

Series: Acts
Title: God's Sovereignty and Use of Means
Text: Acts 23: 12-24
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Acts 23: 11: The Lord promised Paul he would be delivered to Rome to preach the gospel. We have God's word that Christ shall be a sanctuary for those who trust in him. We have many examples, such as the one here, where the Lord stood by Paul, spoke peace into his heart and promised deliverance in order to glorify the name of the Lord.

Acts 23: 12-15: And here is how the Lord began to set the whole course in action--an assassination plot

Acts 23: 16-22: Brethren, despise not the day of small things. God speaks to us in many ways. Here he uses Paul's nephew. Paul knows that Christ has promised to deliver him. But Paul uses the means God has given him.

Acts 23: 23, 24: As the Lord promised the Lord delivers Paul. He uses the Roman army for Paul's protection and so that Paul does not have to run but may ride in ease.

Acts 23: 25-31: The Lord used the chief captain to write a letter to Felix the governor, defending Paul.

The title of our message are the two points we will look into tonight: The Sovereignty of God and the Use of Means.

I. GOD ORDERS ALL PROVIDENCE TO BRING ABOUT HIS PURPOSE.

A. Our God is so absolutely sovereign that he uses even the wrath of man to bring to pass his purpose.

These men, along with the chief priests and elders, had their hearts set on the most dangerous endeavor a man can enter into--touching God's anointed. Of everything they could have contributed in their lives, this is there "15 minutes of fame", recorded forever in God's word: A secret council to kill the man Christ stood by.

B. Will such men prevail against God's saints?

- **Ps 76: 7-12**
- **Ps 105: 12-15**

C. Can God really work the wrath of man to glorify his name and work good for his elect people? Look to the cross! (Acts 4: 26-28)

Salvation for God's elect was accomplished through the wrath of men who were doing exactly what they wanted to do and yet were unrestrained by God as God accomplished his eternal purpose.

- Justification by Christ was accomplished for all those God gave him from eternity
- Sanctification by Christ was accomplished for all those God gave him from eternity

- Redemption by Christ was accomplished for all those God gave him from eternity. They meant it for evil but God meant it for good.

These men were doing exactly what they wanted to do toward Paul, just as those men who sought time and again to kill the Lord Jesus. But they could not for one reason:

John 7:30: Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come.

Will this conspiracy be fulfilled by these men against Paul? No--why? Because Paul's hour was not yet come, the Lord stood by him and delivered him. (**Read Psalm 2**)

Application: "Be wise, now therefore"

John 3:36: He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

Will you bind yourself under the curse that you will not eat the Bread from heaven till you have shut God and his gospel out of your life?

To reject Christ's ambassadors AND his witnesses is to reject Christ Jesus himself. To stiffen your neck and harden your heart, to close your ears to God's gospel IS NOT WISDOM--IT IS TO HAVE MURDER IN YOUR HEART AGAINST GOD.

Proverbs 21:30: There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD.

Isaiah 8:10: Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us.

Psalm 2: 12: Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

II. AS SAINTS OF GOD, BRETHREN, WE MUST USE EVERY MEANS GOD MAKES AVAILABLE TO US.

A. First, Paul had the word of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Every child of God born of his Spirit has his word abiding in you and you have God's written word. Some may think Paul had more than you because the Lord stood by him. But listen to Peter.

2 Peter 1: 16: For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17: For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. 18: And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. 19: We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: 20: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. 21: For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

You have the scriptures. You have the gospel preached to you. Paul was being delivered to preach the word of God. How do you think God would regard those who would not waste their precious time to even go hear the gospel preached? How does God regard you?

B. Secondly, Paul used the means which the Lord brought his way providentially.

1. Every believer knows that our God shall stand by us, he shall speak comfort into our hearts, and he shall deliver us in the way he would have us to go. But our Lord teaches us that providentially, between point A and point Z, there will be fire and flood and suffering and the way may not seem clear. We find the way of the believer in our text: **read v11 and 12**. Yet, we do not find Paul acting rashly or attempting to free himself. Remember Philippi: "At midnight, Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God." Paul believed the Lord.

2. Paul knew the Lord's will was to deliver him to Rome. Paul knew the Lord was sovereign to deliver him by whatever means the Lord chose.

- Twice the angel of the Lord opened the prison for Peter (Acts 5: 18-20; 12: 7)
- At Philippi the Lord caused a great earthquake so that the doors and his bands were loosed (Acts 16: 26.)
- But this time, the Lord used a young man, Paul's nephew (**Acts 23: 16-17.**)

3. Paul recognized the Lord's means and Paul used wisdom.

- Paul did not tell the centurion this news--the centurion might have went to Paul's enemies or not have told the chief captain
- Paul asked the centurion to carry the boy to the chief captain so his nephew could tell the chief captain face-to-face.
- The centurion did so--Paul's conduct was so, that he had the respect of the centurion so that he answered when Paul called on him and he took the lad to the chief captain like Paul asked.

Application: The usual pattern throughout scripture is that God does his spiritual work with disproportionately small and weak instruments.

- Naaman regarded the Jordan as beneath him
- The Jews regarded the second temple as nothing
- Christ Jesus was despised and rejected of men
- Paul did not despise the day of small things.

Often God sends us his word by some means such as this young lad. But far too often we are waiting on some big thing and we miss the word he has been speaking to us all along.

Note: All of this was no less the work of God's sovereign mercy even though the Lord brought it about by human means.

2 Chronicles 16: 9: For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of *them* whose heart *is* perfect toward him.

Isaiah 45:7: I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.

Amos 3:6: Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?

CONCLUSION:

At all times rest in our sovereign God to deliver you. And at all times use the means God has provided. Read his word. Assemble with the saints to hear his gospel preached. Mediate upon his promises to deliver you. Rejoice in the Lord. Ask God for grace to wait on him. AND Ask God for grace to recognize it when God sends his word to you.

In all this, God used Rome to protect and deliver Paul:

Acts 23: 23: 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, 200 hundred spear men.

Acts 23: 24: And beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.

William Cowper wrote:

"GOD MOVES IN A MYSTERIOUS WAY,
HIS WONDERS TO PERFORM;
HE PLANTS HIS FOOTSTEPS IN THE SEA,
AND RIDES UPON THE STORM.
DEEP IN UNFATHOMABLE MINES
OF NEVER-FAILING SKILL,
HE TREASURES UP HIS BRIGHT DESIGNS,
AND WORKS HIS SOVEREIGN WILL.
YE FEARFUL SAINTS, FRESH COURAGE TAKE,
THE CLOUDS YE SO MUCH DREAD
ARE BIG WITH MERCY, AND SHALL BREAK
IN BLESSINGS ON YOUR HEAD.
JUDGE NOT THE LORD BY FEEBLE SENSE,
BUT TRUST HIM FOR HIS GRACE;
BEHIND A FROWNING PROVIDENCE
HE HIDES A SMILING FACE.
HIS PURPOSES WILL RIPEN FAST,
UNFOLDING EVERY HOUR;
THE BUD MAY HAVE A BITTER TASTE,
BUT SWEET WILL BE THE FLOWER.
BLIND UNBELIEF IS SURE TO ERR,
AND SCAN HIS WORK IN VAIN:
' GOD IS HIS OWN INTERPRETER,
AND HE WILL MAKE IT PLAIN.

Amen!