

Further up, Further in

Resources for Continued Study



LOOKOUT
MOUNTAIN
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

DATE: January 24, 2021

SPEAKER: Aaron

SERIES: Acts

PASSAGE: Acts 23:12-35

"WHEN PLANS AND PROVIDENCE COLLIDE"

For individual study or discussion

If you've ever read letters written over a century ago, you may have seen the letters "d.v." added after certain sentences. The letters are an abbreviation for the Latin *Deo volente*, or "God willing." It was a way for Christians to remind themselves and those they were writing that whatever plans were being made, the outcome of every plan was dependent on the will of the Lord.

The initials are less common in letters dating from more recent times. They undoubtedly fell out of use partly because fewer and fewer people were learning and using Latin, but it seems likely also that with the advent of modern medicine and technology, people began to feel more in control than ever. The default mindset may well have become, "If I will, these things will happen." The story in this passage of Acts is both a sobering and an encouraging reminder that everything that happens in this world happens in accordance with the will of God.

- 1) We get a marvelous glimpse in this story of how God was working in all things "for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Rom. 8:28) The very day after Jesus had stood near Paul and told him to have courage, Paul was vividly reminded of God's sovereign control.
 - How are we reminded of God's sovereignty today?
 - How do we face the future, believing in God's sovereignty, without becoming either fatalistic or indifferent? (Why are people, even Christians, so often tempted to be either fatalistic or indifferent?)
- 2) The forty-plus men who conspired to kill Paul did so not out of personal spite or visions of personal glory. They undoubtedly saw themselves as passionate defender's of God's law (note that they went to the chief priests and elders with their plan). (See Acts 23:14-15)
 - What steps do Christians need to take in order to avoid being passionately wrong about something they believe to be in accordance with God's Word? This is no minor matter. Many times in the history of the church there have been people who were utterly convinced that what they were doing was God-honoring when in fact they were pursuing something despicable. Consider both what promotes faulty reasoning and emotional fervor that can blind us to truth and what nurtures biblical thinking and the kind of long-lasting, deep "religious affections" that will result in wise devotion to God and the advancement of his Kingdom.
- 3) The beloved children's hymn, "Jesus Loves Me" includes the words, "I am weak, but he is strong."
 - In this story, we easily recognize someone who must have felt weak—Paul's young nephew. Paul, on the other hand, appears strong as he undergoes these various trials and takes advantage of every opportunity to proclaim the name of Jesus. What was (and is) the reality? Are there little and big people in God's Kingdom? (See 2 Cor. 12:9-10.) How should we see ourselves? (See Jn. 15:5 and Ps. 73:26.)

Family Dinner Table

Have you every planned a party? Or maybe just a meal? Can you make a mental list of everything you considered and prepared?

When we make plans for anything, we generally try to think of all the things that need to be taken care of as well as what *could* happen that would make a mess of our plans.

In this story from the book of Acts, we learn about a group of men who came up with a very specific plan—and it's pretty obvious how committed they were to putting their plan into action. They probably believed they had thought of everything. (See Acts 23:12-15.)

If you've read the whole passage, though, you know that the plot they hatched was a spectacular failure. God protected Paul through a series of remarkable events.

Clearly, we don't want to plan anything that goes against God's plans. What should guide our planning? And if you believe that God is always in control, can you come up with a brief statement of what we believe is true about God and his watch care over us? Maybe you could fill in the blanks of this statement: "I am planning _____, but I know that God _____." (See Prov. 6:6-8, 19:21, and James 4:13-15.)

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Norma A., supported missionary