

The Providence of God

Acts 23:12-31, Sunday AM, January 8, 2023

Prelude – Scripture: Acts 23:6-31 But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul *began* crying out in the Council, “Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!”⁷ As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.⁸ For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.⁹ And there occurred a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and *began* to argue heatedly, saying, “We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?”¹⁰ And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks.¹¹ But on the night *immediately* following, the Lord stood at his side and said, “Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.”¹² When it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul.¹³ There were more than forty who formed this plot.¹⁴ They came to the chief priests and the elders and said, “We have bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we have killed Paul.¹⁵ Now therefore, you and the Council notify the commander to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case by a more thorough investigation; and we for our part are ready to slay him before he comes near the place.”¹⁶ But the son of Paul’s sister heard of their ambush, and he came and entered the barracks and told Paul.¹⁷ Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, “Lead this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him.”¹⁸ So he took him and led him to the commander and said, “Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to lead this young man to you since he has something to tell you.”¹⁹ The commander took him by the hand and stepping aside, *began* to inquire of him privately, “What is it that you have to report to me?”²⁰ And he said, “The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down tomorrow to the Council, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more thoroughly about him.²¹ “So do not listen to them, for more than forty of them are lying in wait for him who have bound themselves under a curse not to eat or drink until they slay him; and now they are ready and waiting for the promise from you.”²² So the commander let the young man go, instructing him, “Tell no one that you have notified me of these things.”²³ And he called to him two of the centurions and said, “Get two hundred soldiers ready by the third hour of the night to proceed to Caesarea, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen.”²⁴ *They were* also to provide mounts to put Paul on and bring him safely to Felix the governor.²⁵ And he wrote a letter having this form:²⁶ “Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings.²⁷ “When this man was arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, I came up to them with the troops and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman.²⁸ “And wanting to ascertain the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their Council;²⁹ and I found him to be accused over questions about their Law, but under no accusation deserving death or imprisonment.³⁰ “When I was informed that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, also instructing his accusers to bring charges against him before you.”³¹ So the soldiers, in accordance with their orders, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris.

What a rough road for one seeking to follow God’s will! Can this much conflict possibly be part of God’s plans for His servants? We’ve moved from Paul’s gospel appeal to an angry crowd who accepted the Jewish part of his God-given mission, but who revolt when he mentions the Gentile part, to a narrow escape from a beating from the Roman commander, to last week’s forced meeting with the chief priests and all the Council. Paul began, “Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.” With this, he brings the ultimate Judge to bear, which is exactly what is needed when there will be much cause between all involved to respond with fear of man. This fear must be cultivated before crisis in order for it to guide through crisis as these crises usually blur the boundary lines of appropriate roles. Paul is struck by order of the high priest. Paul calls out those who did this as outside the law, but then acknowledges the high priest’s position even while the priest’s actions may have been wrong. We must be careful in standing for God that we don’t tear apart God’s structure. But then Paul wisely went to the heart of the issue—yes, to save his skin by pitting the religious leaders against one another, but also to expose the true heart of the gospel—I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead. Once again, the resulting conflict threatens his life and the commander intervenes to keep Paul from being torn to pieces. Would you keep poking the bear like Paul did for the gospel’s sake? Be careful how you answer this, but true belief in the gospel leads to a life of willing sacrifice for the God of the gospel, confident because of provision from God to deal with what otherwise would seem impossible. And when you have this view of a living God and a living gospel, what is your response? Gratitude and worship which you proclaim to all who would hear. Church, sing this gratitude to God for Christ!

***Hymn #106: Praise Him! Praise Him!**

And why shouldn’t Paul be grateful? He was given a miraculous sign of encouragement from God Himself.¹¹ But on the night *immediately* following, the Lord stood at his side and said, “Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.” Wow! Thank-you Lord. But then he wakes up, and his nephew brings him serious news. I heard that some 40 Jews have bound themselves with an oath that they would not eat nor drink until they kill you. Paul, what will happen? For me, it would seem like the struggle to live for Christ’s kingdom seems impossible to live with a good attitude, but from heaven’s perspective, even Paul’s nephew is a sign of the providence of God. You’ll get to Rome Paul. God’s will comes with God’s provision to accomplish that will, but it takes our releasing control of how God accomplishes that will for us to see some of His provision and praise Him for it.

***Hymn (Powerpoint): God Moves in a Mysterious Way *Pastoral Prayer: Pastor Jahn Choir: Press On Scripture: Philippians**

1:12–26 Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel,¹³ so that my imprisonment in the *cause* of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else,¹⁴ and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.¹⁵ Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will;¹⁶ the latter *do it* out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,¹⁹ for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,²⁰ according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but *that* with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.²² But if I *am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose.²³ But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better;²⁴ yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith,²⁶ so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.

Offering: *Doxology:

As we progress through the passage, the plot thickens. So many pieces, so many unknowns for Paul. What about his hopes for life and service? Any fears/disappointments? Did trust in the Lord mean to just sit tight OR was it to embolden him to seek to maneuver through each obstacle? Let’s start with his source of life. Paul treasured Christ. You heard it from Philippians. From prison, he wrote, ¹⁹ for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, ²⁰ according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but *that* with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. Paul’s values directed his focus. He lives for the gospel’s advance. If this would be true for you, there must be something greater than what you see and experience. Like Paul, you MUST see the glory of God in the face of Christ. The gospel you give must be the gospel you live. Sing the treasure of Christ.

***Hymn #413: Jesus, Priceless Treasure**

To know how to act in situations like Pastor will preach on now, you need a clear head filled with God’s Word and eternal values. Remember, true wisdom comes from God—the One who providentially orchestrates all. Pray you will hear and yield to God’s wisdom as we sing and then sit under God’s Word.

***Hymn (Powerpoint): The Perfect Wisdom of Our God**

Message: The Providence of God Acts 23:12-31

***Hymn #47: God Will Take Care of You**

Prayer