“God Will Make A Way”

8/27/2017

Philippians 2:5-15

Please take your Bible with me and open to Acts 23.

The story is told of a drunk who got lost in the Evans City graveyard late one night on his way home from the bar. The grave diggers had finished digging their six feet deep hole and had, somehow, left an open grave for a funeral the next day. As the drunk was walking through the cemetery he fell into the grave. Laying in the bottom of the grave he decided to try to get out. It was so dark.

He first tried to jump out. That didn’t work. He then, tried to climb out and the muddy sides would just not let him out. Each time he attempted to get out, he would fall back down to the bottom of the grave. Finally he saw it was hopeless and he quit trying. He decided he would just sit in the corner of the grave hole and wait for morning to come, hoping someone might find him and rescue him.

A few hours later another drunk came walking through the dark graveyard and, wouldn't you know it? He fell into the same grave. He tried the same procedure to climb out. He tried everything he knew to do. But he too was trapped in a six foot deep grave. Finally, he decided to quit trying. And he started to sit down in a corner.

Just them the other drunk, already sitting in the same corner said: *“I see you can’t get out either. Guess we’re trapped here till morning.”* Immediately the second drunk, upon hearing the voice, thinking it was a dead man, sobered up and launched himself out of that muddy grave. He ran the entire twenty miles to his home and fell onto his front porch. His wife came out and said *“It looks like you’ve seen a ghost.”* He responded, *“You would not believe me if I told you what happened to me.”*

Sometimes in life we just need a little extra motivation to get us out of the rut into which we’ve fallen. [Found on [www.sermoncentral.com](http://www.sermoncentral.com) in a sermon “Shake It Off” by Pastor Wade M. Hughes, Sr. on December 3, 2014].

Today’s topic isn’t motivation, although we all need it. It’s encouragement; specifically, the LORD’s encouragement. One of my favorite writers is Pastor John Piper. Here are his words on encouragement. *“God goes the second (and third and fourth) mile for us to feel encouraged.”*

In the Williams translation of the NT, we read this in Hebrews 6:13 *“For when God made His promise to Abraham, He took an oath by Himself, since He had no one greater by whom He could take it, (14) saying: “I will certainly bless you over and over again, I will extensively increase your numbers.” (15) And so by patiently waiting he obtained what God had promised him.*

*(16) For it is a custom among men to take oath by something greater than themselves, and an oath taken for confirmation settles any dispute among them. (17) Therefore, because God wanted to make the strongest demonstration of the unchangeable character of His purpose, He interposed with an oath,*

*(18) so that by these two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to prove false, we who have taken refuge with Him* ***may have encouragement strong enough*** *to make us seize upon the hope that lies ahead of us.*

*(19) This hope we have as an anchor for our souls, secure and safe, which reaches up behind the heavenly veil, (20) where Jesus has blazed the way for us and became a High Priest with the rank of Melchizedek.”*

How can you keep going when you can’t see the way ahead and you are asking “how can this possibly work out well?”

Martin Luther King once said “We must have the faith that things will work out somehow, that God will make a way for us when there seems no way.”

I’ve titled today’s message “God Will Make A Way.” Shall we pray?

Acts, as you know, is divided into two halves; two main sections. The first half, Acts 1-12, presents the life and ministry of the Apostle Peter. The second half, Acts 13-28 presents the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul.

Our present study, Acts 23 is part of Acts 22-26, where we find Paul having to publicly stand and defend himself. And five times you will see him defending himself before large groups.

Acts 22 – he defends himself before a crowd in Jerusalem

Acts 23 – he defends himself before the Sanhedrim (Scribes and Pharisees)

Acts 24 – he’s before Felix, the Roman Governor of Judea.

Acts 25 – he’s before Festus, the Governor of Judea after Felix died.

Acts 26 – he’s before Herod Agrippa II, King over Judea.

Difficult circumstances; everyone everywhere faces difficult circumstances at times. Acts 23 is one of many times the Apostle Paul faced people who simply didn’t like him or want him around.

So, let’s ask this question. What can you do when you are faced with such things? I hope and I’ve prayed that what I have to say today will be a benefit and a blessing. Here’s what’s on my heart today.

First, none of us are immune to the deep waters of life, to painful circumstances, and sometimes difficult people. I don’t think anyone in history ever liked the deep waters, the painful times, or the difficult people. So, we aren’t immune. But we don’t have to like it.

But, generally, when we find ourselves in problematic circumstances, we simply want out. And, I’m sure that Paul wanted out this day. Here in Acts 23 we find him standing before the Sadducees and Pharisees.

Here’s Acts 23:1 *“And Paul, earnestly beholding the council [the Jewish Sanhedrim], said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. (2) And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. (3) Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: [hypocrite] for sittest thou to judge me after*

*the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? (4) And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? (5) Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.*

*(6) But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. (7) And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.*

*(8) For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. (9) And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.*

*(10) And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.”*

Some commentators and preachers have found this a bit humorous; to think that Paul could get his accusers to disagree with each other and got him out of his predicament. But, this was probably a whole lot more serious; especially in light of verse seven. Acts 23:7 *“And when he had so said,* ***there arose a dissension*** *between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.”*

And then Acts 23:10*“And when* ***there arose a great dissension****, the chief captain, fearing* ***lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces*** *of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.”*

Had it not been for Lysias, the Roman Chief Captain, Paul might have lost his life that day.

Some people face panic attacks. Some people struggle with finances and some with self-image. Or, even, finances or health issues. But, when it comes to deep waters or even people who oppose us, we’re all alike. We often can’t see how it can turn out for good or how it will be for our benefit. We’ve all been there. I certainly have.

Jim and Jennifer Stolpa couldn’t see how their circumstances could have been worse or that things would ever work out for them.

Both twenty-one years of age, married, Jim and Jennifer Stolpa started out from California with the five month old baby boy. It was the winter of 1993. They were heading for Idaho to attend the funeral of a grandparent. But as they started across the Nevada desert a blizzard hit and shut down numerous roads, including Interstate 80. They decided to continue on and so they began to follow a map that showed some smaller roads to get through Nevada.

But very soon they were stranded in the snow. The next four days were spent in their car in the snow, hoping for a rescue; a rescue which never came. Finally, after the fourth day, they decided to walk the twenty miles back to where they remembered a larger road, Route 140.

The bundled themselves and their baby boy up and started walking through hip-deep snow. They walked all night only to find in the morning there was no Route 140; at least it wasn’t where they thought it would be.

They decided to return to the truck. They never made it back to the truck. Instead, Jennifer Stolpa, with her five month old son, wedged into a small cave, while Jim chose to walk the rest of the way back to the truck. He told his wife he was going for help*. “It was tough to leave them, but I had to,”* Jim says*. “There wasn’t any other way.”*

*“Saying goodbye to him was the scariest thing in the whole world,”* Jennifer remembers. *“I didn’t know if that was going to be the last time I’d ever see him.”* Promising he would get help within three days, Jim kissed his wife and child goodbye. Jennifer didn’t want to watch him go. But she heard him shout. *“I’ll make it. Jennifer, I know I’ll make it!”*

He walked back to the truck and then another fourteen miles through one more freezing, blustery night. The next morning Jim thought he saw something like a road. And on the road, he thought he saw a truck coming towards him. He began shouting and waving his arms, though he was extremely tired.

Somehow, after having trekked 85 miles through the snow, he was rescued. He told his rescuer where to find his wife and the family. And all three were saved. [Found on [www.people.com](http://www.people.com) and adapted from “Staying Alive” by Pam Lambert February 8, 1993].

All of you have been in some of the most difficult circumstances where you couldn’t see any way out. Yet, you came through it and you are here today by God’s grace.

First, none of us are immune to painful experiences and the deep waters of life.

Second, as I read and re-read Paul’s story of his time before the Sanhedrim, I think I now know the reason why he was having such a difficult time with the Sanhedrim. I also think it’s the same problem we often face today. Whenever you stand for something, you will face a measure of opposition.

Winston Churchill put it like this. *“You have enemies? Good. That means you’ve stood up for something, sometime in your life.”*

Now Churchill was likely referring to political and national matters. But doesn’t the same thing hold true for spiritual things? Is it possible to stand for the truth and not face opposition? Is it possible to live before people in good conscience, have even the purest of motives and not face opposition? Here’s Paul simply telling the truth. He said *“*…*Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.”*

Would you agree with me that Paul was likely wishing he didn’t have to deal with the Sanhedrim? But he did. He stood for something worth living for, even in the face of opposition. You too, like Paul, have wished you did not have to undergo the things you do. But in case after case, you’ve stood for what is right and, because of it, you’ve faced opposition.

First, none of us are immune to the deep waters of life, painful circumstances, and difficult people.

Second, whenever you stand for something, you will face a measure of opposition.

Third, what does the LORD do about it? Now, it appears as if Paul had a lot of courage. But, that may not be completely true.

Here’s what He did for Paul. Look with me at Acts 23:11 *“And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.”*

What does the LORD do? What has the LORD been known to do? He stands with us. And He encourages us. He stands by us when we’re down. He encourages us when we think about quitting. And He guides us when things seem confusing.

Don’t worry. God is never blind to your tears, never deaf to your prayers, and never silent to your pains. He sees, He hears, and He will deliver.

If there’s one thing you want *and* need more than anything when you are in the midst of your enemies, it’s the LORD’s presence and His comfort.

Acts 23 just might be Paul’s own testimony to what he would later write to the Hebrews when they were facing some who opposed them. Hebrews 13:5 *“for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”*

And from the OT, we read this about God’s love and concern for Israel. Isaiah 43:1 *“But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.*

*(2) When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. (3) For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: … (5) Fear not: for I am with thee: …”*

These are the promises of God. Can you think of a time in your life when you had to face an extremely difficult situation? And did the LORD provide His presence and His comfort to you?

That’s His promise. Your calling is to rely on those promises.

First, none of us are immune to the deep waters of life, painful circumstances, and difficult people.

Second, whenever you stand for something, you will face a measure of opposition.

Third, the LORD provides His presence and His encouragement.

Fourth, then, what can you do? You can remind yourself, not of what you can’t do, but what He can do. And, what can God do?

He can make a way through the wilderness and cause streams to rise up, bringing refreshing even in the desert times.

He can split the sea, move mountains, or any barrier before us, and allow us to walk through on dry ground.

He can conquer any giant, and bring victory to His children.

He can close the mouths of lions, providing safety.

He can open prison doors, setting us free.

He can protect us from the flames of adversity.

He can carry us through any storm.

He’s the God of miracles. He never changes. For He’s the same yesterday, today, and forever. [Found on [www.crosswalk.com](http://www.crosswalk.com) “God Will Make A Way When There Seems To Be No Way” by Debbie McDaniel.

In conclusion, I want to tell you the history behind the hymn I’d like you to sing with me in just a moment.

A tragedy of epic proportions was the background for the writing of Don Moen’s most influential song. Don tells this story behind his song:

“My wife’s sister Susan and her husband, Dr. Craig Phelps, were involved in a car accident during a ski trip they were taking from their home in Oklahoma to a resort in Colorado. Way out in the Texas panhandle an 18 wheeler hit a rear panel of their van with such force that all four of their children were thrown out.”

“The children had just left their seats, where they were buckled in, to lay down for a nap on a ‘bed’ positioned in the rear of the van. In the darkness and the shadows only the crying of their severely injured children made it possible for mom and dad to find them — all except one. They finally located Jeremy, lying by a nearby fence. He was already dead. His neck had been broken.”

“Craig, a medical doctor, picked his son up and tried to revive him, but God said to him, *“Jeremy is with me. You deal with those who are living.”* And so they sat for 45 minutes, out in the wilderness, waiting for an ambulance.”

Don continued, “They asked me to sing at the funeral, so I boarded a plane the next day, March 19, 1987, and headed for Oklahoma. As I sat on the plane, wondering what I should say to them, I began to read in the book of Isaiah. My eyes went to chapter 43, verse 19, *“... I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.”* Instantly, the Lord gave me a song to sing to them. I sketched it out on a legal pad, intending to sing it at the funeral. However, they had already planned to ask me to sing another song, so I sang their request instead.”

“After the funeral, I was sitting with them, holding them in my arms. I cried with them, and through my tears I said, “The Lord gave me a song for you.” And I began singing...

God will make a way

Where there seems to be no way...

Don continued, “I made a taped copy of the song for Susan. I knew that when all of the people had gone, and everything was said and done, there would be days when she needed to hear that God was working in ways that she couldn’t see.”

He works in ways we cannot see,

He will make a way for me.

Susan, Jeremy’s mother, later related how she made a quick decision between the time she got out of the van and the time they found her son. She made a choice between becoming bitter and angry or accepting God’s plan for their family at that time. She agreed that God really did make a way for them during the dark tragedy.

*“...I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.”* - Isaiah 43:19 [Found on [www.staugustine.com](http://www.staugustine.com) “God Will Make A Way” by Lindsay Terry from August 6, 2015 (the story is from March 1987)].

I know it’s hard for us to accept the ways of God when we just don’t understand the what and the why. But, He really is on the Throne of heaven. And He really is able to make a way when we think there is no way.

So, I would like us to sing this song in just a moment. But, last, there might be someone here who’s never found the LORD Jesus as Savior and LORD. Well, if you’ve never repented and received Jesus Christ as your Savior, today is the day you need that.

What do you need to do? Today you need to Repent and to Believe.

* To Repent = I change my mind about God, Christ, my sin, and God’s free gift of salvation.
* To Believe = I simply trust Jesus Christ alone as the One Who paid the entire penalty for my sins.

Here’s the Salvation Prayer*. “LORD, I admit that I am a sinner and deserve judgment for my sins. I believe Jesus died in my place on the Cross to remove that judgment. Please save me today. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”*

Shall we pray?

Hymn # 704 “God Will Make A Way” by Don Moen