

The Lord Sees & The Lord Sees To it

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[0 : 00] Welcome folks, it's good to see you all. I was sorry that I couldn't address the children this morning as I usually would. David had chosen a fantastic song you'll probably be aware of, Our God is a great, great God.

Maybe you know the actions. Now just because the children are out doesn't mean we can't do it together. If you're up for it later. But anyway, as we come to the Word this morning, Before we do that, let me just say again that many of you have known Ray personally, and if you have, it would mean a lot to me and the family if you have a wee think about how you knew her in the capacity of the church or in her faith, just to share anything of that with me, because the family didn't know a lot of that side of her, and are not coming from that side.

So if any of you who are friends with Ray can think of anything to contribute and attribute regarding her church life and her faith life, please share it with me afterwards.

I would be very grateful, and I know the family would as well. So anyway, we are continuing in Acts. If you have a Bible, please open it up at Acts chapter 23. Sorry to Gene and Eleanor earlier for the confusion.

God keeps us on our toes, doesn't He? Or at least we keep each other on our toes. Acts chapter 23.

[1 : 54] We're going to be reading from verse 12 through to 35. This is the next day after Paul is taken in by the tribune back into the barracks for fear of being torn to pieces in the council between the Pharisees and Sadducees.

And there was a bit of a riot and dissension that became violent. The tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces, brought him back into the barracks by force.

And that night the Lord stood by him and said, Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome. And we are reading from verse 12 from the next day.

And so if you have that there. Lord, we thank you for your word. Lord, we pray that you would bless the reading of it. And we pray that by your spirit you would enlighten us, enlighten your word, illuminate it to us, and show us Christ in your word.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Acts 23, verse 12. When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath, neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

[3 : 17] There were more than 40 who made this conspiracy. They went to the chief priests and elders and said, We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul.

Now therefore you, along with the council, give notice to the tribune to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case more exactly. And we are ready to kill him before he comes near.

Now the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush. So he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. Paul called one of the centurions and said, Take this young man to the tribune, for he has something to tell him.

So he took him and brought him to the tribune and said, Paul, the prisoner called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, as he has something to say to you.

The tribune took him by the hand and going aside, asked him privately, What is it that you have to tell me? And he said, The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him.

[4 : 24] But do not be persuaded by them, for more than forty of their men are lying in ambush for him, who bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him.

And now they are ready, waiting for your consent. So the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, Tell no one that you have informed me of these things.

Then he called two of the centurions and said, Get ready two hundred soldiers, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen, to go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night.

Also provide mounts for Paul to ride, and bring him safely to Felix the governor. And he wrote a letter to this effect. Claudius Lysias, To His Excellency the Governor Felix, Greetings.

This man was seized by the Jews, and was about to be killed by them, when I came upon them with the soldiers, and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen.

[5 : 24] And desiring to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their council. I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment.

And when it was disclosed to me, that there would be a plot against this man, I sent him to you at once, ordering his accusers also to state before you, what they have against him.

So the soldiers, according to the instructions, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatrus. And on the next day, they returned to the barracks, letting the horsemen go on with him.

And when they had come to Caesarea, and delivered the letter to the Governor, they presented Paul also before him. On reading the letter, he asked what province he was from. When he learned that he was from Cilicia, he said, I will give you a hearing, when your accusers arrive.

And he commanded him to be guarded in Herod's Praetorium. Amen. That's the word of the Lord. We pray that you bless the reading of it.

[6 : 29] Well, you probably all heard the story, or some version of it, of the man who was in his house when a flood came.

He was trapped in his house, and the floodwaters were coming, and he was on the first floor, and a rowing boat came by, and they shouted in, Excuse me, sir. Excuse me, sir.

Come on into the boat. You need help. The flood's coming. And he says, No, no, no. It's okay. I have faith. God will rescue me. The man in the rowing boat insisted, but no, I've got faith.

God will rescue me. The floodwaters began to rise, and he had to go up the stairs. And a motorboat came by. Sir, sir, come on into the boat. The floods are coming. It's okay.

It's okay. I have faith. God will rescue me. Go on your way. And hesitantly, they went on their way. And then finally, the waters rose even further, and he had to go onto his roof. And you'll remember, a helicopter came by, shouted down, threw the rope ladder down, Sir, get on the ladder.

[7 : 32] The floods are going to go over your house, and you're going to die. No, go on your way. I have faith. God's going to rescue me. Get on the ladder. No, I've got faith. God's going to rescue me. And so the helicopter went on to rescue others.

The floods rose. The man drowned. And when he got to the pearly gates, and he asked God, I had faith that you were going to rescue me. But I drowned. What's going on?

God said, I sent you a roadboat. I sent you a motorboat. I sent you a helicopter. Do you not get the point? We know the story, in some form of it, you know, about God's providence.

I remember one time, I remember one time, a much less dramatic story. I was in Straven, as I used to spend a lot of my time, as a young Christian.

I went to a church through there. And I used to get the last bus at night, because I used to spend all my time, all my day in Straven. And I got the very last bus at night, home to East Coebridge. And it was about 10 to 12 was the last bus.

[8 : 32] But instead of going into the Common Green, where the bus stopped, I went up to the golf course, which is at the exit, going towards East Coebridge. Because it was much more scenic.

But sometimes when the bus, the last bus came into the Common Green, if it saw no one there, it just went back to Hamilton, thinking, oh, nobody's going to East Coebridge. So I'm sitting up at the golf course, waiting on a bus that's not coming, that's already been.

Sitting there, waiting and waiting. The bus is not coming. And I remember sitting there one day, one night, and I remember just praying to God. And you know, God doesn't make us certain promises, you know, but I was praying to God.

And you know, I said to God, God, would you send someone? Would you send someone to take me home? You know, I know by now that this bus is not coming. Would you send an angel to take me home? And a car drove up, and pulled over, opened the door, and it was a man called Yassir.

A Muslim man from the local takeaway that I was friends with. And I thought, God, you've got a sense of humor. But I get in his car, I didn't say, no, no, the Lord's going to send an angel.

[9 : 38] I get in the man's car, and I got down the road at a reasonable time. See, we need to act on these things if God provides. You see, this passage that we're in today, this passage has no apparent doctrine, no apparent instruction, no big speech, no miracle, no mention of God even.

Now, obviously, Luke doesn't divide or separate it from the whole book, but it's recorded as a section on the ground without any obvious apparent intervention from God. Unlike a lot of the rest of Acts, this section, no mention of God, no miracles, no anything like that.

We might expect an angel in the prison to burst it open, or an earthquake, or some kind of miracle. We might expect something supernatural in Acts, not just because it's in Acts, but because this is the Apostle Paul, and because the gospel depends on it.

God does supernatural things, but not this time. What we see instead, 40 plus terrorists, a crooked Jewish council, a youth, a prisoner, a centurion, a tribune, and 470 soldiers, and what seems like an over-the-top high-security prisoner transport.

No miracles, no mention of God, no mention of angels, or the Holy Spirit, just Jewish zealots, Roman soldiers, a young man, and a prisoner. Now, there may be times in life that we look for miracles.

[11 : 09] There may be times where we look for something extraordinary, but we may not notice God answering us in what looks rather ordinary.

You see, God's providence is no less powerful than a miracle, and he's no less involved just because the skies don't open up or angels appear. Most people in this part of Acts will make reference, if somebody's talking about this part of Acts, will make reference to the book of Esther, because likewise, the book of Esther has no great miracles, no great things, no great mention, not even a mention of God, but God's providence is all over it.

You see, we must not think of God as being passive. When we don't hear a mention of God or a mention of miracles or angels or the Holy Spirit, we mustn't think of God as being passive, and we mustn't think of God's providence as being passive, but nor should we think that we should be passive in light of God's providence.

God will sort it out. That's not how it goes. You see, like the stories, we must act, trusting God, even if it doesn't look like we thought it should.

Even if I thought God would send an angel and a Muslim man comes up in a car and he's got just a kind heart and he wants to give me a lift home, it might not look, God's providence might not look like how we thought it would look, but we must act.

[12 : 39] God's not passive and neither should we be. You see, we don't get to advise God about how he ought to do things. God's not a method and nor are his ways methods to learn.

You'll remember this if you know the story of Moses in the wilderness. Remember Moses striking the rock and bringing water from it and then later on, again, they're needing water and God says, tell the rock to yield its water and Moses, thinking it's like a method, grabs his staff and whacks the rock, nothing, whacks it again and water comes out and God gave water in spite of Moses but Moses was disciplined severely for his lack of trust and his disobedience.

Supposing God's ways were methods, trusting in the method instead of obeying God. So whether it's a miracle or providence, even throughout Acts, we cannot expect God to do the same things the same way that he has always done them as if there's a method.

Here's the point, I think. Faith in Jesus and trust in God is relational. It's not methodical. It's not something we can learn as long as we do this.

It's good to do daily devotions. It's good to pray. It's good to practice holiness and godliness. But it's not like we can garner favor from God for these things.

[14 : 07] I love that what you said earlier, David. It's so liberating knowing that we cannot impress God so we don't need to. Now these practices are good for us.

They're good for us and good for others. But trusting in God and our faith, our life of faith isn't a method. It's relational. It's relational. It's relational.

There's a way this is put in Hebrew and the Hebrew language there's a way and you'll find this in the Old Testament so let me show you an example of this. Genesis 22, you'll know the story of Abraham and Isaac.

Abraham was told by God to offer Isaac as a sacrifice to God. Now God generally doesn't do this. In fact, elsewhere this practice is an abomination to God.

God detests this kind of child sacrifice. Something other evil tribes practiced and were judged for. So there's a special reason, a specific reason in context that God is asking Abraham to do this.

[15 : 08] God has been trying to get Abraham to understand that Isaac, the son through him and Sarah would be the one and only through which the promise would come through.

Not Ishmael, not anyone else, only Isaac. It was only coming through Isaac. And so asking him to give up Isaac was a test to see if Abraham now understands that it must be through Isaac and no one else.

And therefore, if Abraham gets it, then Isaac must survive. If God is going to keep his promise, Isaac must live. Now, the question is, do you trust God to keep his promise?

Does Abraham trust God to keep his promise? God has told him in no uncertain terms the promise comes through Isaac. Get this through your head, Abraham. The promise comes through Isaac, not Ishmael, not anyone else, through Isaac.

So if he offers Isaac, he's got to learn God's going to keep his promise no matter what. And that's why the writer of Hebrews can say that Abraham supposed that God would raise Isaac from the dead because God has got to keep his promise.

[16 : 20] Now, when they got to the place, Isaac said, behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb? Where is the lamb for sacrifice?

And Abraham said, God will provide for himself the lamb. Now, a more literal translation in Hebrew would be, God will show himself the lamb.

God will show himself. God will see the lamb. You see, the word provide in Hebrew that we get that from in that very verse and others, the word provide in Hebrew is the term to see.

Basically, God sees. Isaac's like the fire, the wood, but where's the lamb? Don't worry, Isaac, God sees. God knows. God sees our situation.

God sees. God sees our need and therefore, God will see too our need. That's the same word used in Exodus 2, 25.

[17 : 29] You'll remember even when Pharaoh, even when the Pharaoh that was burdening the people with slavery when he died, the people cried out to God. Moses, by this point, had fled.

The people cried out to God and it says that God heard them and it says that God sees. God saw and God knew. Providence.

God sees and God will see to it. It's the same term. He saw their need and he was about to see to it in the Exodus. He remembered his promise and he saw to it.

See, the idea is being in trust in who he is. Trusting in who God is. Trusting that he sees. Trusting that God sees our needs and trusting that God is going to see to it.

So in Acts and Paul's predicament, the only certainty that we have, because God doesn't make every kind of promise that we would wish he would make, but in Acts, the certainty is that Jesus just made a promise to Paul.

[18 : 34] In verse 11, the Lord is going to keep his promise. So Paul's in this place. Is God going to keep his promise? Providence means that he sees Paul.

You see, providence means that he sees the 40 plus conspirators who want him dead. He sees the youth. He sees Paul's nephew. The Lord sees the centurion.

The Lord sees the tribune. The Lord sees the corrupt Jewish council. And the Lord sees the Roman army and ultimately, in respect his promise, he is going to see to it.

Now, I took a bit of pride this year in being the first person to cut my grass out of all the neighbourhood. How foolish. I got the first cut in first.

The trouble is, when others got round to theirs, my grass started to grow again and it was looking out of control. And it was needing a second cut. But the thing is, things get busy.

[19 : 35] Easter time and ministry and holidays, etc. Every day, I thought, I see it. I see. I see it. Jen, I'm going to see to it. Now, she can't trust me like she trusts the Lord, but you'll be there.

Have any of you ever said, I'll see to it? Really? Every day, I thought, I see it. But I just never get round to seeing to it.

Now, I have. You'll be glad to know now. But such are our limitations as humans, eh? We are not all sufficient. We are not even self-sufficient.

We are not sovereign. We are not all powerful. We just aren't. Even just this week, the country's been celebrating the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. It's been a lovely time.

It's been good. She has reigned 70 years. And as Queen, she is sovereign over this nation. But she's not sovereign like God is sovereign.

[20 : 35] It's a difference. You see, even this week, we have seen her own limitations. She's human like the rest of us. But the risen and ascended Lord Jesus in his risen humanity does not have the same limitations.

You see, not only does he see, but he is fully able to see to it. So, although our section, we have no miracles, no mention of God, no mention of the Lord, what we have is an account of the Lord's providence.

The Lord Jesus seeing to his promise to Paul in verse 11. And what we see is sometimes his providence is apparent sometimes, and other times it's not that apparent.

Sometimes his providence is apparent and 470 soldiers to protect Paul. Sometimes his providence is not apparent. and a young boy going in and exposing the plot.

Sometimes in our lives, providence is apparent and other times it's not. One thing to keep in mind in Acts is often, where is the hostility coming from? Who are the troublemakers? Who are the ones breaking the laws?

[21 : 45] Because Paul is arrested often and time and again when it comes to his arrest, it's under false charges. people pretending to be religious but are themselves troublemakers.

Now it seems as well that as the non-Jews become more more closed, the non-Jews become more open to the gospel, the Jews become more and more closed to the gospel.

And so the Jews are becoming more and more volatile to the point that many years after this, many years after this, they rebel and Rome destroys Jerusalem and the temple just as Jesus prophesied.

So what we see here, the Jews reject the gospel and the non-Jews accept it and so as Jerusalem rejects the Messiah, so the gospel will go to Rome.

That's what Jesus said to Paul. You have done this faithfully in Jerusalem and they've rejected it. But just as you've witnessed in Jerusalem you will witness in Rome, we have the darkness and corruption from the Jews and civility and kindness from the Romans.

[22 : 59] The Jews have bound themselves to an oath not to eat or drink until they've killed Paul. More than that, they go to the chief priests and elders.

These are the people that are supposed to be the most religious, looking after the nation spiritually, looking after justice and mercy in the nation and yet they go to them not only for approval but for involvement.

The chief priests and elders and the council are going to be the ones that set the trap. They're going to set the trap so that they can kill Paul. What does that tell you about Israel?

What does that tell you about Jerusalem here? You see, Luke doesn't want his readers to be uncertain about why the Jews have rejected the message about Jesus. Later on, when people are questioning whether this Christianity thing is real, so many Jews are rejecting it.

Does that mean that Jesus isn't the Messiah? Because surely they would know. Luke's saying, no, no, no. No, no. The Jews have a darkness. John 3 describes the light coming into the world but they loved the darkness.

[24 : 07] They rejected the light because they loved the darkness rather than the light. That's what's going on with the Jews. That's why they're rejecting. You see, they plot and they set a trap but the Lord sees. The Lord sees.

Somehow Paul's nephew hears of the plot. How did that happen? Was he a young student like Paul was? All these questions about Paul's nephew, we don't know.

We don't know. All we know is at this point he was in the right place at the right time. Coincidence? Providence. The Lord sees and the Lord has seen to it.

How was it him? How was it him and then that he was able to enter the barracks and tell Paul at the right time? Just at the right time. The Lord sees and the Lord has seen to it.

Paul calls the centurion who takes the unnamed youth to the tribune and he takes the young man by the hand. What kindness coming from Rome and what hostility coming from the Jews.

[25 : 06] Kindness and civility from this man of authority. This is why some suggest that Paul's nephew must have been young, just a youth. The boy tells the tribune and he takes it completely seriously.

Because Claudius Lysias, the tribune, has seen how violent these Jews are. He's seen the mob trying to tear Paul to pieces. He knows the Jews are volatile and he doesn't want a riot on his hands.

Not only does he not want a riot or rebellion, but he doesn't want the Jews to assassinate a Roman under his watch. Paul's a Roman. To the tribune, Paul's a Roman and there's no way he's going to let a Roman under his care be assassinated by Jews.

The Lord sees and the Lord has seen to it. Think about this all the way back to Paul's family gaining Roman citizenship. All the way back to whatever brought Paul's nephew to Jerusalem.

The Lord sees and the Lord has seen to it. Way before we think about it. Up to this point, all these little but significant details of God's providence.

[26 : 15] I wonder how many we miss in our own lives. The Lord sees and the Lord has seen to it. Now remember what Jesus did when Paul himself, back at the start of Acts, when Paul himself went on a murderous hunt for Christians.

Remember the Lord stopped him in his tracks. supernatural striking intervention. Now, at this point, there's more than 40 plus versions of Paul on a murderous hunt for one man.

Do we expect the same thing? Jesus could stop them in their tracks easily. But they have rejected him once too many. Instead, he will use 470 Roman soldiers.

A Roman army. 200 foot soldiers. 200 spearmen and 70 cavalry. And he'll put Paul on a horse and get him out of there at 9 o'clock at night.

This major escort, nothing like this. You see this in movies. The point when a prisoner is transported is the vulnerable point where somebody could break them out or get to them.

[27 : 24] But this tribune surrounds Paul with 470 soldiers. These people who have bound themselves to an oath may as well die because they're not going to eat or drink before Paul's dead.

They're not going to get anywhere near him. Isn't it interesting how the Lord uses a Roman army against his own people to protect Paul, to keep his promise, and to ensure his testimony in Rome?

This, I think, gives us a glimpse about where act is going to end. You see, the Lord sees and the Lord is seeing to it. The Lord sees our predicament, doesn't he? The Lord has seen ahead.

And the Lord has ensured that the gospel has reached us. Now, in all these things, God was not passive. And neither was man.

God's providence includes the obedience and action of each one of us. God is nonetheless active. God is in control. God is sovereign. The Lord sees.

[28 : 26] The Lord knows. The Lord provides. He is going to see to it. Finally, the tribune sends with Paul a letter to Felix.

And although he writes favorably of himself, he defends Paul's innocence. He highlights his Roman citizenship. He basically ensures that Paul is treated well and fairly.

And we see that in the very last verse. Until his accusers arrive, he was to be kept in the praetorium. Inhered's palace.

He's getting first-class treatment here. The Lord sees. And the Lord sees to it. You see, sometimes we will notice the Lord's providence.

Other times, we won't. Sometimes, we'll see it. And the Lord does some great and obvious act. Sometimes, we won't see it. In every little but significant detail, the Lord sees.

[29 : 29] We might not see, but the Lord sees. And the Lord will see to it. Let me pray. O God and Father in heaven, you are indeed sovereign over all things, for you created all things, and you uphold all things by the word of your power.

And so, we thank you that today we come together because of Jesus, ensuring that we would hear the good news of his grace towards us.

And so, God, we thank you that we can come here, not in darkness, not without hope, but we can come here and open your word. We can come here and hear truth.

We can come here knowing that you see. You see what we need. knowing when it comes to your promise regarding us, when it comes to your promises to us in Christ, that you will see to it.

Whatever the case, whatever things look like on the ground, you will see to it. We have that confidence. We have that assurance because you are sovereign.

[30 : 49] You are in control. And so, we thank you. We thank you in Jesus' name and we pray that we would always look to you and trust in you, always and forever.

Amen.