

Introduction

Saying while in Crusade: "God is still on the throne"

1. It's easy to forget that when things appear to be crumbling around us
2. We are facing unprecedented times here in the U.S. and other parts of the Western world, as our faith is coming under attack, as we appear to be losing some of our rights, as we face ever increasing persecution
3. But, God is still on the throne and everything is still going according to His plan
4. We see that in our passage today:
 - a. The Mob's Plot
 - b. God's Providence
 - c. God's Plan

A. The Mob's Plot (READ 23:12-15)

1. A Jewish mob hatches a plot to kill Paul (12-13):
 - a. The mob is likely some of the same Jews who attacked Paul, dragged him out of the synagogue, and sought to kill him in Acts 21
 - b. It was a sizeable group—"at least 40"
 - c. They had bound themselves together with an oath to not eat or drink until they killed Paul—in other words, they went on a hunger strike:
 - 1) When we think of an oath what comes to mind is a promise
 - 2) But here their oath is more akin to placing oneself under a divine curse if they failed in their mission
 - 3) A more literal translation of v. 14 is "**we have cursed ourselves with a curse not to taste anything until we have killed Paul**"
 - 4) Such oaths were common, but pretty much meaningless because Jewish Law allowed one to escape the consequences if they couldn't fulfill it
 - 5) In the case of this mob, it was simply a means of manipulation

We saw the same thing back in mid-January with the college student hunger strike in front of the U.S. Capital—goal was to force the Senate to pass the Freedom to Vote act which is basically a federal takeover of state election laws. After just a few days they were complaining about being hungry, some dropped out, by the sixth day they got impatient, broke through the police line, stormed the capital steps, and were arrested. One student complained: "Unfortunately, the hunger strike was no longer being cared about by our senators...Our futures and lives are hanging in the balance of this bill getting passed, and so we're out here escalating even further."

2. The mob enlists not just their Jewish leaders in their plot, but the Sanhedrin as well (14-15):
 - a. They approach the "**chief priests and elders**" with their plot (14)
 - b. They order them, along with the Sanhedrin (Council), to notify the Roman commander to bring Paul down to another hearing:
 - 1) It was all a ruse under the guise of a "**more thorough investigation**" (15):

- 2) Their plan was to ambush and kill Paul as he is transported from the barracks to the hearing
 - 3) This wasn't some mere request from the mob; it was an order: **"you...notify"** is an aorist imperative
3. Think about all that is wrong about this:
- a. First and foremost, this mob of Jews was operating under the pretense of defending Moses, the Law, the Temple, and even the Jewish people:
 - 1) But, they were ignoring two of the Big Ten commandments themselves: **"You shall not bear false witness"** and **"You shall not murder"**
 - 2) How ironic and hypocritical was that?
 - b. Second, what does this say about Israel's leaders?
 - 1) The chief priests and elders were supposed to be the moral and religious leaders of Israel
 - 2) The Sanhedrin was essentially the Supreme Court of Israel, with the High Priest serving as the chief justice
 - 3) These leaders were the very ones who were supposed to shepherd Israel, teach and uphold the Law, and yet here they are following the mob like sheep (remember, the mob dictated to them what they were to do)
 - 4) You know, I find it interesting that it was Israel's leaders who led the assault on Jesus and convinced the people to turn on him; but here it's the other way around with the mob dictating to their leaders (like the tail wagging the dog)—do you think maybe the mob learned what kind of leaders they had by what they did to Jesus?
4. Takeaway: we see this same mob mentality and corrupt leadership happening today:
- a. We have these mobs who claim they are fighting against bigotry, hate, systemic racism, violence, and oppression, etc. yet they are guilty of doing and promoting all the things they claim to be fighting against!
 - b. We also have government officials who are supposed to uphold the law, protect the innocent, punish the guilty, promote peace, but we seem to be seeing more and more corruption—officials who refuse to uphold our laws, who punish the innocent and protect the guilty, who actually practice and promote bigotry, hate, racism, etc.

Biden Admin: refusing to uphold immigration laws and even secretly transporting illegal immigrants under the cover of darkness into unsuspecting cities; encouraging the use of race in determining who gets Covid treatment or who sits on the Supreme Court; using the CDC to enact an eviction moratorium; using OSHA to force mandatory vaccinations—regarding these last two, Biden and his administration are on the record stating that they knew they "wouldn't pass Constitutional muster" but that they could use the time it would take to litigate them to their advantage

- c. We are seeing the same thing when it comes to the erosion of our religious liberty and rights as more and more policies and laws are enacted here at home and abroad to prevent Christians from not only preaching and teaching Biblical truth, but simply living it out in our lives, our businesses, and our church ministries

Breakfast with Pastor Jim: after watching news for three hours, “if even one tenth of what we are seeing is true, the Church is in for a rude awakening” and we need to be prepared (paraphrase)

B. God’s Providence (23:16-22)

1. The mob may have made their plot, but it ran head-on into God’s providence—Divine providence refers to God’s governance over all things as He directs them according to His purpose and plan
2. Paul’s nephew learned of the mob’s plot (READ 23:16):
 - a. This is the first and only mention in the Bible of any of Paul’s family or relatives
 - b. The word for “**son**” indicates a young man generally in the late teens or early twenties
 - c. Luke doesn’t tell us how he learned of the plot, but he does and he takes the news to Paul:
 - 1) Paul is in the military barracks, not prison
 - 2) While the centurion later refers to Paul as “**the prisoner**”, it’s more akin to protective custody because the Commander feared Paul would be torn apart by his angry accusers (see 23:10)
 - 3) It appears, based on the letter the commander sends to Governor Felix, that he was trying to figure out what to do with Paul—he didn’t believe Paul was guilty of anything deserving of death or imprisonment, but he had an angry mob of Jews demanding action
3. Once Paul’s nephew informed him of the plot, he asked the centurion to escort him to the Roman commander (READ 23:17-21):
 - a. There are two things that stand out to me here
 - b. One is the amount of information Paul’s nephew knew about the plot; it’s impressive:
 - 1) He knew they were planning a fake hearing under the guise of learning more from Paul
 - 2) He knew there were more than 40 in the mob
 - 3) He knew they bound themselves with an oath
 - 4) He knew about their plan to ambush Paul and kill him
 - c. The second thing that stands out is the commander’s response—look at the progression we see:
 - 1) During his first interaction with Paul, he assumed he was the troublemaker and had him bound with chains (presumably between two guards; 21:33)
 - 2) After Paul addressed the mob, the commander appeared to still believe Paul was the guilty party and planned to torture a confession out of him (22:24)
 - 3) His attitude began to change when he learned Paul was a Roman citizen (22:29)
 - 4) He even intervened to save Paul’s life when he felt he would be torn apart by the members of the Sanhedrin (23:10):
 - a) It’s possible he intervened simply because Paul was a Roman citizen, but later we learn that he didn’t believe Paul was guilty of any crime
 - b) Compare this commander’s response with the response of Gallio, the Roman governor of Achaia: when the Jews dragged Sosthenes before Gallio’s judgment seat and began to beat him right before Gallio’s very eyes, Gallio refused to do anything. The Bible says he “**was not concerned about any of these things**” (e.g. meaning the Jews complaints against Paul, but also the fate of Sosthenes)

- 5) Now, when it comes to the mob's plot to kill Paul, the commander takes it seriously and gives it his undivided attention:
 - a) He accepts Paul's request to listen to the young man
 - b) He took Paul's nephew "**by the hand**" and even took him aside to talk privately
 - c) He apparently had no doubt of its accuracy, and went to great lengths to protect Paul (READ 23:22-24):
 - He ordered two of his centurions to put together a force of 470 men: 200 hundred soldiers, 200 hundred spearmen, and 70 horsemen—this was a SIZEABLE force
 - They were ordered to bring Paul safely to Governor Felix in Caesarea which was between 50 and 60 miles away
 - He even had them provide "**mounts**" for Paul: These were likely horses which would have been unusual for a prisoner since they generally were expected to walk
 - Mounts is plural which implies at least two—possibly one for the first half of the journey to Antipatris and one for the second half of the trip to Caesarea (the total trip was between 50 and 60 miles)
 - A horse would have also provided Paul with some ability to escape if attacked

4. What we see here in these events is clearly a result of God's providence—His sovereignty and control over all things as He directs them to accomplish His purpose and plan:
 - a. How did Paul's nephew learn about the plot? Was it by chance? Did he overhear the mob talking in a dark alley? We have to think that those who hatched the plan did everything they could to keep it a secret amongst themselves and their leaders, but somehow some young, rather unimportant lad who just happened to be related to Paul not only learned about it but was familiar with the intimate details
 - b. What about the Roman commander? What changed his thinking and disposition toward Paul? He went from assuming Paul's guilt and binding him in chains to putting together a mini-army of almost 500 men to protect Paul from assassination while he sent him to Governor Felix
 - c. Maybe Paul's nephew just happened to be in the right place at the right time, and maybe the Roman commander's change in attitude and behavior toward Paul was simply because he learned Paul was a Roman citizen and he was doing his due diligence to protect him. Maybe.
 - d. But, that completely ignores two simple facts:
 - 1) First, the Lord told Paul that he would bear His name before "**kings**" (Acts 9:15): "**But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;**"
 - Kings here refers to those possessing royal authority: governors, kings, emperors
 - That hasn't happened yet and is still to come as we will see over the next few chapters
 - 2) Second, on the night before all this started, the Lord told Paul that he was going to be his witness in Rome and that hasn't happened yet either (Acts 23:11): "**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."**

5. Takeaway: God’s providence is not always carried out in big, bold supernatural events
 - a. It’s often seen through the small, seemingly coincidental events—like Paul’s nephew learning of the plot or the Roman soldier learning that Paul was a Roman
 - b. Everything is under His control, even when it doesn’t necessarily seem like it (I’m sure Paul wondered how all of this would play out)

C. God’s Plan (23:25-35)

1. God’s plan was for Paul to be His witness in Rome and along the way to witness to government rulers
2. We begin to see this plan set in motion here as the Roman commander, Claudius Lysias, drafts a letter to Governor Felix in preparation to send him to Caesarea (READ 23:25-30):
 - a. Antonius Felix was the Roman governor over Judea and Samaria and in spite of the commander’s favorable greeting (“most excellent governor Felix”), he was NOT an excellent governor:
 - 1) He was a former slave who had been promoted to governor by Emperor Claudius Caesar
 - 2) According to Roman historian Tacitus, he was known to be “cruel, licentious, and base” and he referred to his behavior at “tyrannical”
 - 3) He had been married three different times, stealing his third wife Drusilla from her second husband, King Azizus
 - 4) He was also corrupt, something we see in Acts 24:26: he knew Paul was innocent but still kept him in prison for two years hoping for a bride
 - 5) His rule as governor only lasted seven years and it was filled with all kinds of violence and trouble—so much so that he was recalled to Rome for his cruelty to the Jews and misconduct in office, was tried, convicted, and only escaped the death penalty because his brother Pallus was able to convince Emperor Nero to spare him
 - b. The commander’s letter is both an attempt to protect a Roman citizen, as well as a political move to portray his handling of the situation in the best possible light:
 - 1) Notice that he bends the truth a bit when describing the events: per his story, the Jews arrested Paul, tried to kill him, and he rushed in with the troops to rescue Paul because he learned Paul was a Roman (no mention of putting Paul in chains, preparing to torture him, etc.)
 - 2) We do learn here, however, something I alluded to earlier—he believed Paul was innocent of breaking any Roman laws, and recognized that the real issue was religious in nature
 - 3) So, the question is why send Paul to Felix if he was convinced he was innocent? Possibly to protect Paul by having the issue settled in court, and to relieve himself of any responsibility of mismanaging the situation had the Jews succeeded in their plot to kill Paul
3. The commander succeeds in sending Paul to Felix (READ 23:31-35)
4. Takeaway: God is sovereign and will accomplish His purpose and plan