

Sermon Notes

WORSHIP SERVICE -

11.30.2025

PART 43 - DESTINATION DECREED

I. INTRODUCTION

- Have you ever done what you thought was the right thing, obeying what God showed you to do, and yet everything seemed to fall apart?
- When we step into Acts 21–26, we watch that happen to the apostle Paul.
- What we read looks, humanly speaking, like a tragedy. It appears that everything has gone wrong.
- And maybe you feel something like that today.
- You feel stuck in a job you despise, bound by sickness that won't leave, or trapped in a situation where justice seems delayed.
- However, as we follow Paul in chains, we come to the realization that he is not a victim.
- He is exactly where God wants him to be.
- He is not a prisoner of Rome; he is a prisoner of Christ.
- What looks like chaos is actually the steady, sovereign hand of God leading his servant exactly where Christ said he would go, to the destination he has decreed—Rome.
- And here's why this matters to us. If God can steer the chaos of riots, the corruption of governors, and the chains of Rome to accomplish his will through Paul, He is certainly sovereign over the chaos in your life today.
- Let us see how the gospel is unstoppable even when the preacher is shackled.

Acts 21:1-14

And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. 2 And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. 3 When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo. 4 And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. 5 When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed 6 and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home.

7 When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day. 8 On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the

evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. 9 He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. 10 While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 11 And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" 12 When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." 14 And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."

II. THE COURAGE OF CONVICTION

- Paul was on a mission to arrive in Jerusalem before Pentecost.
 - He said he was "constrained by the Spirit." He didn't know what would happen but he was to anticipate imprisonment and affliction. (20:22-23)
 - In Tyre, the disciples seemed to have a different message from the Spirit.
 - "...through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem."
 - It seems like the Spirit has contradictory messages. Was Paul in disobedience, going to Jerusalem, when the Spirit was showing other believers what would happen to him if he went?
 - Then it happened again when he stayed at the house of Philip, the evangelist.
 - A Judean prophet named Agabus arrives.
 - And he prophetically acts out what is going to happen to Paul at the hands of the Jews in Jerusalem.
 - Again, the disciples urged Paul not to go up to Jerusalem.
 - In fact, Luke writes, "we and the people there urged him not to go..."
- Even Paul's travel companions didn't think it wise for him to go.
- These seem to contradict what Paul said the Spirit was showing him.
 - But the bottom line is that the prophecy was divinely revealed by the Spirit.
 - However, the interpretation of the prophecy was humanly deduced.
 - A true prophecy of the Spirit is infallible while the human interpretation is not.
 - The believers assumed the meaning of the prophecy and their love and concern for Paul influenced the counsel they gave him.
- We are prone to the same mistake.
 - We often allow fear, comfort, or the concern of good friends to dissuade us from costly obedience.
 - This is why we lean heavily into the sufficiency of Scripture, wise counsel, and prayer to lead and guide us today.
- What we see from Paul is his courage born of conviction.
 - He is going to obey the Spirit no matter what it might lead him into.
 - He was going into the crucible of affliction but that wasn't a detour from his mission, it was part of his mission.
 - He said to the Ephesian elders that he does not count his life as of any value or precious to him, he is going to finish his course and the ministry entrusted to him.
 - And he reflects that same perseverance and courage here.
 - He says to them, *"...I am ready not only to be put in chains but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."*
 - That's not reckless bravado. It is a conviction forged by Christ's call and the Spirit's leading.

- He knew the Spirit was leading him into hardship, not away from it.
- Paul could not be persuaded so they said, “*Let the will of the Lord be done.*”
- That’s the right attitude and heart posture. They expressed their concerns and then rested the matter in God’s sovereign hands. And we need to learn how to do the same.
- The Christian life includes hardship, sacrifice and loss.
- Obedience will cost us.
- Don’t ever confuse a life of ease as a sign of blessing or God’s approval.
- Faithfulness is blessing and obedience is blessing.
- The safest place is not where danger is absent but where Christ is obeyed.
- Just because your path is hard does not mean it is outside of God’s will.

III. THE PACE OF PROVIDENCE

- From this point forward, everything looks like it collapses but it is all actually falling into place.
- God’s decree stands: Paul must testify in Rome and nothing will hinder that plan.

IN JERUSALEM

- Paul arrived in Jerusalem and received a warm welcome from the brothers.
- James and the elders of the Jerusalem church greeted him and James proposed that Paul undertake a vow and present himself in the temple as a gesture of unity with the believing Jews who thought Paul was teaching other Jews to abandon Jewish customs. And Paul agreed to do that and he went to the temple.
- Paul is not turning his back on the gospel of grace alone but trying to remove any stumbling block of offense.

THE JEWS RIOT AND SEIZE PAUL

- The result was a riot. Some Jews from Asia were infuriated having seen Paul in the temple.
- They stirred up the whole crowd into a violent frenzy and they seized Paul.
- They falsely accused him of bringing a Gentile with him into the temple and defiling it.
- They dragged Paul out and beat Paul in an attempt to kill him and Roman soldiers rescued him by placing him under arrest.
- The Roman tribune tried to make sense of what was happening, but like the riot in Ephesus, the city was in confusion.
- Paul asked the tribune to allow him to speak to the people. And he gives him permission.
- Paul addressed the crowd in Hebrew which caused them to listen to him.
- Paul recounts his testimony and relates his conversion experience.
- And when he said to them that the Lord told him that he is sending him far away to the Gentiles, the crowd gets stirred up again.
- Paul in essence had said that the grace and goodness of God has extended to the Gentiles.

- The tribune doesn't know what to do. He ordered Paul back to the barracks to be examined by flogging.
- And as they were preparing him to be flogged, Paul played his ace card.
- *"Is it lawful for you to flog a Roman citizen who has not been condemned?"*
- A citizen of Rome had certain rights and they were about to violate his rights with this illegal torture of a Roman citizen.
- In God's providence, Paul, though a Jew, was born in the free city of Tarsus and he was a Roman citizen by birth.
- Paul trusted the Spirit's leading and God's will and would endure any suffering for the sake of Christ.
- But he did not pursue unnecessary suffering.
- Paul used his citizenship to his advantage and is providentially protected by Roman law.

BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

- The next day Paul is brought before the Sanhedrin
- The tribune wants to know why the Jews want him dead.
- What Paul does is shrewd and wise.
- Acts 23:6 Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial."
- Because the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, Paul knew this would divide the council.
- Things get so heated and violent again, that the tribune fears for Paul's life and has him taken back to the barracks.
- This is the second time the Lord used the tribune and his soldiers to providentially protect Paul from the violent mob.

A COMFORTING WORD AND COMMAND

- Paul was in great physical pain. He is worn out mentally and emotionally, trying to defend himself and facing false accusations.
- He is discouraged. He is anxious and uncertain about what is to come.
- But in this moment of need, at a time of discouragement and loneliness, when things looked the darkest and hope was fading, Luke records the following.
- Acts 23:11 The following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome."
- The Lord stood by Paul. That implies nearness and intimacy.
- Jesus comes by his side. Paul's days aren't numbered, there is more to do.
- He settled Paul by explaining the will of God.
- Paul needed comfort, but he also needed more courage.
- The kind of courage only God can supply.
- We also need that courage to stand in the midst of a crooked and corrupt world, to proclaim and declare the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Everything that has happened and will happen from this point forward has been determined by God.
- He must testify about Christ also in Rome.
- The rest of the narrative of Acts will demonstrate God's faithfulness in carrying Paul through various trials to his final destination.
- The words would have lifted Paul's Spirit and infused him with courage and confidence, no matter what happens to him, he will get to Rome.

- What couldn't we face or endure if we knew the Lord was standing by us?
- Because God providentially ordained for Paul to testify to Christ in Rome, Paul is immortal until his work is done!

THE ASSASSINATION PLOT

- Paul survived an attempted assassination plot by more than forty Jews who take an oath to not eat or drink until they have killed Paul.
- God exposes their plan through Paul's nephew, and under heavy guard, the tribune has Paul escorted to Caesarea, exactly where God wants him.

BEFORE FELIX AND FESTUS

- Paul is handed over to Felix, the governor of Judea, who assures Paul that he will get a fair trial. He has him protected in the Governor's palace.
- There is another failed attempt by the Jews to bring false charges against Paul.
- Paul's defense is brilliant. He dismantled the false accusations. The burden of proof was on them and they failed.
- Luke notes that Felix has good knowledge of Christianity. Felix knows the accusations are baseless and the Jews have nothing on Paul.
- From here on out, Paul's case becomes a matter of the Roman judicial process, exactly as God intended.
- He gives orders to keep Paul in protective custody. He is given a measure of freedom and permits his friends to come and attend to his needs.
- While in custody, Felix and his wife Drusilla send for Paul to hear more about the Christian faith. They show some interest in the faith but remain impenitent.
- And Felix ends up calling for Paul periodically for the remainder of his two years in office.
- He leaves Paul in prison for two years hoping for a bribe.
- Why would God allow that?
- Here is an example of the patient march of providence.
- God is never in a hurry.
- Eventually, Festus replaces Felix. Festus wants to do the Jews a favor and move Paul back to Jerusalem, where they could more easily kill him.
- Paul knowing his rights and God's plan to get him to Rome, plays his ace card again, He appeals to Caesar. This ensures he goes to Rome.

BEFORE KING AGRIPPA

- Before Paul leaves for Rome, King Agrippa visits Festus. He wanted to hear from this controversial figure himself.
- Festus arranged the hearing, the king and his sister Bernice were presented with great pomp and Paul was brought before him in chains.
- Consider what God has done.
- The governor, the king, the military tribunes, and the leaders of the city have gathered together to hear this man named Paul.
- They hear a powerful, bold, and glorious presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, just like God ordained.
- Paul's speech was so persuasive that Agrippa, feeling the conviction, said to Paul, "*In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?*"
- Paul's response should be the heart of every Christian.
- Acts 26:29 And Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains."

- Paul was the only one in that hall who was truly free.

CONCLUSION

- We began with a question, what happens when you obey God and everything seems to go wrong.
- From the outside, Paul's story looks like failure.
- But Scripture lets us see what Paul could not see in the moment, every step, every delay, every chain was God's pathway to Rome.
- The very things that looked like they were destroying Paul and his ministry were the very things God ordained to fulfill his purpose for Paul to testify in Rome.
- Some of you today feel like you are in the riot of Acts 21.
- You might be tempted to think that God has lost control or that you made a mistake by obeying him.
- Others of you feel like you're in the Acts 24 season, the long, quiet two years of waiting.
- Don't interpret God's nearness by your comfort or your circumstances.
- Interpret your circumstances by God's promises.
- He is not wasting your waiting and he has certainly not abandoned you in the storm.
- Lastly, this text challenges our definition of safety.
- The safest place is not where danger is absent, but where Christ is obeyed.
- Your life is not a chain of accidents but a series of divine appointments.
- You are not a victim of your circumstances, but a servant of sovereign God.
- So take courage! The Lord stands by you. He will never leave you!
- The Lord stands by you, because you belong to him.
- And the One who has decreed your destination will carry you through every storm that takes you there.

APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?