

Feeble Plans – God’s Deliverance

Psalm 86, 2 Corinthians 1:8-11, Acts 23:12-35

As Pastor Warren has guided us through the book of Acts, we’ve learned over the weeks how God used Paul as His disciple to bring countless people to faith in Christ. We’ve also learned how the enemies of Paul are constantly out to stop him and end his mission work. Today our scripture in Acts chapter 23 gives us another record on how intensely enemies of Paul were going through great lengths not just to temporarily stop Paul and his mission to bring the gospel to others, but these people wanted to permanently stop Paul by ending Paul’s life.

Of course persecution is nothing new to Paul as we’ve read and heard about Paul being jailed, beaten, huge crowds coming after him. Today we hear about how a group of more than 40 Jewish men took an oath not to eat or drink anything until they had killed Paul. To take an oath was a very serious commitment. In these days, people often abstained from eating or drinking certain kinds of food or drink when undertaking an oath. This information tells us how serious this group of 40 Jewish men were as they were committed to not eating or drinking anything “until they had killed Paul.” Additionally, this group of 40 men may have been part of a group known as “dagger men”, which was a group who targeted people for assassination. The assassins would conceal daggers then stab Roman soldiers to kill them in a secretive way. They believed this was a godly way to work to overthrow the government of Rome which was occupying Jerusalem or at least to make it known to Rome they were not welcome here.

So here we have Paul in prison for no crime while he is being literally hunted by at least 40 Jewish men who had pledged to kill him.

Given all the physical persecution and threats Paul faced in his life to this point, I imagine he does not waiver, I imagine he is not scared and of course he knows what to do. In the midst of these feeble plans of the 40 plus men committed to ending Paul's life thus stopping him from delivering the Gospel to all who will hear him, Paul knows he's not done delivering the gospel. He must know Jesus will deliver him somehow from this conundrum.

I imagine Paul prayed a lot more than the Bible tells us. In the midst of all the hardship Paul faced in his life, I am certain prayers to God throughout each day not only sustained him and guided him, but also drew him close to Christ.

As we heard in Psalm 86 written by King David in the Old Testament. Remember before Paul's conversion to becoming a believer in Christ, he was a very faithful Jewish man, a Pharisee held in high regard in the eyes of the leadership of the Jewish leaders known as the Sanhedrin. Paul was also well educated. He must have known the Old Testament well including the Psalms. All of his life, I imagine Paul prayed the Psalms . BUT, after his conversion, he prayed the Psalms in crying out to Jesus knowing He is God through the Psalms.

In Psalm 86, we read "Hear me Lord and answer me" "guard my life for I am faithful to you, save your servant who is faithful to you" "when I am in distress I call to you

because you answer me” “arrogant foes are attacking me...ruthless people are trying to kill me” “save me because I serve you”

This brings me to my first main point – pray the Psalms. If you are struggling with prayer, how to pray or you simply want to pray more in your day but are not sure how, open the book of Psalms. The book of Psalms is filled with earnest cries to our Lord with raw emotion. While they are ancient songs and prayers, they are still relevant today. Start your day by reading one Psalm a day. It is okay if you don’t fully understand it, but I promise you, if you read from your Bible with the desire to draw closer to God, you will.

The Bible doesn’t tell us how often Paul prayed and sought God’s guidance, but I’m sure it was throughout each day of his life.

In the midst of Paul being jailed while a group of Jews hunting Paul to kill him, we know God was at work in this situation, because Paul’s nephew heard about the plot to kill his uncle. Since Paul’s family were citizens of Rome, his nephew had more privileges as a Roman citizen than an ordinary Jew living in Jerusalem. However, Paul’s nephew heard the news and went straight away to inform his uncle. God used Paul’s nephew as a tool in this situation to deliver Paul from this conundrum he was in. It was no accident that this happened. God had to protect Paul because Jesus promised that he would go to Rome to testify of Him. Last week we heard from Acts 23 verse 11 when God stood near Paul and spoke to him “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”

God demonstrates his faithfulness to Paul by providing a “detachment of 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen to provide safety as Paul is taken to Governor Felix.

Paul is even provided his selection of horses to ride so he does not have to walk.

Additionally, he also has a letter explaining the situation from Claudius Lysias a man of authority overseeing Paul's safety in Jerusalem. Claudius has Paul transferred under the cover of night with his own safety entourage of several Roman soldiers. God showed his faithfulness to Paul in a big way.

This brings me to my second point, how do you see God's faithfulness in your own life?

We know the Lord has been faithfully answering prayers of people we lift up here in our congregation. We know God faithfully delivered our congregation to a Christ-centered denomination in the Global Methodist Church. Even though I sometimes have some anxiety or nervousness, I know God is faithfully delivering me to the calling he has for my life in starting seminary in a couple weeks providing me with a part-time job, a new place to live and the ability to finance it along with making connects with new people near my school. God delivers faithfully in big ways and small ways. Perhaps you may see an answer to a prayer in hindsight or realize how God answered a prayer in the way you didn't want but then you realize things worked out for the better.

As Paul was delivered to safety in Caesarea, Governor Felix reads the letter delivered with Paul. And says to Paul in verse 35, "I will hear your case when your accusers get here." This would be Paul's first opportunity to speak to someone at this level of authority, meaning Governor Felix, which starts the fulfillment of the promise made to Paul some 20 years earlier: that he would bear the name of Jesus to kings. In Acts chapter 9 verse 13, God speaks, "This man, meaning Saul/Paul, is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of

Israel.”

From the scripture today, Paul went from being hunted by 40 men with the commitment to kill him to being delivered faithfully by Christ to a governor to testify in the name of Jesus Christ in hopes to bring the Gospel to new believers.

This brings me to my last main point, Jesus will be faithful to you and will always be with you. Use prayer, explore how God is being faithful to you in your life and take heart because Jesus is walking with you all the days of your life when you invite Him to.

Let's pray: Lord Jesus thank you for your servant Paul and the example of how he faithfully lived his life as a testament to you. When we are feeling that life is too hard, or we are going through times of trial, or we simply want to draw closer to you, remind us of Paul. Helps us to use prayer in our daily life to draw closer to you as we seek your will and how we can best serve you. Remind us when we falter that You are always faithful to us and will never leave our side. Thank you Lord Jesus for your mercy and being with us as You have promised in the Gospel of Matthew, “And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.” In the Name of Jesus, Amen.