

Think Magnificently About God

Acts 27:25

Baccalaureate Sermon

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Four years ago, with many of the new resident students, our son was moving in to Oakwood Dorm. Anne and I joined other parents in getting “that” room assigned to our son just right – with carpet, curtains, telephone, and other small things we felt were needed. We met many of you and your parents on that “move-in weekend.” Throughout these four years of a *unique* relationship with *this* class, I have felt a special kinship with you.

In these four years, we have experienced some low moments together, like the gas explosion on campus in your freshman year, as well as some high moments, like the opening of the new library/learning resource center.

The class of 1998 will always have a very special place in my heart.

My students and my friends, I want to challenge you, as you leave MVNC, with a profound thought to me that I have written on the flyleaf of my Bible – four words I encourage you to write somewhere in your Bible. **“Think magnificently about God.”**

I think I heard this statement first from Dr. Lloyd Ogilvie, now chaplain of the U.S. Senate. Think magnificently about the *Creator God*, the God of *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*; God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; the God who *indwells within* us by His *abiding Spirit*. Don’t try to encapsulate God into your limited world, or finite way of thinking. Don’t be characterized by the words of J. B. Phillips in his book, *Your God is*

Too Small. Don't try to bring God down to your level of understanding. Rather, my challenge to you this evening is to understand that the magnificence of God is measured by His *reliable Word, Timing, and Faithfulness.*

The ancient Irish hymn, "Be Thou My Vision" is a familiar song at MVNC Commencement services:

*Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art--
Thou my best thought, by day or by night;
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.*

The Apostle Paul might have added another phrase or two to this hymn. He could have stated, *Be Thou my Vision...*

*In joy or in sorrow
With little or with much,
On the mountain top or in the valley,
When things are going great, or when life is filled with trials or temptations.
In graduate school or in the work force,
At home around many friends, or overseas where you know very few people.
**Especially in these times, Paul would encourage us to "think
magnificently about God."***

Listen again to the text of the evening: *Therefore take courage men, for I have faith in God, that it will happen just as He told me.* With these words, Paul reaffirms his foundational belief that God's Word, His timing, and His faithfulness are reliable.

Paul thought magnificently about God...and so can we. Let me explain.

I. **God's Word is Reliable.** I'm referring to God's Spoken Word of direction to you and me.

Look at the situation in Acts 27 when Paul spoke the words of our text. He was on his way by ship to Rome from Jerusalem. Paul and his shipmates encountered a typhoon, and were about to experience a shipwreck.

On the ship, Paul told his fellow travelers, *"God has spoken to me through an angel, and told me that there will be no loss of life among us. We will reach Rome. Only the ship will be destroyed.*

Then Paul spoke our text, *"Take courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as He told me."* The context in which this situation occurs is even more fascinating.

Paul is concluding his third missionary journey in Acts 20-23. He had taken a collection for the Jerusalem church throughout Asia. He felt compelled to return to Jerusalem in person to give the money to the congregation. He wanted to avoid misunderstanding between Jews and Gentiles.

Knowing that he would not see his Asian friends again, Paul, on his way to Jerusalem, visited with Christians from Ephesus, Tyre, and Caesarea. Then, *in spite of warnings from them*, he traveled on to Jerusalem.

There, as predicted, he was arrested. He had gone to the temple for worship. And a riot began. He was taken before the Sanhedrin where he gave a beautiful defense of his faith.

The following night, God gave a reliable word to Paul; "You have testified before the Sanhedrin here in Jerusalem, you will also testify about me in Rome" (Acts 23:11). I can imagine Paul saying, "Great! *God* will get me out of this mess!"

However, following the word of God spoken to Paul, the Jews plotted to kill him.

He was transferred to Caesarea, placed on trial before Felix (governor), and later Festus. Paul remained in prison for 2 years. He appeared before King Agrippa.

Finally, Paul was sent to Rome for trial. On the way to Rome, he experienced the typhoon and the shipwreck mentioned in our text.

Paul finally arrived in Rome. God spoke a word of direction to Paul, Paul believed the word of God, And what God promised, He ultimately provided.

For many of you who are graduating, God spoke a word to you, leading you to enroll in MVNC. Like Paul, the realization and accomplishment of that word was not always in your sight. Nevertheless, you believed God had spoken, and you are now graduating as testimony that when God speaks a word of direction to you, He will accomplish His word.

II. Secondly, God's Timing Is Reliable

In Jerusalem, God told Paul that he would **go** to Rome. He did not tell Paul when he would go, or how he would go, or how long the journey would take.

In other words, when God speaks a word to us, He does not always tell us when or how He will accomplish His word. Delays may occur, and progress may not seem as evident as we desire. When this happens, can we like Paul, hold firm to the conviction that God has spoken; and that **IN HIS TIME**, what he has promised, he will fulfill?

Paul's experience also reminds us that when God speaks a definite word to us, suffering and hardship may result! For Paul, there was a plot to kill him. He was a prisoner.

In addition, He was manipulated, and insulted (Chapters 24 + 26). He received death threats. He encountered a typhoon, and experienced a shipwreck.

Are we tempted, at times, to think that when God speaks a word of direction to us, that His word is a guarantee against danger? Physical harm? People? stressful Situations? Abuses? Hardships?

Or can we, with Paul, believe that,

In His time, In His time,

He makes all things beautiful in His time.

Lord please show me every day, as you're teaching me your way,

That you do just what you say, in your time.

God's timing is always right... and reliable.

III. Thirdly, thinking magnificently about God includes a firm belief that, **God's Faithfulness is Reliable.**

God had spoken to Paul, but what was he to think during the suffering and hardship of a prison experience? Paul no doubt remembered the warnings of his friends. Acts 21: 4, says, *"Through the spirit, they (his friends) urged him not to go."* The same chapter, verse 12, says, *"They pleaded with him not to go to Jerusalem."*

He may have questioned his own judgment. Acts 26:32 says, *"This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."* Paul could have asked himself, **"DID I MAKE A MISTAKE?"**

It is not unusual for me to think like this. I well remember my first night in Manila. I asked this question, *"Did I make a mistake?"* New leadership assignments, and responsibilities in a developing country. First trip – alone, tired, and weary. All I saw was poverty, few resources, a long way from home. **"Did I make mistake?"** Profound insights about God emerged within me, however, during those years of ministry in the Philippines.

Paul clearly understood God's faithfulness. He didn't doubt God; he wasn't misled by others, nor did he waver in his conviction. There was no "second guessing" in this phenomenal story. No "pity-parties" along the way. Even the typhoon and shipwreck did not shake his conviction, because his faith was grounded in the

faithfulness of God. *“So keep up the courage, men, I have faith in God that it will happen just as He told me.”* (27:25 text)

PAUL THOUGHT MAGNIFICENTLY ABOUT GOD!

Paul believed in God, and in the faithfulness of God, even when it appeared that God was silent. God could be trusted. Even during the hard hours, Paul could sing –

*Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee,
Thou changest not; Thy compassions they fail not.
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.*

Paul thought magnificently about God!

His Word. His Timing. And His Faithfulness.

and so can we.

Even when delays occur... when suffering and hardship result, in the good days, and in the not so good days, God can be trusted to keep His Word.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, you have experienced the reality of God’s Word, His timing, and His faithfulness during your MVNC years. And now you can depend on God in the months and years *before* you – regardless of *where* He leads you.

The concluding chapter of Acts (28) tells us that God kept His word to Paul. He arrived in Rome. Was everything okay once he arrived? NO! Paul was placed (again) in prison! But, comprehending – in a measure far greater than we--the magnificence of God, Paul didn’t complain. Rather, in prison, he boldly taught and preached.

He wrote the Prison Epistles – Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon. Paul used the situation wherein God placed him to minister to others. He “bloomed” where he was planted – not complaining to God, nor wishing *he* had what some *others* had.

In the coming days and years, will you discipline yourself to increasingly **think magnificently about God?** Wherever He *leads* you, He will be there *with* you! This is

cause for celebration and praise. God does not play games with us – to see if we will trust Him, only to leave us by ourselves when we *stake* our lives by faith on Him.

1. He takes the offerings of ourselves and does *with us* so much more than we ever dreamed possible. Amen!