

“God’s Providential Care”  
Acts 23:11-35  
(Preached at Trinity, May 28, 2008)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. We’ve been looking at this passage that gives the account of Paul before the Sanhedrin. After Paul arrived at Jerusalem he soon found himself in trouble with the Jews who mobbed him and sought to kill him. He was quickly taken into custody by the Roman authorities who were anxious to put the issue to rest and restore peace in the city. The day after Paul’s arrest the Romans brought him before the Sanhedrin in an effort to discover the reason for the anger of the Jews.
2. Immediately there was an uproar among the Sanhedrin. Paul had no sooner begun to speak that the high priest ordered a bystander to smite him on the mouth. Paul then railed upon the high priest for his complete ignoring of the law. Paul admitted the respect due to the high priest and continued make his observation of the body of rulers.
3. In **Verse 1** Paul is described as “earnestly beholding the council” Paul observed that the makeup of the Sanhedrin consisted of a large number of both Sadducees and Pharisees.  
**Acts 23:6** – “But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees”
4. Paul knew the distinct theological and political differences between the Sadducees and Pharisees. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection, in the spiritual world, and in angels. The Pharisees believed in none of these things. In an act of wisdom and prudence Paul took the opportunity to divide the court on these theological differences. It worked perfectly.  
**Acts 23:9** – “And there arose a great cry: and the scribes *that were* of the Pharisees’ part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.”
5. With regard to Paul’s actions let me add a couple points
  - a. First, it has been suggested that Paul acted unseemly and in contradiction with Proverbs 6 and the seven sins God sees as abominations  
**Proverbs 6:19** – “A false witness *that* speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.”  
**Proverbs 6** is speaking against someone with a contentious spirit which does not characterize Paul. And it is speaking of sowing discord among “brethren” – close relations, those of the covenant community.  
These were Paul’s enemies, wolves seeking to devour him.  
Kistemaker – “He perceived that if they united to accuse him of disrupting the *pax Romana* he would lose the protection of the commander. In short, Paul was fighting for his life.”

- b. Second, I preached on Sunday evening on the necessity of having compassion upon the downcast. As we examined Paul's actions last time I stressed the importance of wisdom and prudence as we live the Christian life.  
**Matthew 10:16** – “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.”  
 These two things must be in harmony – wisdom and compassion.  
 It wouldn't be prudent to bring a homeless person to sleep in your home with your wife and children, or to pick up every hitchhiker.
5. Paul was once again removed by the Romans and taken to the castle. That night Paul received a revelation from God.  
**Acts 23:11** – “And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.”
6. Tonight I want to examine this passage as it applies to God's Providence in our lives. We don't receive supernatural revelations from Christ today. But we do have the promises of His Word and we *can* apply them to our lives. We can surely look at the essence of this verse and find great confidence knowing that there are truths in it that apply to every believer.
- We can find comfort in His presence  
 “the Lord stood by him”
  - We can find courage in His protection  
 “Be of good cheer”
  - We can find confidence in His plan  
 “as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.”
7. Let's look more closely at these wonderful truths.
- I. Knowing God's Providence gives us comfort in His presence  
 “the Lord stood by him”
- A. Paul was all alone – or so it would seem
1. Paul stood alone before the Sanhedrin
  2. Now he's been taken back to the castle, its night time and he is all alone.
  3. Where were the other Christians?  
**2 Timothy 4:16** – “At my first answer no man stood with me, but all *men* forsook me: *I pray God* that it may not be laid to their charge.”
  4. And where is mercy from his own kinsmen? In fact the Jews were determined to kill him  
**Acts 23:12** – “And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.”
  5. He wasn't truly alone  
**2 Timothy 4:16** – “Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known . . .”
  6. Neither are we every truly alone. Christ has promised His presence through every step of our lives.

**Matthew 10:19-20** – “But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.”

**Matthew 28:20** – “and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world.”

**Hebrews 13:5** – “*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*”

**Psalms 145:18** – “The LORD *is* nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.”

- B. For the Christian this is the comfort of comforts
1. There is a great peace and comfort in knowing that Christ is with us
  2. God’s presence is with us in our every condition
    - a. In poverty and wealth, sickness & health  
**Matthew 28:20** – “. . . and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world.”
    - b. One of Jesus’ names is Emmanuel which means “God with us”
    - b. The presence of Christ should bring you great comfort  
What possible situation on earth can possibly cause you to fear if God is with you?
  3. We go into every battle with the most powerful Defender by our side  
We face every decision with our infinitely wise Advocate by our side  
**Isaiah 43:2** – “When thou passest through the waters, I *will be* with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.”  
**Psalms 46:1-2** – “God *is* our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. <sup>2</sup> Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;”

II. Knowing God’s Providence gives us courage in His protection  
“Be of good cheer”

- A. God’s first words were “Be of good cheer”
1. This phrase is a single Greek verb - θάρσει – It can be translated “be cheerful” or “be courageous” NAS - “Take courage”
  2. Literally it could be read, “*Courage! Cheer up! Don’t be afraid!*”
- B. We serve an all powerful God. When He is with us all of the power of the universe is with us.
1. There was an evil plot against Paul. Over 40 men had taken an oath that they would neither eat or drink until they had killed Paul. With such determination there was little likelihood that Paul would survive.
  2. But Paul had God on his side.  
**Psalms 56:11** – “In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.”
  3. You may not have a band of 40 terrorists against you but Satan is poised for attack all the time.

- C. Nothing shall keep you from completing your appointed work
1. Why wasn't Paul killed in the numerous other life threatening events?  
**2 Corinthians 11:25-26** – “Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; *In* journeyings often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils by *mine own* countrymen, *in* perils by the heathen, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren;”
    - a. God consistently delivered him
    - b. Christians often demonstrate by their continual fear that they don't truly trust in a Sovereign, Omnipotent God
    - c. Paul told Timothy  
**2 Timothy 1:7** – “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;”
  2. It is important to note that God always protects His servants for His service – listen to Paul's words again:  
**2 Timothy 4:16-18** – “At my first answer no man stood with me, but all *men* forsook me: *I pray God* that it may not be laid to their charge. <sup>17</sup> Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. <sup>18</sup> And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve *me* unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen.”
  3. Nothing can stop God from accomplishing His will in your life  
**Daniel 4:35** – “And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”

III. Knowing God's Providence gives us confidence in His plan  
 “as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.”

- A. None of these events in the life of Paul were without purpose
1. God had carefully orchestrated every detail
    - a. Why was it Paul ended up in Jerusalem? Why was it the Jews came against him in the Temple.
    - b. God ordered it so that Paul would have an opportunity to preach to the Jews.

- c. And God ordered the Romans to allow Paul to speak  
**Acts 21:39 - 22:1** – “But Paul said, I am a man *which am* a Jew of Tarsus, a *city* in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people. <sup>40</sup> And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto *them* in the Hebrew tongue, saying, <sup>KJV</sup> **Acts 22:1** ¶ Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence *which I make* now unto you.”
2. God ordered that Paul would be brought before the Sanhedrin where he again had an opportunity to speak.
3. And it was God that ordered that Paul would again be brought back to the Roman barracks
4. All of the world's people are under the absolute rule of Divine Providence who rules with absolute power
- a. God said to Pharaoh, “Let My people go!” – he had no choice but to let them go.
- b. God controls the actions of all men from the greatest to the least  
**Proverbs 21:1** – “The king's heart *is* in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.  
**Proverbs 16:9** – “A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.
- c. All men are under God’s sovereign dominion  
**1 Samuel 2:6-8** – “The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. <sup>7</sup> The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. <sup>8</sup> He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, *and* lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set *them* among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth *are* the LORD'S, and he hath set the world upon them.”
- d. No man shall ever do anything to you that God has not directed. No plan of God can be thwarted. No one can reverse it. God does as He pleases.  
 Are you confident of this? Doesn't this confidence bring you comfort?
- B. So who ordered the evil scheme devised by the Jews for the murder of Paul?
1. This was all by the sovereign purpose of God.
2. But bear in mind, their sin was all their own  
 Joseph told his brothers,  
**Genesis 50:20** – “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; *but* God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as *it is* this day, to save much people alive.”
3. You can imagine the natural fear Paul must have felt as he stood before his accusers – But Paul saw it as an opportunity to preach
- a. Paul saw God’s direction in his life in every circumstance –  
 Nothing is by accident – even our trials are to His glory

- b. Paul saw his imprisonment as an opportunity to bring the gospel to others  
**Philippians 1:12** – “But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things *which happened* unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel;”
- C. Now God is telling Paul, “I’m about to send you to Rome so you can preach to the Romans.” Not just any Romans. Paul would testify before Governor Felix, Governor Festus, and then before King Agrippa.
1. How would that ever happen?
  2. Look how God brought it to past and how many people He used
    - a. 40 evil Jewish assassins in collusion with the Sanhedrin
    - b. Paul’s nephew was used to expose the scheme. He was in exactly in the right place at the right time to overhear the plot.
    - c. The centurion brought the young man to the chief captain
    - d. And then 470 soldiers were used for Paul’s safety  
 And so Paul was spirited away to see Felix the governor  
 Are God’s ways not perfect
  3. God has limitless resources. What kind of an army does He raise for your protection?
- D. God has orchestrated many opportunities for you to serve Him
1. Are you taking advantage of them?
  2. Do you complain of difficulties or do you see them as God opening opportunities for you?

#### Conclusion:

1. Does this verse bring you great encouragement?
  - We can find comfort in His presence  
 “the Lord stood by him”
  - We can find courage in His protection  
 “Be of good cheer” “Be of good courage”
  - We can find confidence in His plan  
 “as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.”
2. God has called you to be His witness. Are you daily looking for the opportunities God has carefully orchestrated for you?  
 May God grant us to look at life in this manner. We don’t live in a world with events unfolding without purpose. God has ordered it all according to His perfect plan.