

SUMMER 9 - Acts 16-28 - To Rome and Beyond

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[0 : 0 0] Well, it's been good to be with you. This is our last one for this year. And thank you for keeping on coming. And I hope you've learned lots of good things from this great book of Acts.

Let's pray and ask God to help us this evening. Gracious Father, please be at work amongst us this evening as we study your word. Quicken it to us by your spirit and work in our wills that we might obey it.

And we pray this for the glory and honour of your son, Jesus, and in his name. Amen. Well, you don't have to read much these days in order to come across it.

It saturates our popular literature. It has infiltrated deep into our modern movies. Our world is a world which loves and worships a goddess. Oh, not an idol-type goddess, not the sort of goddess that you might place in a corner of your room at home or whatever.

No, the world worships an outdoors goddess. They even call her mother at times. That goddess is known as Mother Nature. Read any literature, you know, or much literature of our modern age and you will find her.

[1 : 1 0] She is the world of trees and green and soft, gentle breezes. And she's nature as warm, fertile, living, nurturing, abundant, giving, protective, and so on.

This goddess we know as Mother Nature is as old as nature religion itself, as human religion even. She has been known by many names from time immemorial. In poor days, the Ephesians worshipped her as Artemis the Great.

She was the mother goddess, the protectress of wildlife. She was the source of all things good. Now, it's funny how we talk about nature, I think, isn't it? You see, sometimes nature for us is personal, warm, fertile, protective, sometimes called a mother.

But there's another dark side to nature, isn't there, where nature is not a mother, not warm, not personal but impersonal. A place where gigantic forces clash, where boundaries are, you know, just torn apart, where forces are heartless and ruthless, where they have no regard for human life, where human life is just tossed here and there.

They are mindless, cruel, and apparently amorally destructive, lethal, and callous. Nature can have both those sides to it, can't it, in our contemporary world?

[2 : 3 4] And we see it on the news so often. Well, today's section of the book of Acts is a story about nature, as much as it is, I think, a story about Paul. And not quite as much, but there are strong hints of it through here.

Up until this point in Luke, Acts has concentrated on people. And it has given us snapshots of people and of the surrounding world. But in our passage tonight, another world opens up.

Luke is travelling with his friend Paul. And his story is that of an eyewitness. And as he tells his story, there is a new enemy on the horizon, as it were. Not Jews this time.

Not Romans. Not people hurling stones and wielding whips. No, this time the enemy is nature itself. And the question is whether this new enemy will be able to do what others have failed to do in the book of Acts.

Will this new enemy thwart God's good purpose that Paul preached the gospel in Rome? Well, let's turn to the passage. Let's have a look at what it says. And by the way, as we do this, I want to tell you that tonight I'm going to take a slightly different tack.

[3 : 38] You see, normally we'd work through the passage and I'd try and highlight key elements within the passage that shape its meaning and its meaning for us. Then I'd try and tell you what I think the implications are for us.

Today I want to do something just slightly different. I want to give you a quick run through the passage, simply describing what happens. And I want to then concentrate on the implications of firstly how the book ends.

And then what I want to do is take a sideways look at one element within the text, which is undoubtedly not its main theme. But I want to reflect on it a bit theologically and help us to think it through.

So let's get started and we'll take a quick run through the text. You may like to just follow it quickly with me. It's a great story. It's full of eyewitness detail. Now, and scholars about this passage argue about why Luke has bothered putting it in.

I think it's a great story for a start. And I think it was just too good to tell to not tell that is. And so I think Luke wanted to include it. I think there are other reasons as well. But I think this is a good one.

[4 : 40] Let's we start with this text with a reminder that Paul is a prisoner on his way to Rome on a boat. He's handed over to a Roman centurion with a whole lot of other prisoners.

And the first word in verse two uses the pronoun we, which means that Luke is with him. The last part of verse two mentions an Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica.

So Paul is allowed to have companions. That makes him clearly not an ordinary prisoner, doesn't it? He's someone quite special here. Anyway, the ship is born along the Syrian coast by the current there and covers 69 nautical miles to Sidon in about a day.

According to verse three, Julius the centurion who oversees Paul is gracious to him and allows him to visit friends who provide for his needs. As you can see, again, not a usual prisoner.

On the very next leg of the journey, they strike out to the west. I've given you a diagram there. And they encounter adverse weather. Now, someone in here was talking to me about during the war, I think it was, they had been in the Mediterranean and they had encountered the weather.

[5 : 52] And they told me it was ferocious. So that's just a bit of a life touch from someone here about the weather that can occur in the Mediterranean. Anyway, they have a square rigged vessel and the winds are coming from the west.

That's the direction they want to travel in. And the end result is what they choose to do is to use the island of Cyprus as a shield sailing on its northern side, which faced away from the wind and which also had a current running along the southern coast of Asia Minor.

Anyway, eventually in verse 5, they land at Myra, a regular port of call for grain vessels traveling from Alexandria to Rome. And from here, they catch a lift on a boat that is probably part of the imperial grain fleet.

It's carrying grain. We find that later on. In all likelihood, it's trying to squeeze a second run to Rome before the onset of winter. Now, on the next section of the trip from Myra to Fairhavens in Crete, the same contrary winds accost them.

That's verse 7. And after many days of only succeeding in making progress to Nidus on a promontory in the southwest Asia Minor, they then begin to enter the open sea.

[7 : 02] And then the northerly winds of the Adriatic, they blow against them, preventing them from maintaining their westward course. And again, they use an island, this time Crete, as a shield.

But even then, they only just make it to Fairhavens. We know from Paul's writings and from the rest of the book of Acts that Paul had already in his ministry time traveled some 5,000 kilometers by sea.

So he's probably pretty used to, you know, being in a boat and traveling. He was a seasoned sea traveler. He knew the risks of setting out again at this time. After all, we're told that there's a little telltale sign in the text, the Day of Atonement had passed, which makes it by calculation at least the 6th of October.

September and October were known to be dangerous times for sailing the Mediterranean. All sea travel on the Mediterranean generally ceased in those days between November and March.

It was just too risky to travel at that time. But not only did Paul know the dangers from common knowledge and experience, it appears that God had given him additional insight.

[8 : 07] Look at verse 10. Look at the warning he gives. Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo and to our own lives as well.

Well, in any case, he warns the centurion, the pilot, the owner. The centurion decides to go along with the pilot and the owner, and they decide on a 60 kilometer journey out into the open sea around Cape Matala and onto Phoenix.

Fair Havens was open to the east and therefore left ships unprotected against winter winds. Phoenix, on the other hand, offered more protection for a wintering ship.

And in verse 13, we hear the arrival of the arrival of a gentle south wind. The sailors, you see, remember, it's been a northerly wind and so on. The sailors think they've gained their purpose.

So they weigh anchor and they sail along the shore of Crete. It was probably as they rounded Cape Matala that they entered the winter northeaster. The crew's unable to head the vessel into the wind.

[9 : 10] So they reposition the boat so that at least it won't be struck broadside and be broken apart. You see that in verse 15. The crew then take four steps to cope with their predicament.

In verses 16 and 17, they hoist and secure on deck the ship's dinghy. In verse 17, they undergird the ship with cables that run under its center hull to strengthen the hull against the wave so it's not broken up.

In verse 17, they lower the sea anchor, which would slow the ship's movement from crest to crest and help keep it on course. After a violent battering in verses 18 and 19, they lighten the ship by throwing overboard cargo, as well as that sort of movable gear and tackle that was often on a deck.

But still, they're left at the mercy of the elements. The cloud cover, the darkness of the storm means that they didn't know where they were for many days.

The storm rages. Finally, all hope is abandoned in verse 20. It seems that no one had eaten all of this time. In all likelihood, you can imagine if you were there, anxious.

[10 : 20] Remember how many? There's a couple of hundred. They're anxious. Seasick. The food was either inaccessible because of the motion of the boat or inedible because it could not be cooked or it had been spoiled by salt water.

In any case, Paul stands in the midst in verse 21 and seeks to encourage them. He reminds them that he had warned them in fair havens. It's not a good way to start in some ways, I suppose.

But anyway, but it is it does have a good point to it. The reminder is probably to give them confidence in what he's about to tell them. In other words, he says, I got it right last time, didn't I? So, you know, it's a fair bet.

I'm going to get it right this time as well. He then tells them that no one will be lost, but that the ship will be destroyed and that this information comes from God. In verse 27, we learn that two weeks have passed at this point.

In all likelihood, they have been blown close to 500 nautical miles from the original point. The sailors sense that Lando is close. And so in verse 28, they cast a lead line overboard and they measure depths to confirm it.

[11 : 28] Then they begin to take immediate action to stop the ship's drift toward the coast. That's verse 29. They hurl four anchors from the stern and wait for daybreak.

In verse 29, the sailors have done all that they can and they turn to prayer. So as Cromwell urged, they, you know, very, very many years later, they prayed and kept their powder dry, as it were.

So they did. They did the godly and right thing and they prayed, but they also took practical action. Some of the sailors do a bit more. They seek to escape in verse 30. Paul points out to the centurion that this is happening.

And he issues another warning. And so the soldiers cut the rope. So Paul's carrying a lot of dignity at this point. And the dinghy falls away. All aboard are now going to share the same fate.

Anyway, Paul speaks again in verse 33. Just before the dawn, he says, for the last 14 days, you have been in constant suspense. And have gone without food.

[12 : 30] You haven't eaten anything. Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair on his head. And the ship's company are encouraged and all 267 on board eat their fill before setting about final preparations for the approach to the shore.

And the precious cargo of grain had been of value during the storm. Why? Probably because it served as ballast in the bottom of the boat. Now, however, it may be a hazard that would cause them to run aground.

So they jettison it in verse 38. Before long, they make out a bay with a sandy beach. They cut loose the anchors and they begin to head for the beach. In verse 41, the ship strikes a sandbar, sticks fast and begins to break up.

There's a move to kill the prisoners. But the Roman centurion does what so many Romans had done throughout the book of Acts and rescues Paul. Eventually, all the crew and passengers make it to shore just as Paul had promised.

And you can see that in verse 44. Now, they're now on Malta. The islanders referred to in verse 2, I think, are probably the original islanders.

[13 : 44] They appear to be what was considered uncivilized and uncouth. In verse 2, we're told that they show unusual kindness to the survivors. A fire is started.

Wood is gathered. In the process, Paul dumps a load of wood on the fire. Unfortunately, his load of wood contains a poisonous snake, which then bites him in verse 3.

The superstitious islanders presume, well, the gods missed him out on the sea. They've got him now. Verse 4. This man must be a murderer. For though he escaped from the sea, the goddess Justice has not allowed him to live.

But when Paul doesn't suffer any ill effects, they presume, well, actually, he must be a god then. There's a lot of deductive reasoning going on here. Anyway, Paul is welcomed by the villagers.

He heals quite a number of people. Verses 7 to 10. We're not told whether he engaged in any significant teaching ministry or whether people were converted. Nor are we told how free he is under Roman supervision to even do so.

[14 : 44] But we do know that his healing was done in the context of prayer. And that these prayers undoubtedly were offered in the name of Jesus and conveyed truths about Jesus. After three months of winter, Paul and the others board their third ship now.

And eventually they arrive in Rome. We can only guess at what Paul must have felt as he walked into this city. As it happens, they were met by believers. And as Paul saw them, he thanked his God and was encouraged.

He's finally in Rome. Do you remember when it was? It was predicted way back in chapter 19, 20 that he planned to get to Rome. So it's taken him 10 chapters or so, but now he's there.

He's under guard. In verse 17, he calls together the local Jewish leaders. He informs them of his history in verses 17 to 20. They tell him they've not received any information about him from Judea about him.

They also say that they've heard nothing good about what they call the sect that he is involved with. Nevertheless, they do want to hear from him about it. So meetings arranged.

[15 : 54] Verse 23, Paul witnesses from morning to evening, explaining the kingdom of God to them. From the law of Moses and the prophets, he tries to persuade them about Jesus.

So he uses their Bible and his Bible. Some are convinced. Others are not. There is a division. And then Paul makes this final statement. See it there in verses 25 to 28.

And we'll read the whole lot. They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made his final statement. He said, the Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah, the prophet, go to this people and say, you will be ever hearing.

But never understanding. You will be ever seeing. But never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused. They hardly hear with their ears and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn. And I would heal them. Therefore, I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles.

[17 : 02] And they will listen. Then in verses 30 to 31, he proclaims the kingdom of God, talks about the Lord Jesus with all boldness and without hindrance in the center of the Roman Empire for two whole years.

And we're not told of what happens after that. These closing verses reiterate what we've heard all the way through Acts. You see, while some Jews respond positively to the gospel, most reject it.

This is to be expected. You see, it was prophesied to be thus in the Old Testament. Despite that, though, the gospel marches on and continues to be proclaimed.

And Jews must hear. But the gospel is not curtailed by Jewish hard-heartedness. It is to go throughout the world. It will go to all the world.

For it is the power to bring salvation to all who believe. First the Jew, then the Gentile. Paul in Rome is the promise that the whole world, Jew and Gentile alike, is now potentially exposed to the gospel.

[18 : 13] What God had intended in Genesis 1 to 11 is now on view. That's why I think, you see, Genesis, the whole of Scripture starts with Genesis 1 to 11, which has no Jews in it, as it were.

Because what's on view for God is the whole world. Then he calls Abraham as the means for blessing that whole world.

The end of the earth, though, is God's goal in Genesis 1 and his goal, I think, in Genesis 12. It is reiterated in Acts 1.

That the gospel would go to the ends of the earth. And now in Rome, it is very much within reach. God has been faithful to his intention and his promises from the beginning.

Now, friends, with all of that said, let me now turn and do some sideways reflecting on God and nature. The story in Acts 27 and 8 has something strange about it.

[19 : 17] Did you notice it as we read through it? After all, first, we know that God is the creator, don't we? Genesis 1 tells us that. The rest of the Bible rests on this and confirms it.

All Christian faith is grounded on this truth. Second, we know, don't we, that God stands over nature and controls it and governs it. You read anywhere in Scripture and you can see him doing it.

We know this from multiple places in Old and New Testaments. Places such as Job 38 to 41, Psalm 104. This is what makes God God, isn't it?

He is a creator, sovereign over his creation. Three, we know that God controlled nature in and through his son, Jesus. We see it in places such as where Jesus stills the storm or heals someone with a congenital illness.

He controls nature and oversees it. And fourth, we know that Paul is on a mission instigated by God and from God.

[20 : 19] We've seen this in Acts 9 and after. We've heard Jesus tell Paul in Acts 23, 11 that he will testify to him in Jerusalem and also in Rome.

So we know that Paul is on this journey because God sent him and God has a goal for him. He is not running away from God or God's commission as Jonah did before him.

God's commission is very important. Paul is a very important man obeying God. But nature is not quelled. It is allowed to run its course.

And that course is violent, oppressive and dangerous. It is almost as though nature is set against Paul. So what do we make of this? What do we do when we see this and read about it?

Well, it seems to me that as I ponder these questions, it throws up at least a couple of possible answers for me. The first possible answer is to say that the Bible's teaching is false at this point.

[21 : 19] That is, God is really not in control. He's not sovereign. He really doesn't stand over the world and its forces and control them.

And that answer, I think, is an increasingly popular and common one in our day. It is all just an accident. It's one, you see, that has massive...

If you come to that conclusion, it has massive implications to see if God is not in control, then no one is. We are therefore under control of what might seem blind fate.

We're in a world without purpose. A world here by accident. A world whose future will be determined by accident. An unfriendly world in the end. A world where we can try to control things as best as we can.

But a world where we must finally just grin and bear these random things that come to us. Let's test this out from our passage.

[22 : 19] Let's think about it and make three observations. Here they are. First, let's think about the incident with the snake. Acts 28, 1 to 6. The presentation is that what happens there is a miracle.

It's not actually said in those words, but clearly that's the intention. It is an intervention by God in a world of nature. A demonstration by God that he can control nature and that he does control nature.

Second, let's remember about the language of Paul that we heard throughout the boat journey. Do you remember as the boat journey goes on? Third, let's remember how things turn out.

You see, everything turns out, doesn't it? As God and Paul had announced. Everyone is kept safe. Paul makes it to Rome. And as Jesus promised, he testifies about Jesus in Rome.

Friends, the Old Testament is very clear in places like Isaiah and elsewhere, particularly Isaiah 40 to 55. It says that the mark of a true God is that he announces things beforehand and then makes sure that they happen.

[23 : 40] And that's how you can tell he's true. Announcements beforehand, followed by their fulfillment, are indicators that nature and history and human wills stand under the announcer's hand.

They are under God's control. So our first answer is really not supported by this story. In this story, God is very much in control. And there are signs of that throughout the narrative.

Things are not just random. They are rather under the hand and guidance and control of a real God. And that brings us to the second answer. In the face of the questions posed earlier and by the narrative, we might answer that God is in control, but that he does allow the forces of nature to continue almost unabated.

Let me say it again. And one answer to the questions posed is that God is in control, but he allows the forces of nature to continue at work. That is, they're allowed to, as it were, run their course.

And there are elements in our story that might seem to indicate this, aren't there? Are the storm brews? As it brews often at this time in this particular part of the world, and as one of our members has encountered.

[24 : 54] It blows the same way as it usually blows. It pushes ships in the same way it always does. It's still happening in this last century as it did 20 centuries ago.

It pushes ships in the same way. Now, if we take that on board, it has implications, just as our first answer did. You see, first, since God is in control of nature and can control nature, he will often be found to be using it for his good purpose, won't he?

And that purpose may involve his people. It may mean good for them, or it may mean things not so good for them. A storm, you see, may cause a reluctant prophet to be cast into the sea, Jonah.

Or it may cause a willing apostle to be cast up upon the coast of Malta, where he might heal a sick and witness to Jesus. Or a Christian's untimely death or disability might even be part of the ongoing processes of the gospel.

A second implication may go along these lines. If what I posited is true, then there's no necessary reason for Christians to expect that they will necessarily be kept safe from the forces of nature.

[26 : 17] Is there? A lightning and hail? Snow and sandstorm? Sun and storm, blizzard and drought? Such things have always done the Creator's bidding in his great cosmic plan and purpose in our world and our universe.

They are not necessarily withdrawn, tamed or retained for the sake of Christians or in order to guarantee their safe passage. A third implication flows on for Christian missionaries and ministers.

On the one hand, you see, Christian missionaries can, and I only use this because I think often you hear these things said. On the one hand, Christian missionaries can expect opposition from people of the world as they speak what the world doesn't want to hear.

That is, they can expect what they're experiencing all throughout the world in these days. Persecution, difficulties and death. But they can also expect the normal, natural events to treat them in the same way as everyone else.

Storms will still come when you're a very important missionary on a very important mission from God. So may starvation. So may seasickness and shipwreck.

[27 : 29] And you may not be rescued from the snake right at the end. However, I need to say there is one strong caveat that I have to make. And that caveat is present in this text.

Do you remember it? This text tells us that sometimes God does intervene in the natural world. He does break in and stop nature's usual process.

We see this here with the snake. You see, snakes bite in the ancient world just like they do in ours. They bite, their bites often wound and heal and kill.

Especially snakes like the ones in Acts 28. And not so though in Paul's case, is it? You see, God chooses to stop the effect of the snake.

He doesn't have to. And he may not in other circumstances. But he does here. And you see here that he wants to preserve a gospel man for Rome and gospel proclamation. That's what he has intended.

[28 : 29] And what he's proclaimed. And perhaps he wants to open a gospel door in Malta. I wonder if you can see the point that I'm saying. God is sovereign over all his creation.

Nevertheless, the Christian is not promised that nature will not touch or harm us. So what assurances can we have in this world that at times look so out of control?

Well, let me tell you, we can be sure of what Romans 8.28 assures us. We might like to turn to Romans 8. Turn to Romans 8. And Romans 8.28 is a very well-known verse.

So Romans 8.28. What we can be sure of, these are the assurances we can have. That in all these things, that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose.

That is, he will work so that those whom he foreknew, he will also predestine to be conformed to the image of his son. I guess he could even use the natural forces of this world to do that.

[29 : 36] Those he predestined, he also called. Those he called, he also justified. And those he justified, he will also glorify. But there's more, you see. Read on. We can also be sure that nothing will separate us from God's love for us.

You see, if God is for us, who can be against us? And that's what Paul goes on to say in Romans 8.31-39. He says, nothing shall separate us from God and his love for us and his purposes for us.

Not nature. Not spiritual forces. Not demonic forces. Not the present. Not the future. Nothing in creation. We'll be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nothing. And that's really what counts, isn't it? Not whether a storm swallows us up or whether a car accident happens to us or we're in a bushfire in the wrong place at the wrong time.

What really matters is nothing will separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord and God's purposes for us as his chosen, redeemed, sanctified, justified people.

[30 : 49] You see, my perception is that many Christians often seem to speak and live as though God owes them something. He is a good God, which we know. He is a great God, which we also know.

We know he controls all the world. And we know that we are his people. And therefore a lot of Christians, the lot of Christians should be a good lot. Good things from nature.

Good health. Success in business and in life. Success in occupations. Financial health and wealth. And there are a whole sects of Christianity that bargain on that and that sell it, particularly through Asia and Southeast Asia and Africa.

But we're not immune to it. But friends, God does not promise these things. And that poses a question.

What do we do when confronted by forces that work in our world that sometimes seem out of control, like natural forces? I've got five suggestions for us tonight, which you might like to contemplate. The first is this.

[31 : 57] Realise this. That these forces are part of the world, a part of the world that God places us in to be rulers over. Having realised, we ought to do what we can to harness and subdue these forces for the good of human beings.

Hence, we Christians should work at using, I guess, wind to turn windmills and draw water, electricity to turn electricity, you know, to use the forces of nature to turn electricity into light.

We should use atomic energy to use for power, for good things. And we should use every part of the created order to accomplish good things for God, where God has given us rule over it.

That is entirely right. It is a right thing for Christians to be doing. It is a godly thing to be doing. These forces are part of the world, and God has placed us as rulers over them.

We should use them for good and for right. However, we should realise something else as well. We should realise that nature will still, at times, be violent.

[33 : 11] We should realise, it will still, apparently, at times, be apparently uncontrolled. Storms will still come. Volcanoes will still erupt.

Hurricanes will still tear up cities. Fires will still devastate. Treat whole cities. And since nature will never be tamed and harnessed, treat it with respect.

Paul does this in our passage. He knows it is foolish to travel on the sea at certain times. Did you notice that? He warned people against it.

It's just silly. Well, he didn't use those words, but that's what he was saying. He said, don't do it. He does the wise thing. He says, he urges people, do the same.

Don't travel at this time of year. That's not the right time. So should we. We should do the wise thing. We should act rightly in this world, which is a risky place to live, so we won't light fires on total fire band days.

[34 : 12] In fact, we as Christians will go even further. We won't do stupid things with fire, even if it's not a total fire band day. Because we want to treat God's world responsibly and well.

We will not treat nature with ignore. Next thing, we should realize that God does use nature for his purposes, but that nature is not our judge.

You see, as I'm indicating, the Bible tells us that God does use nature. He used it to judge his people and to judge pagan people. You can read much about this in the Old and the New Testaments.

But we don't know his will. And therefore, friends, if I might say this, we need to be very careful in pronouncing it. We will often misread God's actions in nature.

Let me give you a classic case of three men who got it terribly, terribly wrong. The friends of Job, when they saw his illness. It looked like a natural illness.

[35 : 15] And they made pronouncements about what it meant. And they were wrong. And we will often get it wrong. We will often have no grounds for reading from nature to God.

And if we do, we will often get it wrong. We see this with the islanders at Malta, don't we? They're doing it, and they get it wrong.

Then they get it wrong again, so they try again. Acts of nature, either miraculous or natural, may or may not be acts of God.

Well, they're all acts of God, but you know what I mean. But they may or can also be easily misread. Therefore, don't be too hasty to read from them to God.

Nature is not our judge. God is, and his judgment is pronounced, not in his acts in nature necessarily, but pronounced in the gospel and in the world. Fourth, we should realize that God and his gospel will triumph over nature.

[36 : 16] See, the natural forces of this world cannot stop the gospel. It may cause the ministers of the gospel difficulty, as it did with Paul. At times, it may even cause them death.

But whatever it does is within God's hands. If God doesn't want his people and his ministers stopped by nature, they will not be. And his cause of the gospel will push on despite nature.

God has promised this. God will make it happen. He's the sovereign God of all the earth. So, can you see what I'm saying? Paul being in Rome is because God has not only worked through Jews set against him, Romans, who are at the beck and call of others, or the forces of nature, nothing of that.

None of the things that happened from chapter 19 through to chapter 28 will stop the gospel getting to Rome if God wants the gospel in Rome in the person of Paul.

Nothing. Nothing. God wants it to happen. He will cause whatever is needed to happen so that it might happen. He's the sovereign God of all the earth.

[37 : 32] He controls it all. So, I wonder whether that's part of what Luke is doing in recording this event. I wonder whether part of it, perhaps not the main part of it, but a significant part of it, is saying God has a purpose and nothing.

No Jewish authorities, no Roman authorities, no creational forces are going to stop that purpose being fulfilled. It will march on, for it is God's purpose.

And the last thing. My final point on this is that we should realize that faith in God will enable us in the face of these things to be calm and wise. You see, the point is that we believe that God is sovereign and that nothing that happens in the world of nature is out of his control.

And if nothing is out of his control, then we need not fear. Oh, we can worry. We can be concerned.

We can go and see doctors. We can do all of those things which are entirely right. But if nothing is out of his control, we need not fear. For the perfect love that is evident in the cross of Christ and in the giving of God's Son for us casts out fear, friends.

[38 : 54] We need not fear. We can, however, give ourselves to sober thought and calm insight. And we see this with Paul in a number of passages in this story. Chapter 27, verse 30.

Verses 35 to 36. We've seen it in Paul time and time again in Acts. You see, Paul knows that God loves him. He knows because God has sent his only Son to be an atoning sacrifice for his sin.

And Paul knows that if God loves him, nothing can do him any eternal damage. Therefore, he can sing in jail, Acts 16.

He can be calm in a storm while everyone else is losing their cool and being foolish. Such quiet confidence in God is a demonstration of a deep faith in the God of the Bible.

Can you hear that? A deep faith in the God of the Bible who oversees all the world. And in the God who reveals himself in Jesus. Friends, we need to have that sort of faith.

[39 : 59] I see it often in those dying. And I see it often in those grappling with the enigmas of life. But we need to have that sort of faith. And we need to train ourselves to think this way and act this way.

And we will train ourselves to think and act this way as we meditate and think upon the scriptures. And take them on board. And understand the great theological things that are being said there.

And then apply them to our lives. Let's train ourselves to think this way and act this way. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for this almost sideways glimpse of Paul.

As Luke observes him and writes down what he sees and observes you at work in your world and writes down what he sees. Thank you that we can reflect upon it and learn great things.

But Father, even as we do this, please help us to remember where this book ends. Thank you, Father, that in weakness you can be strong.

[41 : 21] We know this because we have seen you do this in the cross. And so we thank you for this. And we thank you that even in our weakness you can show your strength to your world.

We thank you for this. In Jesus' name. Amen.