

Gospel Triumph: Take Courage, God Will Get You There – Acts 22:30-23:35

I watched a video this week made from a camera mounted on the International Space Station as it orbits the earth. Here's a screenshot from the video. The Space Station flies 250 miles above the earth and orbits once every 93 minutes. In the video you could see the clusters of lights of various cities, and you could see flashes of light popping up repeatedly which were lightning flashes.

Now, those lightning flashes experienced on earth would be jolting and chaotic and if you were on the ground in those cities at night there may be traffic, noise, crime, and hustle and bustle. But from the height of the space station the video is calming, serene, and beautiful.

Our lives often feel chaotic and certainly the world around us feels out of control at certain moments. Our world is so connected that we hear about things happening all the time that are difficult or evil. We hear about problems and issues, and it can seem like everything is spinning at a speed we can't manage.

Sometimes it's good to see the world from the perspective of the International Space Station. It's good to see the whole instead of just feeling the chaos of the moment. It's good to remember God's viewpoint. One of the key messages of the Bible is that all human history is a story that is unfolding according to God's sovereign guidance and plan. You and I fit within that story, and our lives are also under God's providential direction. Nothing falls outside of His purposes and plans, regardless of how chaotic things may feel.

Everything in Paul's life has been chaotic and out of control since he arrived in Jerusalem in Acts 21. He was seized by an angry mob of Jews in the temple, saved by the Roman Tribune only to ask to go back out and defend himself to the crowd. The crowd responded to his speech by working themselves into a frenzy and then Paul was grabbed by Roman soldiers and brought back into the barracks to have the reason for the riot beaten out of him by whips. Paul's Roman citizenship keeps him from being flogged but he's still under arrest by the Romans and unable to move about freely. This brings us to Acts 22:29-30.

We are going to study Acts 23 today and the craziness continues and only increases, however, all of it moves along by the sovereign hand of God for His purposes to be accomplished. Look at Acts 23:11, which is the key verse in this passage to help us understand Luke's point. God says that Paul "must" testify in Rome. God's story moves forward through chaos and craziness and Luke, the author, helps us to see God's perspective and control. This space station view of God's providence is meant to build trust in us. So here's what we will see today. **3 Qualities that Build Trust in God's Guidance Despite Life's Uncertainties.**

1. Commitment to God's Ways (vv. 1-10)

The Roman Tribune still wants to figure out why the Jews hate Paul so much, and so he brings him before the council of the Sanhedrin. Paul willingly speaks. Look at verse 1. Paul's point here is not that he's never sinned or done anything wrong. He's not even really talking about his commitment to keeping the law. He's basically saying, 'I have done what God called me to do'. He's reaffirming what he said the day before on the steps before the crowd that had almost killed him. Paul is saying that God called him to take the gospel to the Gentiles, and he's been faithful to God's call.

Well, the high priest doesn't like this. Look at verse 2. Paul responds immediately in verse 3. Jesus, of course, called the Pharisees whitewashed tombs in Matthew 23 and Paul echoes that here because of the hypocrisy. The high priest and the members of the Sanhedrin are supposed to be those most committed to upholding the law of Moses. And yet, he orders Paul to be punished before he can even finish speaking and certainly before he can be tried. They ignore Paul's accusation and accuse him of doing wrong. Look at verse 4. Despite their hypocrisy and violation of the law notice how Paul responds in verse 5.

Paul had been gone from Jerusalem for several years and so didn't recognize the high priest. Despite the sinfulness of the priest's actions, Paul doesn't want to speak evil of the office of high priest. This shows that Paul is more committed to reverence for God's commands and obedience to them than even those in the Sanhedrin.

At this point Paul's defense takes a turn. Look at verses 6-8. Paul doesn't do this to purposefully cause dissension. He knows that these two factions disagree as it states in verse 8. Look what happens in verses 9-10. Paul's goal here is to get the conversation back to the main thing. And at the end of the day, the most important issue is whether Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Everything else falls into place if that is true and so Paul goes there.

Now, our first quality is Confidence in God's Ways, and I think you see this quite clearly in Paul here. He is committed to obedience to God's law in how he responds to the high priest, and he intentionally brings the issue of the resurrection up. Paul can't help but live out his faith and trust in God's Word even in a very challenging circumstance. Living out God's Word in faith builds our confidence in God's guidance in our lives. We obey and watch Him work.

Now, this is the ideal, but if we are honest, we all struggle with commitment to God's Word and a willingness to live it out, especially in challenging moments. And this is why we need this second quality to be grown in us by grace.

2. Courage to Face God's Future (v. 11)

Again, this is the heart of this passage and the key idea. Look at verse 11. At key moments in the story of Acts God shows up to speak directly to Paul. Of course, we don't have this option now, but we do have God's complete Word to us containing all we need for life and godliness. God is speaking to you this morning through this Word to Paul. God's not telling you that you will testify in Rome, but He is confirming His providence and guidance in your life, whatever He has for you. And He wants to grow you in courage as you face the future.

What is courage? Many years ago courage was called fortitude and was considered a virtue. Here's how one author defines it: *"Fortitude can be defined in general as firmness of mind, and more specifically firmness in the face of threat or danger. It is the quality of character that enables a person not to be diverted by difficulty or danger from carrying out an action or plan for achieving some good purpose."* – Daniel Westberg

Courage comes as we look into an unknown future and yet see the perspective of the space station. God's viewpoint pulls us out of the chaos and courage increases the more we are shaped by connection to God.

Courage is a gift of grace given to us because we are united to Jesus Christ. He is with us, and He is for us. Courage builds in us as we cultivate our union with Christ and the reality of His presence in us. Turn to God's Word to find courage and fortitude. God is in control. He's guiding and He is with you. Even when evil people enter your life.

3. Certainty in God's Sovereignty (vv. 12-35)

We love to think of God as sovereign when good things happen and life generally goes our way. But God even oversees the difficult and evil actions of men. God does not cause men to sin, but sinful men do fit within his plan. To really find courage to face the future, we have to grapple with the scope of God's sovereignty. God told Paul he would get to Rome and God would ensure he got there. It wouldn't always be easy, but Paul would always be within God's plan, even when things got dicey. Look at verses 12-15.

This was a time of great political turmoil in Israel and people were willing to get violent to get what they wanted. These 40 Jews conspire with the Sanhedrin to murder Paul. Another violation of the law! But they don't care and they are willing to exert the pressure of this oath on the Sanhedrin to get this done. It seems to be an airtight plan. Ask for Paul to appear before the Sanhedrin and take him out while he's being moved from the Roman barracks to the Sanhedrin. The chances are high that Paul would have been moved by a small number of Roman soldiers and so 40 armed men with the element of surprise on their side could surely overwhelm the guards.

But God has other plans and He's going to use this to alter Paul's location and the next few years of Paul's life. Look at verses 16-22. What's amazing here is how much the story telling of Luke, the author of Acts, slows down. We've seen verses like this in Acts. Acts 19:10. One verse, two years! Here we get tons of details and conversations and multiple chapters covering just a couple of days in the life of

Paul. Why? Luke slows down to show God's oversight of all of the details. God will move Paul to Rome and here's how He will do it. Paul's nephew will somehow hear of this plot and report it. The Tribune will believe him and take every precaution against this happening. Look at verses 23-30.

470 Roman soldiers to escort Paul away from Jerusalem! No doubt this Tribune is probably acting a little out of guilt here because he almost beat a Roman citizen. But he also knows that a murder in the streets of Jerusalem that will probably involve a clash with Roman soldiers will no doubt stir up tons of trouble. He's acting to protect his own skin and to keep the peace and the best way to do that is to move Paul away from Jerusalem. Imagine that. It's almost like someone is playing chess with all of these pieces and arranging the board for a greater purpose. Look at verses 31-35.

So, Paul ends up in Caesarea, and will testify to the governor and ultimately spend two years there before heading off to Rome. And all of this fits within God's sovereign plan.

My encouragement to you today is that God's sovereignty is always acted out in accordance with God's love and grace to you. He's a God who is powerful and can be trusted because of His love. Let this story in Paul's life help you to lift your gaze above the chaos of the world and to God's serene and sovereign plan.

I'd like to leave you with a quote on God's providence for your benefit and with the ultimate goal of being with Him in mind that comes from Samuel Rutherford.

"What is his purpose herein, he knoweth best who hath taken your soul in tutoring. Your faith may be boldly charitable of Christ, that however matters go, the worst shall be a tired traveller, and a joyful and sweet welcome home: the back of your winter night is broken. Look to the east - the day sky is breaking; think not that Christ loseth time or lingereth unsuitably." - Samuel Rutherford

Sermon Reflection Questions – 10/19/25

- What area of life feels most chaotic to you currently?
- How do verses 1-10 demonstrate Paul's commitment to God's ways?
- How does living out a commitment to God's ways build our trust in God's sovereign guidance over our lives?
- Can you give an example of a time when you stayed faithful to God's ways and then were able to see God providentially guide and protect you?
- Why do you think God speaks directly to Paul here in 23:11?
- How would you define courage?
- How does a belief in God's sovereign hand give us courage?
- Why do you think we only get 1 verse covering two years of ministry in Asia (19:10) and multiple chapters detailing Paul's trials in Jerusalem?
- Can you think of other instances in Scripture where the sinful actions of men fit within God's sovereign plan?

- Why is it so important that we think of God as sovereign over everything and not only sovereign over some things?
- Is there a part of this Samuel Rutherford quote that is most encouraging and helpful to you? *"What is his purpose herein, he knoweth best who hath taken your soul in tutoring. Your faith may be boldly charitable of Christ, that however matters go, the worst shall be a tired traveller, and a joyful and sweet welcome home: the back of your winter night is broken. Look to the east - the day sky is breaking; think not that Christ loseth time or lingereth unsuitably."* - Samuel Rutherford