

# Safety in Sovereignty

## Introduction

If you have your Bibles...

### Acts 23:12-35

12 When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. 13 There were more than forty who made this conspiracy. 14 They went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul. 15 Now therefore you, along with the council, give notice to the tribune to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case more exactly. And we are ready to kill him before he comes near."

16 Now the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, so he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. 17 Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the tribune, for he has something to tell him." 18 So he took him and brought him to the tribune and said, "Paul the prisoner called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, as he has something to say to you." 19 The tribune took him by the hand, and going aside asked him privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?" 20 And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him. 21 But do not be persuaded by them, for more than forty of their men are lying in ambush for him, who have bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now they are ready, waiting for your consent." 22 So the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, "Tell no one that you have informed me of these things."

23 Then he called two of the centurions and said, "Get ready two hundred soldiers, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night. 24 Also provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix the governor." 25 And he wrote a letter to this effect:

26 "Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency the governor Felix, greetings. 27 This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen. 28 And desiring to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their council. 29 I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment. 30 And when it was disclosed to me that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, ordering his accusers also to state before you what they have against him."

31 So the soldiers, according to their instructions, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. 32 And on the next day they returned to the barracks, letting the horsemen go on with him. 33 When they had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they presented Paul also before him. 34 On reading the letter, he asked what province he was from. And when he learned that he was from Cilicia, 35 he said, "I will give you a hearing when your accusers arrive." And he commanded him to be guarded in Herod's praetorium.

## Context/Story

Paul is in Jerusalem, and his preaching of the gospel has stirred up intense opposition. In Acts 22, he was nearly torn apart by a mob, but Roman soldiers rescued him. Now, he's in custody,

awaiting trial. The Jewish leaders are furious because Paul's message threatens their traditions and authority.

Yet, in Acts 23:11, just before our passage, the Lord Jesus appears to Paul and says, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome." God has a plan for Paul, but the path to Rome is steeped with danger.

### **God Hates the Zeal Of Religion (Vs 12-15)**

- I think it is safe to say that there is no one in this room who is as despised, as Hated, as was the apostle Paul. 40 men Over forty Jewish men form a conspiracy, binding themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they've killed Paul. Show me, Where in the old testament scriptures does it say that is okay?
  - Their oath is, of course, to God. They clearly must believe that God wants Paul dead. They make an oath to God to murder one of their fellow jews who has not been given a trial or found guilty. Clearly against the Old Testament Law. Highly hypocritical. "He is against the Law, so we will violate the law and murder him!" Mark this. When people are gripped by personal animosity and irrational rage, Consistency is the first thing to go.
- The chief priests and elders agree to deceive the Roman tribune by requesting Paul's transfer, a deceptive, wicked, and evil plan to give an opportunity for an ambush.
  - They're convinced they're serving God, but their actions are driven by pride, anger, and self-righteousness. This is the zeal of religion—a passionate commitment to a cause that promotes the self and undermines God. They're so sure they're right that they're willing to kill to protect their traditions.
    - John 16:2-3 - They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. 3 And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me.
    - This is the crux of every false religion. Men, claiming to know the will of God, and the mind of God. Men lying and deceiving others to get people to follow their manmade plans and desires about the world.
      - Joseph Smith - Polygamy, Becoming like God.
      - Islam - A religion that belittles women, and claims that upon a man's death, they will have 72 virgins in heaven,
      - Ron Hubbard the founder of Scientology - remarked before creating Scientology that starting a religion was a fantastic way to make money.
        - And make money he did! To the tune of 200 million.
    - If you can get people to believe that your desires in life are God's desires. You stand to gain an incredible amount! And that is exactly what the Judaism of Jesus day was like. What was once a genuine pursuit of God, had become an empty shell propped up by tradition and pursuit of status and power.
      - Example (Father - "I am the law") The Pharisees had such high opinions of themselves that they believed that when they spoke, it was as if God was speaking.

- Passion without God's truth is a fire that destroys.
  - Sometimes we can be so sure we're right that we miss God's truth.
    - For some of you, it is a grudge you can't let go of
    - For some of you, it is a tradition or resistance to change.
    - For some of you, it is a plan you're pursuing without seeking God's will.
      - Our passion and zeal can blind us to God's purposes.

### **God Sees the Schemes of the Wicked (Vs 16-22)**

- Paul's nephew, a young man whose name we don't even know, overhears the plot. This is likely a young boy around 13 years old. (because it says that the tribune took the boy by the hand to speak to him.
  - He courageously goes to the barracks, informs Paul, and is brought to the Roman tribune. The tribune listens carefully and acts decisively, instructing the young man to keep quiet.
    - If not for this young boy, the Apostle Paul would have likely died that night. But by God's providence, the scheme is discovered and brought to the attention of the Romans.
      - The Jew's oaths crumble before the providence of God, I wonder if they kept that oath once Paul was out of their reach.
        - Psalm 33:10-11 - The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. 11 The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.
        - A.W. Tozer wrote, "God's omniscience is our comfort. He knows the plans of the wicked and turns them to His glory."
  - No plot escapes the eyes of the God who sees all. God's eyes pierce the shadows of every scheme. He is never caught off guard, He is never surprised. There is no blinding the omniscient God. Every secret, every plot, every conspiracy, every back room deal, every sinful act, we cannot escape the presence of God.
    - Psalm 139:7-12 - Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? 8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! 9 If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, 10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," 12 even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.
  - God's plans are not always safe.
    - We have an obsession with safety. We idolize comfort and security—safe spaces, risk-free decisions, and avoiding conflict at all costs. We bubble wrap our kids, we buy the safest vehicles, we purchase 15 different kinds of insurance, we create financial buffers to protect us in case something happens.
      - But we have to realize that following Jesus isn't safe. It's costly. Paul faced death threats, yet he trusted God's plan. If we actually start doing what God commanded us to do we will face opposition. Real Christianity faces real opposition. Don't cower back from sharing Jesus with those

around you. Don't hedge your words when it comes to God's truth. Speak boldly, and clearly the message of Jesus, and let God sort out the consequences. God sees the opposition you face, and He promises to be with you. Your safety cannot be found in trying to control everything. Your safety can only be found when you realize that you are in the hands of a sovereign God.

### **God Uses Unlikely Instruments (Vs 23-35)**

- The tribune, Claudius Lysias, organizes an impressive escort—200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen—to transport Paul safely to Governor Felix in Caesarea.
  - He dispatches 470 men to take Paul 60 miles to Caesarea where Felix resided. It's an entire military convoy to protect one man!
  - The tribune writes a letter explaining Paul's situation, emphasizing his Roman citizenship and innocence. Paul is delivered safely, and Felix agrees to hear his case when his accusers arrive.
- Paul will not be free again for the rest of the book of Acts.
  - Even though Paul's freedom was over, his ministry was not. As he languished in the prison at the barracks. He had to wonder whether his ministry was over and whether there would be any fruit from his labors. Do you ever feel like that?
    - Sometimes we wonder if we are too broken, too Sinful, to be Used by God
    - Sometimes we wonder if we are too young to be Used by God
    - Sometimes we wonder if we are too old to be Used by God
    - God was not done with Paul and He is not Done with you..
      - Consider Samson - victory after victory, success after success. Until eventually He was humbled by his own pride and relationship with a woman. They bound him, and gouged out his eyes and paraded him through the temple of Dagon. But though Samson's eyes had been gouged out, his mission wasn't over yet.
        - As long as there is breath in your lungs, you are to offer yourself as a living sacrifice to God. Your body, your mind, your decisions, your choices, your bank account, it all belongs to God for His will.
          - Who knows when God is finished with you? Who knows how much impact your life and testimony will have?
  - Apply
    - God's sovereignty doesn't depend on perfect people; He uses whoever and whatever He chooses to accomplish His will.
      - God Used a Donkey, He used a Ox goad, Tent Peg, Jawbone,
        - There is no power in the universe that can stop him from fulfilling his totally good plans for you.
          - John Piper - "God is always doing 10,000 things in your life, and you may be aware of three of them."

- God's infinite wisdom always sees a way to bring the greatest good out of the most painful and complex situations.
- Not only may you only see a tiny fraction of what God is doing in your life; the part you do see may make no sense to you.
  - You may find yourself in prison, but God may be advancing the gospel among the guards like he did with Peter.
  - You may find yourself with a painful ailment, but God may be making the power of Christ more beautiful in your weakness. Just like he did with Paul
  - You may find yourself with a dead brother that Jesus could have healed, but God may be preparing to show his glory. Just like he did with Mary and Martha.
  - You may find yourself sold into slavery, accused falsely of abuse, and forgotten in a prison cell, but God may be preparing to set you in a position of Authority. Just like Joseph.
  - You may walk through famine, be driven from your homeland, lose husband and sons, and be left desolate, and God may be making you an ancestor of a King. Just like Ruth.
  - You may not be able to sleep, depressed and alone. Just like Elijah, and Jeremiah, and Job, and David, and Esther, and Jesus. But God may be preparing to shame your enemies, and rescue your people.
  - You may be a sexually pure single person and yet accused of immorality, and God may be preparing you to bless the world in ways no one can even imagine. Just like Mary.
  - You may live in all purity and humility and truth only to end up rejected and killed, but through you, God may be showing the world a testimony of His Son Jesus Christ Who gave it all up, in a display of unfathomable love.
- God's plan doesn't need your strength, just your surrender.
  - For the past few weeks, I have had a question stirring in my mind. "What percentage of Christians are completely and totally sold out for Jesus?" "how many are actually surrendering their lives to Jesus?" "what percentage of Christians here in this room?" Will you surrender your life to God?
    - I believe that right now, God is calling out to his People, just like he does in every Generation. The call is the same as what the prophet Isaiah heard.
      - Isaiah 6:8 - And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me."

### **God's Sovereign Purpose (Conclusion)**

- Paul's life was spared because God had a purpose for him—to testify about Jesus in Rome. God has a purpose for you as well. When God's purpose for you is complete, he will take you home. But until He does, you are not finished. Be looking for what he has for you to do.
- Let's finish with the gospel. We have seen God's sovereign hand overcome an evil plot, but I believe that the most beautiful example of this is displayed on the cross. The world plotted against Jesus, thinking they had won when He was crucified. Yet, God turned

their scheme into the greatest victory in history. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, God defeated sin, death, and Satan, offering salvation to all who believe. If you trust in Christ, His sovereign hand is guiding your life, just as it guided Paul.

- Examine your heart for misdirected zeal and align it with God's will.
- Trust God's sovereignty when you face opposition for your faith.
  - You must know that God is sovereign over every circumstance. No plot, no opposition, no danger can thwart His plans. Your safety is in His sovereignty, not in your control or the world's approval.
- Step out as God's instrument, even if you feel unqualified.

### **Pray/Invitation**

**Father, we thank You for Your sovereign hand that protects, provides, and prevails. Forgive us for the times we've trusted our plans over Yours. Strengthen us to face opposition with courage and to serve as Your instruments.**