

“exercised the powers of a king with the disposition of a slave.” But again, the Lord chose to – as the Irish say – strike a straight blow with this crooked stick here too.

2. The weak

Not only the strong but the weak as well – Paul’s nephew, the son of his sister. How little we know of Paul’s family! How tantalizing this reference! How he learned of the plot, how he had access to the barracks – we don’t know. But he was apparently rather young, possibly with an affection for “Uncle Paul.” And the Lord used him as well.

B) *Taking Surprising Paths*

Surprising people – folks you wouldn’t expect. And surprising paths.

1. Dramatic events

You could imagine that Paul’s expectations – that his friends’ expectations – must have been soaring at this point. This dangerous plot foiled. Such power and protection demonstrated – even through the escort and the arrival at Herod’s praetorium.

2. Circuitous route

And from there – Paul then spends over two years waiting. And then, after that, as we’ll see later in Acts, a dangerous voyage by sea. A bit of a circuitous route. And who could have known this would be the way to Rome? That this would be God’s way of moving?

Illustration:

Our lives are filled with such circuitous paths, with surprising events and subtle influences with far reaching effects. The small things, the little decisions, the seemingly unrelated events that led to me to Christ, to my meeting Sarah, to Covenant Seminary, to Clarksville. He ordained it all from the beginning of time – the great ends and the little means. But in the midst of it, who would have thought? Who would have thought?

Application:

Our lives are filled with such things. You know that. There are times we are simply not able to see, to know, to understand what is going on. But we were never told we would. There is a certainty to His purposes. But there is no certainty to our seeing them. And insisting otherwise is sure to frustrate. It’s to demand what is not ours. Ours is not necessarily to know. But it is to trust, to say, *“Lord, I don’t see how you can bring any good out of this situation. I haven’t been treated fairly. Everything seems to be falling apart. This has gone on so long. But I trust you. I don’t understand. But I trust you – in your greatness and your goodness, in your justice and your mercy, in your wisdom and your compassion. I trust you.”* That’s what we’re called to do.

CONCLUSION:

Remember, *“God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform.”* Or, as Edith Schaeffer has so helpfully reminded people through the years, our lives are often like a tapestry. On one side, there is a jumble of color, cut and tangled threads, knots and loose strands. It hardly seems to have any pattern to it at all. It’s a mess. That’s the side we see. Then, on the other side, there are the colors, the shapes, the patterns, the artistry all brought together as a marvelous whole. We might get but only a glimpse of that side in this life. But it’s there. It’s there. It’s what all the tangles, the knots, and even the loose (seemingly meaningless) strands were forming. And it’s a wonder to behold.

Such are our lives. Such is the way of the divine weaver with His threads of both pain and pleasure, temptation and trial, wandering and waiting. Such are our lives. And He’s making something beautiful. Just you wait. He’s making something beautiful.

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Because of the nature of God’s purposes,
(anchor) we can find the rest we seek.

Yes, they had formulated a plan – a plan that if carried out would surely bring about much shedding of blood. Yes, they were determined. They had taken an oath.

2. Why they had sworn to do it

Why? Because even as Paul had alluded to in his defense back in chapter 22, they were zealous for God. Zealous, committed, fanatical. They had resolved to carry this out.

B) The Resolve of Paul's Lord

But the resolve of Paul's enemies meant nothing in the face of the resolve of his Lord. For nothing in all creation can stand against Him.

1. Who had spoken

The Lord is God. Jesus is the risen, ruling, reigning King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is the One who had spoken with such blinding force on the road to Damascus, the One Paul later referred to as "the Righteous One."

2. What would happen

And He had declared that Paul was going to Rome. And so his ticket was punched. As far as whether it would happen or not, he was as good as there.

Application:

There was no need to doubt, no need to worry. What Jesus had said He was going to do in and through Paul He was going to do. Now, think with me. What has Jesus said He will do in and through us? Has He not declared that, as the divine gardener, in the lives of those whom He has engrafted into the vine, that He will bring about fruit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? Has He not declared that, as the divine craftsman, in the lives of those whom He has begun His good work, that He will conform us into His likeness? Indeed He has.

Now what stands in the way of that? Really? Can our failures? Can our frailties? Can the temptations we are so prone to? Can any scenario in the future, any memory from the past, any plot by forces seen or unseen undo, unmake, overshadow, finally defeat His purposes for us, His movements in our lives? No! As surely as the sun will rise tomorrow morning, as certain as death and taxes await us all, so too will His purposes come to pass, His movements in this world bring about His intent. There is no room for doubt here. And we have no reason for doubt here either.

II. THE MYSTERY OF HIS PURPOSES

Now, having said that, the fact that His purposes are certain does not necessarily make them clear. Jesus' declaration in verse 11 sets the tone for a lot of puzzling things – puzzling especially if you were living in the midst of them. His movements are certain. And they are mysterious as well. What He has planned He may not reveal ahead of time. And even when He does, He may bring it about through some rather surprising means.

A) Involving Surprising Persons

Here we see Paul's movement towards Rome coming through surprising persons.

1. The strong

First, through the strong. Claudius Lysius, the tribune – we can commend him for seeing a crisis and taking decisive action. But we also have to recognize that there is a strong element of self-interest here as well. Because Paul is a Roman citizen he is the tribune's responsibility. Because how such cases were handled would affect his career, he spins the facts a bit in his letter to Felix. He's a politician. But the Lord uses him.

Then there is Felix, the governor – a man known for his greed and ruthlessness, described by historians of the time as being a freedman and having ([READ Tacitus quote](#))

“The Purposes of God” Acts 23:12-35

FCF: Fear for lack of control of circumstances

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Because of the nature of God’s purposes,
(anchor) we can find the rest we seek.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

The heart of any loving parent goes out to their crying child. And so too does the embrace – even in the middle of the night. How often the nightmares of our little ones have awoken us. How often they have cried out, “*Mommy! Daddy!*” And yet there are those strange occasions when, even after scooping them up to tenderly hold them, they tense their bodies, they resist, they fight against the very thing they are most longing for.

How often I have then prayed, “*Ah, Lord, that is me! Resisting You, fighting You, against the very One I long for!*” Cheating myself of the rest my heart awaits. Rest that comes in resting in Him. How is that possible? Partly, at least, in knowing His ways.

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 23:12-35

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Let me read you an excerpt from a lay level science book I have at home. It’s from an entry on “wind” ([READ The Big Book of Tell Me Why, vol. 3, p.35](#)):

Sometimes when we are outdoors, a sudden and mysterious thing takes place. A wind begins to blow. We cannot see it, but we feel it, and we have no idea what started it. A wind is simply the motion of air over the earth. What causes air to move? All winds are caused by one thing – a change in temperature. Whenever air is heated it expands. This makes it lighter, and lighter air rises. As the warm air rises, cooler air flows in to take its place.

Such are the causes of wind. And such is why its speed and direction can often be predicted. Often, but not always. There are so many variables – multiple weather systems, natural and manmade phenomena – all of which makes this thing we call wind hard to pin down. We know why it blows but we cannot fully predict how and when.

Little wonder the Bible often equates God’s actions, His movements in this world, as being something like wind. For instance, Jesus’ words to Nicodemus in John 3 ([READ John 3:8](#)). There’s this wonderful tension to the imagery – a predictable unpredictability. William Cowper captured it so beautifully in the line from his hymn printed in your bulletin ([READ bulletin quote](#)): *God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform.* Again, a beautiful line – both for its prose and its insight. God is moving. Always moving. But His movements are often so very mysterious. We can always know He is always moving. Clearly that is the case. But equally clearly there are times those movements, those purposes, are beyond our understanding.

Now how does that show itself in our morning’s text here in Acts 23? And what difference should such things make for us in the daily stuff of life? Look with me.

I. THE CERTAINTY OF HIS PURPOSES

Paul’s experience here bears out the inevitability of the Lord’s purposes, the certainty of His movements. Look with me at verse 11, the words that set the tone for everything that follows ([READ Acts 23:11](#)). We talked about this last week – how the words “*so you must testify also in Rome*” have the sense of “*it is necessary, it is sure and certain, for you to testify in Rome.*” Why? Because the Lord said so. That’s why.

A) *The Resolve of Paul’s Enemies*

So much so that the resolve of Paul’s enemies was immaterial. It didn’t matter.

1. What they had sworn to do