

“Sovereign Lord” – How to Pray When People Want to Kill You

Introduction

The Text

²³ When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, ²⁵ who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, ‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? ²⁶ The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’ — ²⁷ for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. ²⁹ And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰ while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:23–31)

The Lord’s Prayer

- A. A long while back I taught on what’s called the Lord’s Prayer which is given to us by Jesus in both Luke and Matthew’s gospels. This is where, you may remember, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray.
 - 1. If we’re honest, prayer can be a somewhat confusing thing. We often don’t know how to do it or even where to begin.
- B. So Jesus comes to our aid: “⁷ [W]hen you pray,” he says, “⁹ [p]ray . . . like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread, ¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matt. 6:7, 9–13).
 - 1. Now, there are some, of course, who take him to mean that we should just repeat these words here. And so many do, without much thought to what they are even saying.
 - 2. But then there are others who, rightly I think, understand what Jesus is doing in this prayer.
 - a. He’s not so much giving us a formula for rote recitation. These aren’t magic words we are to recite (with proper pronunciation and intonation of course) and then can expect “success” in our prayers. No.
 - b. He’s not so much giving us a formula so much as he’s giving us a form or a pattern for prayer after which all our other prayers can and maybe even should be modeled.

- C. At a high level, stepping back and considering this prayer more generally, there's an approach and progression to it that is massively significant and particularly helpful—especially for those of us who are prone to get lost in prayer and not know the up or down or right or left of it.

A – S – K

- A. As a way to help us, when I taught on this before I identified three basic steps to the prayer Jesus gives us here, and I tried to connect them all memorably in a little acronym A – S – K.
1. When you think of prayer you think of asking God for something. Well, in one sense I suppose that is true, but let the acronym, guide you into the appropriate steps towards that.
- B. So it begins with A for Adore.
1. And here we have those opening words: [“Our Father in heaven . . .” \(v. 9\)](#).
 - a. The idea here is that first we see God for who he is—in his glory and his goodness. He is above us ([in heaven](#)) and he is right here with us ([our Father](#)). We begin with adoration, with praising and thanking him, reminding ourselves who he is for us in Jesus.
- C. But then we move to S for Surrender.
1. And here come those next words Jesus shares with us: [“⁹ . . . \[H\]allowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” \(vv. 9-10\)](#).
 - a. Here is the natural progression. After seeing God for who he is, in his sovereign benevolence—when we get that he is strong and he is good, that he is in heaven and he is our Father—we don't want our name to stand above his, we don't want our kingdom to come, we don't want our will to be done. We want him to do what seems best to him, because he knows better and he loves me.
- D. Adore, Surrender, and then at last we come to, perhaps, what we typically think of when we think of prayer: the requests. So we come to K for Knock.
1. I take this from that little parable Jesus tells after Luke's version of this prayer about the man who, though it's very late at night, he needs help and so he's knocking and knocking and knocking on the door of his friend's home. And finally the friend, because of this man's persistence, he gets up and lets him in.
 2. And Jesus concludes saying: [“I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” \(Luke 11:9\)](#).
 3. So here we have those personal requests for help in [Matt. 6:11-13](#): [“¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread, ¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”](#)

- a. And if I could just say: if we get the progression right, we may still ask for the same things, but we won't ask in the same way.
 - i. We see who God is.
 - ii. We've submitted ourselves to him, knowing he's got us.
 - iii. We still need his help, of course, but now we really trust him to do what's right with the requests we bring.

E. So there's the pattern for prayer laid out for us in the Lord's Prayer: Adore, Surrender, Knock.

Acts 4

- A. But now, I bring this up (as I know some of you may be wondering why at this point) because these disciples in our text in [Acts 4](#), they've clearly learned from Jesus' prior lesson on prayer and are here again modeling their prayers after that very same pattern.
- B. And so, rest assured, in case you were worried, I wasn't just wasting your time here with this lengthy introduction.
 - 1. Unbeknownst to you perhaps, I was actually giving you the three main points for this morning's sermon: (1) A – dore; (2) S – urrender; (3) K -nock. That's how these early Christians pray. And it's how we ought to pray as well. So let's dive in!

(1) A – dore

“Sovereign Lord”

- A. Look again at the flow of thought leading up to the first words of the prayer there in [v. 24](#): “²³ When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.²⁴ And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, ‘Sovereign Lord’” ([vv. 23-24](#)).
- B. Now, I love this. Because here's what it says right out of the gate: when you're struggling, when you're in the thick of it, when you feel like you might not be able to go on, when it seems the whole world is against you and everything is falling apart . . . what you need in those moments more than anything is a fresh vision of God.
 - 1. If you're in that space, whatever it may be you're facing, you can probably think of a thousand things you'd say you need before this . . .
 - a. You need more money in the bank account; you need your kids to start listening; you need the doctor to get back to you; you need the cancer to go away; you need the boss to rethink the job cuts; you need your spouse to shape up; and on it goes.
 - 2. For these apostles, they've got all these religious leaders there in Jerusalem who just arrested them, threw them in prison, then dragged them out before the high court, where they proceeded to threaten them, give them an ultimatum: “If you ever talk in the name of Jesus again, it will be over for you.”

- a. So we'd imagine they might be thinking: "What we need more than anything is a counterattack on these chief priests and elders; or maybe we need a relocation, let's move somewhere where stuff isn't as hostile," and so forth.
- b. But that's not where they start. That's not what they need above all else. And it's not what we need either.

- i. We need a fresh vision of God. We need to see him as he truly is: "Sovereign Lord . . ." (v. 24).

C. You realize, then, when it comes to prayer, what you need first and foremost, it isn't to be heard, but to hear; it isn't to be seen, but to see . . . him!

Other Examples

A. This is what God is everywhere trying to help his children understand, especially when they come on hard times.

B. So when Abraham is struggling with the fact that he still has no children even after God's initial promise, what does God do?

- 1. [Gen. 15:5](#): "[H]e brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'"

- a. What is he doing? He's saying: "Abraham, step outside of the little box you've been living in. Look up at the sky. Do you see the stars? You can't even the number them all. Listen, the one who is speaking to you made all of these. I didn't just number them. I know them by name. I think I can handle a few babies. Okay? I've got you. I am God."

C. It's the same in [Isa. 40](#), where God is trying now to encourage his people as he addresses those who will soon be struggling as exiles in Babylon: "⁹ Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, 'Behold your God!' . . . ²⁵ To whom . . . will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. ²⁶ Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power, not one is missing. ²⁷ Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God'? ²⁸ Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable" (vv. 9, 25–28).

- 1. "Listen, I've not forgotten you, I've got you. Lift up your eyes. Behold me!" That's what you need when then wind and waves are howling round about you.

D. Do you remember when Jesus puts the disciples in a boat and has them go off across the sea without him? As evening came, the winds start to pick up and a storm begins to brew.

1. And what does Jesus do? Well, it's a bit odd. We're told in Mark's account that at "about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. [And now here's what's interesting. Mark says that . . .] He meant to pass by them . . . (Mark 6:48).
 - a. He only got in the boat with them because they cried out at him, thinking he was a ghost or something.
 - b. But he meant to pass by them, to walk on the water before them, why? So that in the midst of the storm, they could see him.
 2. It's interesting, some commentators think this idea of passing before them echoes a similar incident that took place earlier when God "pass[ed] before" Moses (Exod. 33:19, 22; 34:6) giving him a glimpse of his glory.
 - a. The lesson here is the same: what you need right now more than anything, it isn't for the wind and waves to stop first and foremost. It's to see God—Father, Son, Spirit—in all his glory!
- E. However overwhelming all of this may seem, your God is greater and he's good. "Sovereign Lord."
1. I had to go to the dentist last week, just for a regular cleaning, but still, I hate it. They're poking and prying. There's all these weird sounds and smells. Spit is flying everywhere. It's a horrible place. There's a fine line between a dentist's office and a torture chamber.
 - a. And as I'm sitting there and they're poking at me, do you want to know what I was doing? I was praying. And do you want to know how I was praying? I was praying like this: "Sovereign Lord! I see you. I know you. I know you are over this, even though it seems like this dentist is trying to kill me. You've got me. It will be okay."

Begging the Question

- A. All of this begs the question, though: if when we come to pray in the midst of hardship and struggle, what we need most is to see God for who he is and what he's done, where do we most clearly see him?
1. Well, the answer, put simply, is: in Scripture.
- B. The Bible is God's revelation to man of himself.
1. We are not left to our own imaginations. We don't fashion God to our own liking or after our own image.
 2. We let him tell us who he is and what he's like.
 - a. We see such things in the Scriptures and then, in our prayers, we make space to adore him for it, to remind ourselves of it.
- C. This is why Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book *Life Together*, he talks about how our regular times in prayer with God should be preceded and informed by our times in the Word of God.

1. He writes: “Scripture meditation leads to prayer. . . . [T]he most promising method of prayer is to allow oneself to be guided by the word of the Scriptures, to pray on the basis of a word of Scripture. In this way we shall not become the victims of our own emptiness. Prayer means nothing else but the readiness and willingness to receive and appropriate the Word, and, what is more, to accept it in one’s personal situation, particular tasks, decisions, sins, and temptations. . . . According to a word of Scripture we pray for the clarification of our day, for preservation from sin, for growth in sanctification, for faithfulness and strength in our work. And we may be certain that our prayer will be heard, because it is a response to God’s Word and promise. Because God’s Word has found its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, all prayers that we pray conforming to this Word are certainly heard and answered in Jesus Christ” (84-85).
- D. George Muller says something similar when he tells of how he flipped his devotional habits. He used to spend the majority of his prayer time before reading Scripture, but he found it much more fruitful to read Scripture first and then let God’s Word inform his prayers.
1. Here’s what he writes: “[F]ormerly when I rose, I began to pray as soon as possible, and generally spent all my time till breakfast in prayer But what was the result? I often spent a quarter of an hour, or half an hour, or even an hour on my knees before being conscious to myself of having derived comfort, encouragement, humbling of soul, etc.; and often, after having suffered much from wandering of mind for the first ten minutes, or quarter of an hour, or even half an hour, I only then really began to pray.
I scarcely ever suffer now in this way. For my heart being nourished by the truth, being brought into . . . fellowship with God, I speak to my Father and to my Friend (vile though I am, and unworthy of it) about the things that He has brought before me in His precious Word.”
- E. Eugene Peterson really sums this up nicely for us when he says: “[P]rayer is never the first word; it is always the second word. God has the first word. Prayer is answering speech; it is not primarily ‘address’ but ‘response’” (Working the Angles, 45).
1. Did you hear that? Prayer is not so much talking to God as much as it is answering him, responding to him.
 - a. Therefore, prayer can really only come into its own when it comes after the careful listening to God in his Word. Our words are spoken to God in light of his Words spoken to us.

Acts 4

- A. That’s really what we see happening here in [Acts 4](#).
1. They begin by addressing him as “sovereign Lord.”
 2. But then they flesh this out further, making note of the fact that he is sovereign over both creation and redemption.
 - a. And they get both of these ideas from Scripture . . .

Sovereign Lord . . . over Creation (Ps. 146; Gen. 1-2)

- A. So they continue in v. 24: “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them”
 - 1. This is a near exact quotation of Ps. 146:6 which itself is clearly a summary of Gen. 1-2 and the days of creation.
- B. But it’s adoring God for who he is, how he is sovereign over all creation.
 - 1. There is no stray atom or wandering star somehow outside his purview or full control, immune to the sway of his sovereign rule. He made it, he sustains it.
- C. That’s important to remember, when you’re struggling in the weeds, right? He’s over it all!

Sovereign Lord . . . over Redemption (Ps. 2)

- A. But, of course, this leads us to that second piece, that God is sovereign, not just over creation, but over redemption. He’s not just great, he’s good. He uses his power over all things to it for the good of his people!
 - 1. And that’s what comes out as they quote now, not from Ps. 146, but from Ps. 2: “²⁴ Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them,²⁵ who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, [and here they quote Ps. 2:1-2 . . .] ‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain?²⁶ The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’ —²⁷ for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place” (Acts 4:24-28).
- B. Ps. 2 speaks of all the kings and rulers and Gentiles and peoples plotting against God and against his Anointed, and how it will all ultimately come to nothing, it will be in vain. God’s purposes will stand.
 - 1. This word “Anointed” here, it’s the Hebrew word *mashiach*, from which we get Messiah. When brought into the Greek of our text, it’s the word *christos*, from which we get Christ.
 - 2. So it’s no wonder that these praying Christians make the appropriate connection between these words in Ps. 2 and what happened with Jesus at the cross—with Herod, Pilate, Gentile and Jew all plotting against God’s Anointed, God’s Son, all for different reasons perhaps, but nevertheless with wicked intent.
- C. Now, of all the texts these early Christians could have grabbed hold of at this point, why this one?
 - 1. Well, I think the clue is found in what they bring out at the end there.
 - a. Whatever these opponents of God were hoping to accomplish, the bottom line is this: they only ended up ultimately accomplishing, not their own will, but God’s—“to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place” (v. 28).

2. You see it, right? God can take the worst of circumstances and turn it for unimaginable blessing.
 - a. In the case of Jesus, he took the evil intent of all these people, gathered around calling for his blood, and he turned it into the very means of our salvation and forgiveness!
 - b. They drove the nails through, thinking they were getting rid of God once and for all. All they really did was open up a fountain for our cleansing (cf. [Zech. 13:1](#)).
 - c. They thought they were standing in the way of God's plan and purpose. Turns out they were truly fulfilling it.
 - i. Was the cross horrible? Yes.
 - ii. Did God make of it something beautiful? A thousand times yes!
 - d. And so, now, for them, as they are up against persecution themselves, because of their connection to this Christ—they recall this Psalm and its fulfillment in him, because it reminds them that, just as God turned all the plots of Jesus' enemies on their head and used it for good, so he can and will do the same in their own situation now as well.
- D. So they just adore God here for who he is and what he's done—sovereign over creation and over redemption.

(2) S – urrender

“Your Servants”

- A. And the natural next step, as we saw earlier, is, then, to surrender.
 1. He is lifted up and we are lowered beneath. We see who he is—what he's said and what he's done. We get his heart, his love. And we trust him. We put our lives in his hands.
- B. For this, I'd simply draw your attention to the way these disciples refer to themselves down in [v. 29](#). Did you catch that? They call themselves God's “servants.”
 1. It's the Greek word [doulos](#) and it means slave or servant or bondservant. The essence of it is quite simple: “We belong to you, Lord. We're yours!”
- C. This made me think of what Paul says in [1 Cor. 6:19-20](#): “¹⁹You are not your own [why?] ²⁰for you were bought with a price.” Well, what was the price? “[T]he precious blood of Christ,” Peter tells us in [1 Pet. 1:19](#) (cf. [Acts 20:28](#)). How then shall we live? “So glorify God,” Paul concludes in the last part of [v. 20](#). Live to for his glory, not yours.
 1. This is why I say there is this sense of surrender. “Your name be hallowed. Your kingdom come. Your will be done. You're the Master. We're your servants.” That's what's happening here.

- D. It's tragic how often we invert this when we come to pray. Do you know what I mean?
1. We act like prayer is the time when we get to tell God what to do. We set ourselves up like the master, and he's in the position of our servant.
 - a. "I want this. I need that. Get me a job. Find me a spouse. Help my kids. Fix my health. Keep me safe. Make me comfortable. Do my bidding! Your end of month review is coming up soon, so don't disappoint on this. Your numbers have been down in the polls lately. I'd hate to have to let you go."
- E. That's not prayer, that's insanity. That's setting yourself in a seat you have no place sitting in.
1. Instead, prayer must be conditioned by this heart posture of surrender. Because we get it: he is God and we are not.
 - a. Does he care yes. Can we bring our needs and wants to him, absolutely (as we'll soon see).
 - b. But is he our slave, here to do our royal bidding? Not a chance.
 - i. Again, he's our "sovereign Lord."
- F. So we Adore, then we Surrender . . . and now, at long last, you're ready to Knock . . .

(3) K – nock

What They Don't and Do Pray for

- A. As John Stott puts it: "Only now, with their vision of God clarified, and themselves humbled before him, were they ready at last to pray." Now they could properly talk about their needs and make their requests.
- B. Before we look at what they do pray for, we must take a moment and marvel a bit at what they don't.
1. Go back to the opening lines of our text. Remember, the apostles Peter and John had just been harassed and threatened. They know their life is in grave danger because of these religious leaders. Upon their release, they come back to the community of saints and share what's going down. And they huddle up and pray . . .
- C. Let me ask you: what are you praying for in those moments? I could imagine a number of things.
1. Maybe you're just upset at God. "This is what we get? After all we've given up for you? I thought you were supposed to be a God of love. Here we are, it feels like you're hurting us, like you've abandoned us, like you don't care. I don't want to be a Christian if this is how it's going to go. I came to Jesus to make my life better, this is just making it harder." But they don't pray like that.

2. They also don't pray for God to change their circumstances.
3. Nor do they pray for him to exact vengeance on their enemies.
4. Nor do they even pray that they be kept safe. (Give it a few chapters and Stephen's going to be dead. Give it a few more and the apostle James is in the dirt. But they're not praying for safety.)

D. Now, to be clear, praying for such things is not necessarily wrong.

1. We see laments in the Bible, where people wrestle with the outworking of his providence in their lives and they struggle with it.
2. We know people can pray for changed circumstances, or for God to vindicate them, or protect them, and all this.

a. So these things are not inherently wrong, it's just not where these guys and gals go.

E. Again, I think, informed by God's Word, they say:

1. "We know you never promised it would be easy. If they hated you they're going to hate us.
2. We know you've not abandoned us. You said you'd be with us even to the end of the age.
3. We know you're ultimately going to take vengeance on your enemies and make all the wrong right.
4. We know you're going to keep us safe in the end, that even we should be put to death, not a hair of our heads will perish because of the resurrection and glory that awaits us . . .
5. And there's something else we know from your Word: we know we're to be your witnesses here in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.
6. So, instead of asking for vengeance or protection or any of these other things, what we want to ask Jesus is that you help us fulfill that call. Give us the courage we need to keep speaking in your name, no matter what!"

a. Here's how they put it in vv. 29-30: "²⁹ And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰ while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." That's what they're knocking for.

"Filled with the Holy Spirit"

A. And so what happens? How does God respond? "And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness" (v. 31).

B. They are "filled with the Holy Spirit."

1. It's the same sort of thing described earlier on the day of Pentecost: "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit . . ." (Acts 2:4).
2. And then a bit later, when Peter is standing on trial before the Sanhedrin, we're told that he was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:8).

3. And here it is again ([Acts 4:31](#)).
 - a. So we understand that while the Spirit was given and poured out in a unique sense on the day of Pentecost, we can continue to be filled with him—especially as we seek God in his Word and in prayer.

- C. And we desperately need this! Because here’s what happens, I think: Jesus says of the Holy Spirit in [John 16:14](#), that “[he will take what is mine and declare it to you.](#)”
 1. The point I think is actually quite simple: the Spirit takes what is true out there and makes it true in here.

- D. So to use our text as an example . . .
 1. These people know God is sovereign; they know he can turn all things for good; they know Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords; they know he is with them;
 2. but they were struggling to really “know” it, if you get what I mean?
 - a. The Spirit helps bridge the gap between head and heart. And as we pray over the Scriptures, and cry out for God’s help on the basis of such things, when he comes and fills us with his Spirit, it’s as if the penny drops, the Word settles in, we don’t just have light, we have heat . . . and, in that, we have power.
 - i. “We know God really is sovereign and he really does love us. Whatever comes, we’re going to be just fine. Let’s go!”

- E. So I would just commend this pattern for prayer to you. Make use of it in your own times of trial and temptation. Adore, Surrender, Knock.
 1. Whatever it is you’re dealing with—anger, bitterness, depression, lust, conflict, fear, etc.
 - a. Find places in God’s Word that address it. See who he is and what he says about it and how he brings help to us in it ultimately through Jesus.
 - b. And trust him to do what’s best. Put your life and your plans and all this in his hands.
 - c. And ask him for help, for the Spirit to come and bridge the gap between head and heart and enable you live faithfully even in the midst of the tough stuff.

“The Place . . . Was Shaken”

- A. But, now, here’s where I wanted to close. It’s awesome that we get to pray and anticipate God meeting with us and all this. What a privilege! But I don’t ever want us to forget where that privilege has come from, why we can approach God in prayer like this in the first place.

- B. To help us connect the dots, I want to just focus in on that work “[shaken](#)” there in [v. 31](#): “[And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken . . .](#)”

1. The quaking of the earth was often a sign that accompanied God's presence as he manifested himself on the earth. And it was a fearsome thing.
 - a. So Mount Sinai, if you remember, for example, it was shaking. God said: "Tell the people don't come near, don't even touch it, lest I break out against you and you perish. I'm holy, you're sinful." ["It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" \(Heb. 10:31\).](#)
 2. And yet here, as the people pray, and God comes, what's so intriguing is the place is shaking, but the people are not. If anything they are becoming more stable and unshakable as God draws near.
 - a. He doesn't destroy them, he sustains them, equips them, enables them, helps them. But how?
- C. Well, there's another earthquake that takes place in Scripture, when God's presence comes down. Do you remember? It's when Jesus is on the cross.
1. Matthew records it for us like this: [" ⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. ⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' . . . ⁵⁰ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. ⁵¹ And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵² The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, ⁵³ and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴ When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" \(Matt. 27:45-46, 50-54\).](#)
- D. There's obviously a lot here, but there's just a simple observation I want to make. Because it seems to here we can discern how the quaking of God's presence is changed for us from a dreadful thing to a wonderful thing.
1. And the bottom line is this: Jesus takes the dread. Because Jesus takes my sin. And when he does, listen, when God comes down at Calvary there, he tears his beloved Son to pieces.
 - a. Jesus' prayers and cries for help go unanswered. He knocks but no one's home. Why? Because he's taking the dread, the wrath of God, in our place.
 2. So we get the blessing and grace. Did you notice, all the blessings that are catalyzed for us from this very same earthquake.
 - a. The curtain in the temple is torn, we can draw near to God without fear.
 - b. The tombs are opened and people come out alive. What exactly this means I have no idea. But here's what I want you to see: the same quaking presence that shook Jesus to death, is shaking us to life! That's the point I think.
 - c. So people see and believe and they are saved, born again.

- E. So how do we have this privilege? How can we come and knock and God hears and he opens?
1. It's because of the cross, because of the gospel, because of Jesus.
 2. That's why, by the way, we pray "in Jesus' name."
 - a. That's not some superstitious phrase we tag at the end of our prayers.
 - b. It's an admission that the only reason we can approach a holy God and expect grace and mercy instead of judgement is because of him. May we never forget it!