really bad dad, and every circumstance John could have been very fearful and said, "Yeah, I'm not saying anything because it could cost me my life." Or he could stand in the confidence that God is sovereign over all things, and even though he has not revealed exactly what our lives will look like and how they are going to unfold, "My days are numbered and whether my day is today or tomorrow, the task remains the same. Be faithful unto the Lord." And John did so and we can rest in that. There is actually rest in knowing that God has numbered our days. We don't have to do anything to try and make our lives longer because God has numbered them, and it gives us a confidence in the Lord that he will carry us, that he will sustain us, and that he will lead us until our very last breath for his glory.

So Christian, are you living like that? Are you living fearful of what this life might bring? Are you living scared of what tomorrow might bring? Are you living in such a way where you are just trying to preserve your life? Or are you living as one who realizes that once they laid down their life they found it? How are you living? Are you living for the glory of the Lord, pursuing his will and purpose for your life, trusting that he has planned all things, that he has ordered your steps and his will will be accomplished? Which leads us then to our closing point and what we will spend the rest of our time considering is the truth that God's purpose will stand. God's purpose will stand. You know, as we have been walking through this text, I have been amazed in considering this very truth. I think the first week I shared with you I just struggled with this, looking at the way everything unfolds. I mean, John who is called by Jesus, the greatest man born of woman, dies in the most ridiculous way while it seems like sin and wickedness is being put on full display and is glorified for everyone around there.

Now that's not the case but that's what it feels like to us. I mean, let's just consider one more time what happens in Mark 6. Herod hears about this man Jesus. Herod hears about Jesus and he wants to meet him partially because he is terrified that it's John the Baptist whom he beheaded, and so we are given an exact account of how John died. Now just before that, and this will be an important detail in just a moment, just before that John sent messengers to Jesus asking him, "Are you the one that was promised or should I be looking for another one?" And Jesus essentially responded with, "It's me. I am the Savior that was to come." Now Jesus does it in his own wording in his own way but that is the synopsis of it. So John sitting in prison not knowing what's going to happen next is able to rest in the truth that God has provided a Savior. But Herod has John arrested. John comes before Herod and says, "You cannot marry that woman. She is your brother's wife. It is unlawful. You are disobeying the commands of God." Herodias hates him. She wants him dead instantly. Herod is afraid of him so he has him arrested, and then we see the party unfold like we looked at last week. People are celebrating Herod's greatness. He is basking in the glory of himself like an arrogant proud man. Herodias disgustingly sends her daughter out, dances before the crowd, pleases Herod and the guests, and Herod in a foolish, foolish, foolish decision says, "You can ask whatever you want up to half of my kingdom." So she goes to her mom. Herodias knowing that her plan had worked tells her daughter, "Go back and ask for the head of John the Baptist." And it says at once it happened. Immediately it happened. In the span of probably just a few hours, John is sitting in prison considering that his task had been accomplished, the Savior had come, that's probably the only thing going through his mind at this point, meanwhile he doesn't really know what disgusting display is happening and then all of a sudden people burst in the door and chop off his head. That was it for John. That was it. So what could have been God's purpose in all of this?

Now there are things that we will not know about this text, there are things that unfolded that this text does not give us even to the point in which 2,000 years later we're talking about it. So clearly God had a great plan for even using this text that we can't fully comprehend. But what was God's purpose in all of this? I invite you to first turn to Isaiah 46. Isaiah 46:8. This is something that we need to write on our eyes so we see it every single day, tattoo it to our foreheads, whatever you want to do to remember it. This is one

of those verses to know. Isaiah 46:8, "Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'" This is a sure promise that God will accomplish all of his purposes that were set about before the foundation of the world. Some things that have not yet happened will come to pass but the question we have to ask is what in the world was the purpose for the death of John the Baptist? Remember when we looked at Luke 1 earlier, what was John's purpose in this life? To establish the coming of the Messiah. The Messiah came. His purpose was done. His purpose had been accomplished. God had set about way before John was even going to be a thought through the prophets looking forward to the last prophet that would come and inaugurate the arrival of the Messiah, God had been working towards this for years upon years upon years. And then John arrives. John does exactly what God commanded him, was faithful even unto death, and at his death his purpose had been accomplished. Mission accomplished.

Again, we're going to die, it is just a question of how, but God's purpose will be accomplished as it was in John. His task was completed. But then there is the question of Herod. What was his purpose in this? Okay, John died. God's purpose was accomplished and the inauguration of the coming Messiah. He was here. He was done. What was God's purpose in keeping Herod alive because I'm a justice lover, at least my own version of justice. When I see something wrong that offends my version of justice, I want instant justice. You cut me off in traffic, I want a police officer right there to get you. If you go flying past me in traffic, I really want the police to be there. And I find that I get annoyed when I come around a corner after someone went 75 miles an hour past me in a 45 zone, and there is no police officer to be found because it is my version of justice. And I want it instantly. And yet as we are about to find out, God's timing unfolds in his ordained way.

Look with me at Romans 9. Romans 9 starting in verse 19. What was God's purpose for not just absolutely wiping Herod off the face of the planet in that moment? "You will say to me then, 'Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?' But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me like this?' Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory?" Now let me make something abundantly clear: God does not cause us to sin. We've talked about this many times before. It would be contrary to his character. He does not cause us to sin but he will ordain the weakness and the sin of man for his purposes. In other words, he will use it for his glorious purposes. And what we see in Romans 9 is the patience of God on full display. I mean, think about this for a moment. You look at Israel. Israel's sin was so wicked that they genuinely deserved to be wiped off the face of this planet. They communed with God. He dwelled with them. And yet God endured their infidelity and their wickedness with much patience because he had a plan and he had a purpose, and he was working towards that purpose. But then you get to Herod and that's really on full display because Herod was a wicked and destitute man. God could have struck him down

in that moment, but he didn't. He endured with much patience a vessel of wrath in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy.

He endured the wickedness of Herod. He was very patient as Herod brought an end to his faithful servant John, but he was working towards something. What was that purpose? The last place that we will look is Luke 23. Turn with me to Luke 23 as we consider God's patient mercy that is about to be fully displayed. In the Mark 6 passage, we find out that Herod wants to meet Jesus. He hears about this great man that's doing all these wonderful miraculous things and he desires to meet him. In fact, Herod's father also desired to meet him, but he wanted to put Jesus to death. But there would only be one instance in which Herod would meet Jesus. Luke 23, we'll start in verse 6. "When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him." All Herod wanted to see was just a sign. He wanted to be entertained but he didn't know that the Son of God was about to be standing before him.

Verse 9, "So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate. And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other." What in the world was God's purpose for Herod? He endured with much patience. He could have had Herod put to death in that moment when he beheaded John but he didn't. He endured with patience. He waited because something was coming that he had been working towards and that would be the one time that Jesus appears before Herod. And when Herod finally gets to meet this one that he had been waiting for so long, he realizes that he is not the entertainer that he wanted and so Herod would send Jesus ultimately to his death through Pilate. What if God, desiring to show his mercy, endured with much patience vessels of wrath? God patiently endured the sinfulness and the wickedness of Herod and ordained that Herod would be the one to hand him to Pilate, that he would reject the Messiah and the Savior, and that John would not be the last one put to death on his behalf.

I was in preparation reading a quote, and I don't even know who to attribute this to, I've seen it circulating everywhere, but the question that we often ask in situations like this is why does God allow bad things to happen to good people? And as we arrive at this text, we realize that that has only happened one time in human history. One time. God allowed suffering and death to happen to the only good man, which was Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, the Son of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Messiah of the whole world. He allowed him to suffer and die. He endured with patience Herod, so that Herod would ultimately send Jesus to the cross. God's purpose before the foundation of the world was salvation, the redemption of his people, and so he worked towards that. He endured with patience every single wicked and broken person. He endured Israel, who time and time again broke his law. He endured Herod, who would put to death his servant John and ultimately send his Son to the cross. All so that God's purpose of salvation would be accomplished. And if there's anything that we learn in this text, it's this: God's

purpose will stand. He will not be defeated by our wickedness. He will not be defeated by our sin. The dumb things that we do will not thwart his plan. God's purpose will be accomplished and we can rest in that. Oh, what a glorious truth it is that we serve a God that rules and reigns over all things.

I want to close in considering the struggles that we have in this life. I mean, think about our own congregation for just a moment. There are people that are not here right now because they are going through cancer treatments, who can't be here with us to worship. There are people in this room right now that are going through broken relationships, some that might have lost their jobs, others that are in such a financial hole that they don't imagine how in the world they're going to get out, some whose family members have completely rejected them because of their faith in Jesus. And I could just keep going for hours and hours about the pain and the struggles that are in just this room alone, and if we only thought about, "I just don't see what God's doing," then, man, we would struggle more than we should. But if we looked at the truth of the Scriptures, that God's purpose will stand, no matter what it is, then we can rest.

I was talking with my dad a couple of days ago, talking about a hard situation that I was in. My dad stopped me and paused me and he said, "You know, you might not ever know what God is doing. You just might not ever know." Does that mean that God is not good? Well, the answer is clearly no to that. God is completely good. There are things in this life that we might not understand completely. When we come to the text of John the Baptist, we cannot completely comprehend why he had to die in that way and yet we can rest in the promise and the truth that God's purpose will stand for the good of his people and the glory of his name.

Let's go before the Lord in prayer.

*Almighty and gracious God, we praise you that you are in control of all things, that even in the midst of trials and sufferings, of persecution and calamity, and good times, you are working all things for our good and for your glory. Lord, in this life, it can be very difficult to try and understand what you are doing and yet you have not called us to know all things, you have just called us to be faithful. So Lord, break us of our proud desire to be in control of our own lives and replace our proud hearts with hearts of humility that delights in your goodness and your sovereignty and that seeks to be obedient to you in all things. Lord, we praise you that you have been far more gracious than we deserve by revealing yourself in your word, that you have shown us what we are called to in this life, to know you, to love you, to serve you, and to make disciples. Lord, we thank you that our days are numbered, that you know how long we will be in this life, and whether it is five more minutes or 60 more years, your purpose will be accomplished. Help us to rest in that truth and help us to delight in the truth that you are so loving, so good, so gracious, that you patiently endured until your Son would come to lay down his life for us. Thank you, God, for the salvation that you have given us in Jesus Christ. Help us to serve you all of our days and give us a heart for others, so that they might see the glorious truth that your purpose will stand. Strengthen us, hold us, and sustain us, O God, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*