

Title: **Embracing Gospel Realism: The Christian Life As Inevitably Hard But Invariably Good**
Text: **Acts 23:11-35**

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Big Idea

The biblical worldview as it is presented to us in this text won't let us be naively optimistic on the one hand nor naively pessimistic on the other hand. Instead, we are invited to embrace a "gospel realism" where we see that, while the Christian life will be inevitably hard, it will also be invariably good!

"Metamodernism considers that our era is characterized by an oscillation between aspects of both modernism and postmodernism. We see this manifest as a kind of informed naivety, a pragmatic idealism, a moderate fanaticism, oscillating between sincerity and irony, deconstruction and construction, apathy and affect, attempting to attain some sort of transcendent position, as if such a thing were within our grasp. The metamodern generation understands that we can be both ironic and sincere in the same moment; that one does not necessarily diminish the other."

1. Resisting Naïve Optimism

As followers of Jesus, texts like the one we have before us this morning in Acts 23 do not permit us to be naively optimistic about what life will be like with Jesus. We are not allowed to imagine that after you come to Jesus you are going to go off leaping from mountain peak to mountain peak with no more regard for or experience of the valley. That may be how some people try to sell Christianity to you, but it's a lie and thoroughly unbiblical. Does following Jesus make your life better? Yes. Does following Jesus make your life harder? Also yes! The promise of v. 11 is followed by the peril of v. 12.

2. Resisting Naïve Pessimism

The temptation, after experiencing some of the hardship of following Jesus, is to get a bit jaded and just expect things to go badly. But this pessimism—while in one sense it's a necessary corrective of naïve op-

timism—from a biblical perspective, it's just as naïve. It too doesn't account for the whole story. As far as our text in Acts 23 goes, we are not allowed to see things as only bad here. Not even close. Instead, we get this view of a sovereign God who can take what these Jewish conspirators mean for evil against Paul and turn it for his good. It's not naively optimistic. Things are really hard. People really do want to kill him. But neither is it naively pessimistic. Jesus really is with Paul and moving him along, fulfilling his good purpose and plan in his life.

Observation #1: Their Curse Circles Back

Notice how Jesus uses the vitriol of Paul's enemies to undo his enemies. He flips their attack of him back on themselves.

Observation #2: Their Fury Pushes Forward

These conspirators, trying to stop God's plan for Paul's life, ultimately help him fulfill it. Even the enemies of God are made his servants in the end!

Pause and consider the possibility that one of the ways God may move you further along in the fulfillment of his promise to you and plan for you is not *in spite* of hard circumstances but *in and through* them.

3. Embracing Gospel Realism

So we're not given to a naïve optimism on the one hand nor a naïve pessimism on the other. Instead we find ourselves embracing what I've called a gospel realism. And I say it's "gospel" realism because it's really a perspective on life that's grounded in and held together by what Jesus accomplishes for us there on the cross.

Reflection Questions

- Which extreme are you more prone to would you say—naïve optimism or naïve pessimism? Why do you think? How does the gospel provide a necessary corrective and way forward for you?
- Can you think of an example in your life when God used a hard thing to accomplish a good purpose? Tell the story. Why do we often lose sight of this when the next hard thing comes? What can we do now to prepare our soul to "hold its nerve" in the face of such things?

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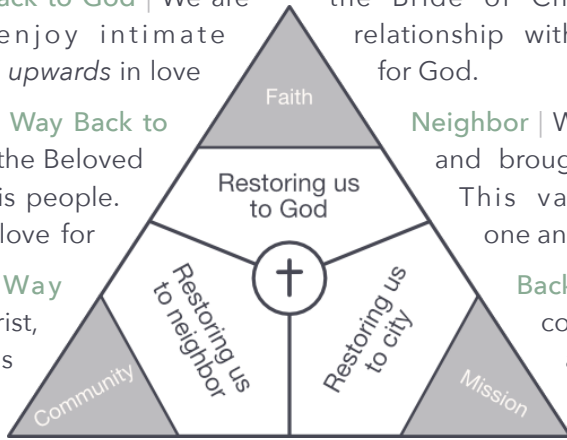
Our Mission & Values

Mercy Hill Church exists to help restore us to God, neighbor, and city through the good news of Jesus Christ.

FAITH: The Way Back to God | We are redeemed to enjoy intimate relationship with God. This value presses our church *upwards* in love for God.

COMMUNITY: The Way Back to Christ, adopted in the Beloved relationship with his people. This value presses our church *inwards* in love for Neighbor | We are the Family of and brought into covenantal relationship with his people.

MISSION: The Way the Embassy of Christ, Savior to be his ambassadors. This value presses our church *outwards* in love for the Back to City | We are commissioned by the unbelieving.



Your Next Steps

When approaching the Christian faith and life, it can be confusing to know where to even begin. Come find us at the Next Steps Table after the service—it would be our joy to help you along in the journey! And if you're a visitor, we have a special gift bag for you. Don't miss it!



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Welcome to Mercy Hill Church.
We are so glad you've joined us today!

Announcement Spotlight

All Church Campout - NEXT WEEK!

We are excited to announce that we will again be hosting our All Church Campout at Mount Madonna County Park over the weekend of June 26-28! We have a huge group campsite all to ourselves and lots of options in the park for having fun together. Whether you love to camp or you'd rather still sleep in your own bed, we have something for everyone. Because the park is only a 45 minute drive from south San Jose, people can feel free to come and go as it works with their schedule and preference.

- **Option #1: Day-Use:** For those not wanting to camp but still wanting to participate, the Day-Use option is best. You can come in for the day, enjoy activities, meals, etc., and then head home to your warm bed while the rest of us "rough" it :).
- **Option #2: Camp:** This option is for those who want the full camping experience. We have the site for Friday and Saturday nights. You can choose to camp for one or both of these depending upon your availability and desire.

Scan the QR code below for more info and to find a link to sign up!

If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to us at info@mercyhillchurch.org.

All Church Prayer - Cancelled Tonight

Scan the QR code below for more info and clickable content!

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