

Christ Church Clifton Sermon Notes & Questions



Series: Autumn 2020 Acts –a manual for a scattered church
Passage: Acts 21v17-Acts 23v35
Preacher: Janet Lee **Date of Sermon:** November 22nd 2020

God is sovereign! Paul had 4 close shaves in Jerusalem AD 57, nearly died but was saved.

Context, Paul on way back to Jerusalem carrying gifts from scattered church across Asia Minor and Greece to Jewish church, Paul is led by Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem then onto Rome, see Acts 19v21 ²¹ *After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also."*

1st escape Acts 21v30-32

Paul in Jerusalem gone to temple should be safe there, Jews from Ephesus saw him assumed the worst look for trouble shouted, mob rule, lynched Paul

Acts 21³⁰ The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. ³¹ While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. ³² He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

Some people trouble follows them, earlier in Acts thrown in jail riots beatings arrests, God is sovereign, the fortress of Antonia built in NW corner of temple compound only 2 flights of stairs so Romans saw, came down and rescued Paul, not just a coincidence that Romans were close by, just in time before mob tore him apart, miraculous escape no 1,

God is sovereign, he uses our past our gifts, the languages we speak, Paul spoke good educated Greek so the commander stopped listened to him and let him address the crowd, then Paul switches to Aramaic local language and tells his story –again at least 3 times in Acts we hear Paul's testimony, Acts 9,21 and 26, have you a testimony ready to tell others? A story ready to share? Paul recounts his story including his blinding direct revelation from God on road to Damascus, they listened until he said the word Gentiles, Acts 22v21 *"Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles."*

²² *The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!"*

Incendiary remark take gospel to Gentiles, but Paul didn't make them become Jews first before conversion, this was inflammatory, fine Paul for you to have faith but don't spread it others, especially not gentiles, abomination, today Ok to have a faith but not to proselytise, evangelise, laws against conversion in many countries,

Remind you of Jesus, mistaken, false witnesses, mob rule, get rid of him crucify? Luke makes parallels, journey to Jerusalem.

This leads to second miraculous escape from death the Roman commander orders Paul to be flogged, scourged tortured on a rack, whip had thongs with metal and bone in it,

2nd escape Acts 22v22-25 It was illegal to flog a Roman citizen and illegal to claim to be one to escape punishment. God uses the fact Paul was a Roman citizen by birth, through his parents, more prestigious

than an acquired Roman citizen like the Roman commander had. God is sovereign, He uses your past. Paul escapes death by flogging again. Note importance of law, upholding the law, importance of justice, lawyers who point out the law to protect people, fight for justice be advocates, look at IJM International Justice Ministry, or Tear Fund train advocates to remind governments of citizens' rights under law. God is sovereign, Paul is not flogged but released. A second miraculous escape.

The third escape takes place in front of Sanhedrin, Jewish council. Look at Acts 23.v1-3 Paul looked straight in eye, image of a clear conscience, can we look people in the eye? Note Paul is hit in the mouth, - same thing happened to Jesus. Then once Paul mentions resurrection of the dead, there is uproar again trouble follows Paul, argument between Pharisees and Sadducees, see v10 ¹⁰ *The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.*

Again the Romans save Paul using force, rescued and brought back to barracks. God is sovereign, he protects Paul from Sanhedrin, from a very violent bust up, could tear Paul to pieces. A third escape from certain death.

Before look at 4th miraculous escape from death, think of Paul how was he feeling after 2 days of violence and opposition and hate and threat of death or not reaching Rome. look at key verse from these 3 chapters. Acts 22v21.

11 The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."

After 2 tumultuous days after facing all that violence and enmity, question will I ever reach Rome as I believe Spirit is leading me? The Lord appears to Paul, stands near. Already appeared thrice at conversion in 9v5, in first visit to Jerusalem,22v17,18 and in Corinth,18v9,10. And now in barracks. The Lord stood near Paul. What a comfort "Take courage" keep going be courageous still, you will go to Rome, a promise, you have testified about me in Jerusalem you will also do so in Rome. The Lord reassures Paul about future saying you won't die in Jerusalem my plan for you to reach Rome. Word witness same root as martyr. God is sovereign, when we need it most in dark in the night, when facing a lot of trouble, he comforts, he comes near, he speaks he sends help, may be direct word, a feeling in your heart, a word from Bible reading, a note from a friend God speaks. God is sovereign over events.

Now 4th, final miraculous escape from death, Acts 23 v12 -16

There is a secret plot 40 ardent Jewish men plot to kill Paul in an ambush, but God is in control God is sovereign. Paul has a sister and a nephew, he overhears plot and tells Paul. Don't underestimate what children hear and can do! God can use children for his purposes. Any children here, God can and will use you to help others. Paul as a Roman prisoner has visitation rights so his nephew can come in maybe bring food to prisoners, and Paul respected by Romans gets centurion to take the boy to commander, must be young boy and we are told in v19 he takes him by the hand. God uses the nephew uses the Romans to rescue Paul again another miraculous escape, God is sovereign over situation. Finally, the commander sends Paul safely out of Jerusalem overnight to Caesarea on coast 62-mile journey, with half his force, 470 men! He is sent to governor of Judea Felix, which was part of province of Syria same as Cilicia, Paul's home town. Paul is kept in Herod's palace there.

4 miraculous escapes in 3 chapters and just few days, God is sovereign. Paul is safe and alive for now. Paul has confidence in Jesus and the gospel he has testified to him in Jerusalem and has promise he will do so in Rome.

So what do we learn? Paul was killed eventually he didn't stay alive for ever. But he did reach Rome. God was sovereign and saved him. Christians still face sufferings along the way, but God is in control. We still suffer pain but our times are in his hands.

Psalm 31v15 My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me.

As I look back over my life I see God is sovereign. He has used my past gifts and experiences, like Paul his languages and learning, his Jewish background and studies. God really uses your experiences the hard times as well as good times, to his glory. God is sovereign he is in control; our times are in his hands.

Reflect on those difficult times those escapes you had, where you saw God in control despite events going on, he is sovereign, hold on. Reflect on when you were in just the right place and the right time God is sovereign. Be led by the Spirit walk in his way, obey God serve him as part of our discipleship, have confidence in Jesus and in his gospel God is sovereign.

Questions for study:

Optional starter -share stories of your close shaves,

1. Acts 19v21, why did Paul want to go to Jerusalem? What was he taking with him? What was initial reaction to his arrival? Acts 21v17-19
2. Read Acts 21v30-32, what was his first close shave?
3. Paul used his languages, good educated Greek and then Aramaic, how can God use your gifts and background?
4. 3 times in Acts, chapters 9,21 and 26 Paul shares his testimony in great detail, have you a testimony or a story about your coming to faith ready to share with others? (note –does not have to be “exciting” just genuine and real for you)
5. Read Acts 22v21-25, Paul's second close shave, why was the word Gentiles so inflammatory to crowd? Why does talking about conversion so antagonise people today?
6. Paul points out his rights, under Roman law, who are the people today pointing out the law and people's rights? Look at charities like IJM or Advocates in Tear Fund, how can we support them better or what laws is God calling you to point out?
7. Read Acts 22v30-Acts 23v3, do we have a good conscience? can we look straight at our accusers? Again note parallels with Jesus. This time resurrection of the dead was the inflammatory word.
8. Acts 23v9-11, Paul's 3rd close shave from death, how do you think he was feeling back in the barracks? What was so comforting about the Lord's word and presence in v11? Note he does not promise Paul that he won't suffer in future.
9. Share stories how has God comforted you in the past, when down or depressed or in despair?
10. Read Acts 23v12-22, Paul's 4th close shave, how is the plot averted? How is this an example that God is sovereign in all circumstances?

Prayer

Read Psalm 31, especially meditate on v15, My times are in your hands.