

Mars Hill  
Acts 17:16-33  
Seeing what God is already doing

Paul, the mightiest of all the apostles. Patient, courageous, forgiving, humble, passionate, loving, kind, gentle, uncompromising, faithful, strong, amongst other things... All of these characteristics were used by different scholars over centuries to describe the Apostle Paul, and for many of us here today, it is easy for us to see why. He is certainly one of the most influential Biblical characters in the New Testament, and he is certainly one of the most quintessential examples of what true Christian living looks like. Throughout the scriptures we are told, and we read, about his encouragement to the early church, his firm but fairness towards sinners, his faithfulness in the gospel, his passion for serving ALL people, his courage in serving Jesus. But this is only one side of Paul's incredible story, and it is the one side that most people choose only to remember.

I want you to understand though, the other side of this story. The side that many people have probably heard, the side that many have probably forgotten, the side that many people have probably chosen to forget. But this morning, I want you to hear these words as quoted from Paul, I want you to understand what his dedication cost him. **2 Cor 11:23-28, "I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches."**

So how does a person in their right mind continue doing exactly what they have been doing, believing exactly what they have believed, teaching exactly what they have been teaching, after facing what Paul faced? The constant uphill battles, the never ending persecutions, being beaten and flogged, the fight for survival. Because it's been my experience that when life throws us a curve ball, when we don't get our own way, when things become difficult, when the struggles of life become as real as they will ever be, our response generally is, **"where is God in what I am going through? What is God doing as I struggle to stay afloat?"**

I want to suggest that if we think we are able to know and understand exactly where God is and what He is doing, whether in good or in bad times, then we have another thing coming to us. The God that we serve, the God that we worship is not some genie type God who pops up anytime we need him and then disappears when we are done with him. But rather, the one true God says in [Isaiah 55:8-9](#), **"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."** But let me tell you this, that is not where God leaves it. He does not, nor has He ever, simply left us to just be. God, in His own wisdom and His own time has revealed to us, whether through His word, through His prophets or directly to us, certain truths about Himself and about His plan.

So what is God doing? I want to make three observations:

1. **He is making us more Christ like:** Romans 8:29 says, **"For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son."** When Jesus died on that cross

for you and for me, it was not an empty or hollow action resulting in nothing, but it was the moment where the lives of every believer would be changed for all eternity. Why? Because we are no longer what we were before the cross! Everything that we were has been taken away from us; and it has been replaced with the very righteousness of Christ, and God wants each of us to grow in that righteousness becoming more Christ-like.

2. **He is working for our good:** Romans 8:28 says this, **“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.”** We can never mistake this though, that good in this sense does not mean comfort. They are two different things. God promises that He is working for our good, according to His perfect plan, in His perfect time, in His perfect love, and His perfect wisdom. But nowhere does He promise that everything will be easy. And though there are times where this is painful, where this becomes confusing, we can rest in the hope and the knowledge that He is faithful in all things, no matter how big or small they may seem, He is working for our good.
3. **He is bending all things for His glory:** Isaiah 42:8, **“I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.”** God does not waver in His anger towards idolatry nor will He ever. But He has overlooked our past ignorance and He is calling us all back to Himself, that we would seek Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. All glory, all honour, all praise belongs to the one true God.

And what Paul alludes to, or rather, what Paul places right in front of the eyes of the Athenians in Acts 17 is exactly what is staring at us this morning. The God that we worship is the same God who was there at the very beginning. He is the same God who authored all of creation, not an idol made by our hands, not an idol of gold or silver or stone. He is the one true and only God who gives life and breath to all creation. He is the God who, through Jesus Christ, has redeemed creation back to Himself. And it is in Him and through Him that we have life; and life in abundance. It is in Him that we live and move and have our being. He is in all things at all times, the same yesterday, today and forever.

You really want to see where God is, you really want to know what God is doing. I'll tell you He is where He has always been, and He is doing what He has always been doing, from the very beginning of creation. He is calling His people back to Himself, He is calling us all back. He is calling us all to repentance, and He has offered all people a way back from death and destruction and He has given us a chance to respond. All you have to do is open your eyes, look around you, look at your own lives. He is everywhere, at all times, and His glory is visible in of creation. And though we could never understand how or why God does what He does, we trust in His perfect plan for our lives. For we can be confident of this, that He who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. That is where our hope lies, and that is the hope that we hold on to in Jesus, the hope that one day we will experience His glory in its completeness. You are not alone in what you are facing, and if anything, I want you to remember and come to trust in these words from 1 Peter 5:9-11, **“Resist him (that's the devil), standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To Him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.”**