

# Peace Under Pressure

## Acts 23:12-35

### Sermon Handout

"Humanly speaking, there shouldn't have been a local church in that area of the world—and certainly not in that forest. But there I was, listening to a new generation of pilgrims praising God under the cover of trees." Dr. Ryan Currie

We need to learn to expect Christ to show up in hard places and among resistant peoples.

"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted." Job 42:2

Having peace and calm in a hostile and highly anxious world is a clear and powerful testimony of the transforming power of the gospel.

### **1. Remember: He is Sovereign Over All. Chaos Doesn't Reign. Christ Does. Acts 23:12-35**

"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. There were more than forty 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.'" Acts 23:12-14

We live in age of conspiracy theories and it fills many people with anxiety or anger. It serves us well to remember: Jesus is King over conspiracies. He is never caught off guard or out-manuevered.

"While Jesus vowed not to eat or to drink again until his death on behalf of his enemies, these men vow not to eat or drink until death finds their enemy (Mark 14:25)." Patrick Schreiner

"Why do the nations rage  
and the peoples plot in vain?

The kings of the earth set themselves,  
and the rulers take counsel together,  
against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying,  
'Let us burst their bonds apart

and cast away their cords from us.’  
He who sits in the heavens laughs;  
the Lord holds them in derision.  
Then he will speak to them in his wrath,  
and terrify them in his fury, saying,  
‘As for me, I have set my King  
on Zion, my holy hill.’”  
Psalm 2:1-5

“But for all those who do trust in Christ, Psalm 2 offers a world of comfort and consolation as it delights in God’s sovereignty, and his sure and certain promise to his Son, the King, Jesus. No matter what is happening in your life, your God is in charge and he has made a promise that Jesus has fulfilled and that you can rely on. Jesus is risen. God has declared him King. Nothing can thwart his rule, or his purposes of grace. You can count on it.” Ligon Duncan

“A wild chief followed me around for four hours with his loaded musket, and, though often directed towards me, God restrained his hand. I spoke kindly to him, and attended to my work as if he had not been there, fully persuaded that my God had placed me there, and would protect me till my allotted task was finished. Looking up in unceasing prayer to our dear Lord Jesus, I left all in his hands, and felt immortal till my work was done.” John Paton

## **2. He Sees All Things: Nothing is Hidden from King Jesus. Acts 23:16-22**

“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.’” Acts 23:16-18

“If the Lord be with us, we have no cause of fear. His eye is upon us, His arm over us, His ear open to our prayer—His grace sufficient, His promise unchangeable.” John Newton

“An anonymous youth prevents death, not the apostolic leaders on their thrones. How many times does the church also undersell the impact a youth can have? This shows how God likes to work in the most surprising ways to accomplish his plans.” Patrick Schreiner

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” Deuteronomy 29:29

“My heart rose up to the Lord Jesus; I saw Him watching all the scene. My peace came back to me like a wave from God. I realized that I was immortal till my Master's work with me was done. The assurance came to me, as if a voice out of Heaven had spoken, that not a musket would be fired to wound us, not a club prevail to strike us, not a spear leave the hand in which it was held vibrating to be thrown, not an arrow leave the bow, or a killing stone the fingers, without the permission of Jesus Christ, whose is all power in Heaven and on Earth. He rules all Nature, animate and inanimate, and restrains even the Savage of the South Seas.” John Paton

“When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, ‘Alas, my master! What shall we do?’ He said, ‘Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.’ Then Elisha prayed and said, ‘O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.’ So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” 2 Kings 6:15-17

### **3. He is our Shield: Christ Has Covenanted to Care For Us. Acts 23:23-35**

"But you, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head." Psalm 3:3

“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.’” Acts 23:23-24

- Physical Assassins: Paul is protected from his would-be physical assassins. (Acts 23:23-24)
- Character Assassins: Paul is protected from his would-be character assassins. (Acts 23:27-29)
- Missional Assassins: Paul is protected from his would-be missional assassins. (Acts 23:34-35)

"Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." 1 Peter 5:7

One of the most powerful witnesses to the reality of the resurrected Christ is believers having peace in calm in a hostile and chaotic world being assured that "if God is for us, who can be against us?"

## Group Study Questions – *Peace Under Pressure (Acts 23:12–35)*

1. In Acts 23:12–15, a serious conspiracy forms against Paul. How does this passage challenge the way we typically respond to fear, uncertainty, or “conspiracies” in our own lives?
2. The lesson says, “*Chaos doesn't reign. Christ does.*” Where do you most struggle to believe that right now, and why?
3. Reflect on **Psalm 2:1–5**. How does God’s response to human plotting reshape your perspective on world events or personal trials?
4. The quote from John Paton describes feeling “immortal till my work was done.” What do you think that means practically? Do you find that idea comforting or difficult?
5. In Acts 23:16–22, God uses an unnamed young man to expose the plot. What does this teach us about how God works through unexpected or overlooked people?
6. How can remembering that “*nothing is hidden from King Jesus*” (Hebrews 4:13 conceptually) bring both comfort and conviction in your daily life?
7. The story of Elisha in 2 Kings 6:15–17 shows a hidden spiritual reality. What “unseen realities” might we forget when we face anxiety or pressure?
8. The lesson describes Christ as our **shield** (Psalm 3:3). In what ways have you experienced God’s protection—physically, relationally, or spiritually?
9. The handout mentions *physical, character, and missional* “assassins.” Which of these feels most relevant to your life right now, and how can you trust Christ in that area?
10. One key takeaway is that peace under pressure is a powerful testimony. What would it look like for you to visibly demonstrate gospel-shaped peace in a current stressful situation?