

Text: Acts 23:12-35  
Target audience: All  
Topic: God's sovereignty  
Theme: God NEVER fails to accomplish his plan  
My purpose for this message: To encourage people to trust God.  
Delivered: May 1, 2005 @ KEFC

## The Pawns of God

Pity the person who is a pawn: Children used by parents in custody battles; or the poor used by the politicians in election year. The term comes from the chess piece. In a chess match each player has a row of pawns. Unlike the other pieces, these can only move forward. To some players pawns are little more than cannon fodder and they sacrifice them with little regret. But the chessmaster uses them to shrewdly chip away at opposing forces as well as protect his own, more potent pieces; he uses them to carry out his master plan.

People want to run their own show; don't want to be pawns. However, the show is floundering. The National Institute of Mental Health has named anxiety the nation's #1 mental health issue, affecting 19 million Americans with this or that toxic mix of fear and worry. Which is being passed on to offspring. In the Nov/Dec., 2004 issue of *Psychology Today*, author Hara Marano writes...

*Maybe it's the cyclist in the park, trim under his sleek metallic blue helmet, cruising along the dirt path... at 3 miles an hour. On his tricycle.*

*Or perhaps it's today's playground, all-rubber-cushioned surface where kids used to skin their knees. And...wait a minute...those aren't little kids playing. Their mommies—and especially their daddies—are in there with them, coplaying or play-by-play coaching. Few take it easy on the perimeter benches, as parents used to do, letting the kids figure things out for themselves.*

*Then there are the sanitizing gels, with which over a third of parents now send their kids to school, according to a recent survey. Presumably, parents now worry that school bathrooms are not good enough for their children.*

Doesn't it seem that the very people who wanted to be the chessmasters of their lives are less than confident of running the board? And their children mimic their uncertainty.

This message is titled *The Pawns of God* because God moves every person in the universe to conform to his perfect plan. He moves people here, He moves them there. People believing that what they're doing is exclusively carrying out *their* plans, oblivious to the fact that they are carrying out *His*. Please turn to Prov.16:9. READ. You say, well, then what about evil; if God is always carrying out his plan, is evil part of it? That's a different sermon! For today, I want to show how intentionally God accomplishes His plans, whether people know it or not.

If we often miss seeing God's plan enacted through our words and conduct, books of history like Acts help us see better. For this is a history not just of Peter, Paul, of the early church, but of the stunning work of God. READ Acts 23:12-35.

PRAY.

Story:

Middle of Acts 21-middle of Acts 23 covers about 5-6 days. Intense, harrowing days for Paul: a mob tried to kill him, he was arrested and imprisoned, narrowly escaped Roman torture, questioned by the Jewish Sanhedrin and slapped, finally rescued by the military after the meeting turned ugly. Now, back in protective custody, Paul is ignorant of a deadly scheme forming.

Over 40 Jewish fanatics vow before God not to eat or drink until they've killed Paul. A nephew hears about it. (Apart from Acts 23:6 where he mentions his father, this is only NT reference to members of Paul's family. With his dad a Pharisee, it's likely he'd convinced the rest of the family to sever ties with Paul [Phil.3:8].)

The nephew warned Paul, and then the commander, who took the report very seriously. He immediately made plans to get Paul out of Jerusalem—a step he would have taken sooner or later. For his job was to keep the peace and Paul's presence jeopardized that. And, Paul needed to be examined, and the tribune was a policeman, not a judge. He sent a letter to the procurator Felix, giving background to the problem, and doctoring the facts in his favor just a bit. Under cover of darkness, 470 soldiers spirited Paul away. Arriving safely in Antipatris 35 miles away, the cavalry took Paul the remaining 27 miles and the infantry returned to Jerusalem.

God used 520-550 men as pawns: Garrison commander Claudius Lysias, 470 soldiers, the high priest Ananias and some of the other ruling priests of the Sanhedrin, and 40+ fanatics. Pawns in the sense that each of them had their own plans and agenda; things they were trying to accomplish.

#### What was the commander trying to accomplish?

1. He was getting rid of a man who had the potential to ignite the city and disturb the *pax romana*.
2. He was ensuring the safety of a Roman citizen
3. He was following Rome's legal system
4. He was removing a possible threat to the advancement of his career

#### What were the soldiers trying to accomplish?

1. Follow orders
2. Safely deliver the prisoner to the governor

#### What were Ananias and other Jewish leaders trying to accomplish?

1. To rid Judaism of a thorn in its side

#### What were the 40+ assassins trying to accomplish?

1. Kill a man so they could eat and drink again!

But God had a different plan and he used each of these men to carry it out—IN THEIR IGNORANCE. READ Acts 9:15. God's plans were different from the 550: **1)** to have the gospel proclaimed in Roman palaces. And since part of that plan was for Paul to be the mouthpiece, God's plan was also **2)** to keep Paul safe. (Likely, other plans too but those are still hidden from us.)

These were not just things God *hoped* would happen, but what God made *sure* would happen. Friends, what God plans to do, He does. Remember he assured Paul in prison (23:12) that he was going to tell about Jesus in Rome's most hallowed halls. And no matter *how* many wild-eyed religious fanatics schemed together, no one was going to derail God's plans. READ Is.46:10b-11.

### Application for us

God not only had a plan for Paul and the Roman rulers, he has a plan for you. He's got one for your spouse or daughter, your son, parent or the neighbor who hates you. He has a plan for the prominent and one for the unknowns. His plan includes yesterday, today and tomorrow. A plan that will bring Him glory, and a plan that will bless His children. How can we be sure? Because He is good, and because He loves His children. Sometimes the *blessings* in His plans are camouflaged, perhaps overlooked, but never absent.

READ Phil. 1:6. No plan of God's is ever left unfinished. What God started in you, He means to finish—and in more areas than simply your spiritual growth. Such as if you're 25, single, without a date in 8 years but God's plan for you is marriage, you don't have to throw yourself at some marginal prospect for fear you'll *never* find a mate. Even if you missed out on the singles event of the year, you didn't tragically miss your destiny. If marriage is part of God's plan for you, you *will* meet him, her.

When you get the pink slip from an employer who's downsizing, it's not an accident God wishes He could have prevented. He has big plans for you *in* that termination. Your boss may be looking no farther than the bottom line nevertheless she's part of God's big plan for you too. Your loss may lead to the gain of a far better job than you would have ever taken the initiative to seek on your own. Or..., it may lead to bone-grinding poverty that glorifies God and transforms your thinking about what matters in life.

A man attends a business conference to improve his skills and make himself more valuable to the company, but *God* sent him there to encounter a certain doctor who's going to give him an important suggestion for his wife's cancer. Or, to fit in God's plan for someone else, not him. God's plan.

If you get arrested for a crime you didn't commit, your world may fall apart in a way you would have never dreamed, but I can assure you God's plan will be working its way out.

You can count on God's plan *always* getting carried out. Which would be scary if God wasn't *good*. But because He is, that's reassuring.

### Concl:

READ Prov. 19:21. Spurgeon said, *We are absolutely at His disposal, and all of our circumstances are arranged by Him in all their details. We are comforted to have it so.*