

Further up, Further in

Resources for Continued Study

“NOT BY CHANCE, BUT BY GOD’S FATHERLY HAND”

For individual study or discussion

In 1675, German schoolteacher and writer Samuel Rodigast wrote a hymn to comfort a sick friend. Catherine Winkworth translated it into English in 1863. Each verse of the hymn begins with the words that also comprise the title, “Whate’er my God ordains is right.” The end of the hymn proclaims:

“Whate’er my God ordains is right: here shall my stand be taken.
Though sorrow, need, or death be mine, yet am I not forsaken.
My Father’s care is round me there; he holds me that I shall not fall:
And so to him I leave it all.”¹

The life of Paul as revealed in the book of Acts and in his letters gives every indication that he trusted that nothing happened to him by chance—whether tribulations and trials or successes and celebrations. It can be easy for us to see God’s sovereign control of Paul’s life when reading the accounts some two thousand years later. But Paul could not have detected all that God was doing as he was brought before rulers and authorities to defend himself and the Gospel or as he lived through tedious days in prison. He appears, however, to have felt confident of God’s providential working out of everything for his good even when experiencing a succession of truly bad days. What will enable us to do the same?

- 1) Take some time to remember all of the things that had to happen in order for Paul to have the opportunity to proclaim the Gospel before Festus, Agrippa, and all the leading men in Caesarea. You may want to look back through chapters 21-24, in addition to chapter 25, as you consider all the events that led to the filled-with-pomp occasion of Paul’s appearance before Agrippa.
 - In what ways do we see God’s providence in the life of Paul and in the advancement of God’s Kingdom as revealed in the book of Acts? (Remember the catechism definition of providence: “God’s providence is his completely holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing every creature and every action, to his own glory.”)
 - What is also revealed about human agency in the stories of Paul?
 - ◇ What do we see in the actions of the Jewish leaders and Festus that make clear that, before God, every mouth is silenced and the whole world held accountable? (See Rom. 3:9-20.)
 - ◇ And in what ways was Paul an active, not passive, participant in the working out of God’s plan?
- 2) While most of us don’t have the kind of power or position that Festus had, we may well find ourselves facing a thorny dilemma not unlike the one he faced as he tried to figure out what to do with Paul.
 - What considerations went into his decision making? What considerations (including our understanding of the sovereignty of God) should govern the decisions we make? See Proverbs 3:5-6, 18:1-13; James 1:5; and Romans 12:2.



LOOKOUT
MOUNTAIN
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

DATE: February 14, 2021

SPEAKER: Chad/Frank

SERIES: Acts

PASSAGE: Acts 25:1-27

Family Dinner Table

There is a lot going on in this story, and a lot of different people to sort out. If you’ve been following along for a while now in the book of Acts, you are familiar with Paul, and you probably remember that the Jews have basically been out to get him for a while. But now we are introduced to a new governor (Festus), and a new king (Herod Agrippa II) and the king’s sister Bernice. If you have time, read back through Acts 25 and then think about these questions:

What things in this story (and in the events leading up to this story, if you remember them,) can you identify as “bad”? What was likely to have been painful and upsetting to Paul? When he was brought before King Agrippa, how long had it been since Paul had had what we consider a “good day.” (It’s fine if you want to stop and talk about what you consider a good day. And here’s one hint: look back at Acts 24:27.)

All of these bad things ultimately end with Paul being able to come before not only Festus and Agrippa but all the important men of the city (v. 23), and as we’ll see in chapter 26, sharing the Gospel with them. How does knowing this story help you now as you face hard and difficult things in your own life?

PRAY FOR HOME MISSIONS

Metanoia Prison Ministries

PRAY FOR WORLD MISSIONS

Brigette and Mark, supported missionary partners

¹For a thoughtful examination of this hymn by pastors Ligon Duncan and Derek Thomas and First Presbyterian (Jackson, MS) music director, Bill Wymond, click [here](#).