

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

The Storms of Life

Acts 27:1-44

Intro: We have come to an exciting passage of Scripture that describes an account of a great storm on the Mediterranean that came upon the ship that was transporting Paul to Rome. It was a real, literal storm but it can also be seen as a symbol of the storms that come into the lives of God's people. The idea of being overtaken by life's storms is not something that most Christians like to dwell on, especially in the brand of Christianity most predominant in the Western culture. In the Western church today, there are very few pulpits where the storms of life are discussed or even acknowledged. This is a dangerous mishandling of God's Word and a dereliction of duty since even Jesus Himself told us that difficult times would come.

Still, when things are going well, we are tempted to believe that we are exempt from storms or that they will not affect us. But we are not, and they will. In the U.S., Christianity has been riding a wave of acceptance and tolerance, at differing degrees, for centuries. But, it appears as if that wave is about to crash down upon us. When that happens, the question will be: Are you anchored to the Rock? Do you trust the One who is able to pilot you through tempestuous seas? Paul was able to do just that. If we discover the basis for his victory then we will learn how we can prevail in the storm as well.

1-13 – Ch27 is also unique in that it offers a rare glimpse of an area of ancient life not found anywhere else. It's amazingly accurate. James Smith lived in various parts of the Mediterranean world in the mid-19th century and he investigated its weather patterns and geography. He recorded his findings in *The Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul*. He concluded that the account in ch27 was the product of an eyewitness who wasn't a sailor: "No sailor would have written in a style so little like that of a sailor; no man not a sailor could have written a narrative of a sea voyage so consistent in all its parts, unless from actual observation." Luke's words are accurate in terms of the route the ship took, ancient navigating skills, details of the ship's physical construction, and the way in which the sailors tried to cope with the storm.

Smith was right about Luke's presence on the voyage, since he indicates that he was along for the ride in vs2. God had provided Paul with some encouraging traveling companions as Aristarchus (20:4) came along too. This all points to the favor Paul enjoyed from Julius, the centurion in charge of delivering him to Rome. It might seem odd that a prisoner should receive such liberty of movement (3) but Paul was different from the other prisoners on board. They were probably all condemned prisoners being sent to Rome to die in the arena. Paul wasn't a condemned man (yet), he was merely awaiting trial before Caesar. Plus, Paul's godly character and demonstration of Christian love went a long way in helping him gain that favor. Many Christians mistakenly think that just because they belong to God, they should receive favor from the world. But usually, that favor only comes when we begin to act like we belong to God, if it comes at all. The favor of the world should never be expected or assumed, it is a rare blessing from the Lord.

The original ship they boarded was following the eastern coastline of the Mediterranean engaging in commerce along the way. Apparently, Rome was not on their schedule nor could a boat of that size handle the rough seas of the open water. When they landed in Lycia, they found a grain freighter that could shoot across the open Sea, straight on to Italy. The typical grain freighter of the day was 140 ft long and 36 ft wide with 1 main mast with a large square sail. Steering came from 2 paddles hanging off the rear of the ship. Because of its particular design, ships of this type couldn't sail into the wind. That's why they had so much trouble getting to port in the Fair Havens.

The fast Luke refers to in vs9 was most likely the Day of Atonement which occurred on Oct 5th of that year (AD 59). The dangerous season for sailing began around mid-September and lasted until mid-November. After that, all sailing on the open sea was shut down until winter was over. As winter approached, the weather became more dangerous for sailing. Thus, Paul advises them to hunker down and wait out the winter right where they were. It's not that Paul was prophesying here or that he fancied himself an experienced mariner. It's just that he had suffered enough at the hands of inexperienced sailors. In II Cor 11:25, Paul tells us that by this time, he had already been shipwrecked twice in his lifetime and he didn't want to go another round with that again if he could help it.

The problem was with where they were. Fair Havens must have been a name thought up by the local Chamber of Commerce to get tourists and travelers to stop in and visit. But, it was clearly false advertising because apparently, the accommodations provided by this port didn't quite live up to the standards expected by the ship's crew or the Roman officer and soldiers. They were going to have to spend 4-5 months wintering somewhere and none of them could fathom spending all that time in a dump ironically called Fair Havens. The port of Phoenix was just a measly 40 miles away. Why not weigh anchor and make for Phoenix now, while the south wind is blowing?

It was a logical conclusion and it's no surprise that the Roman commander had more respect for the opinions of the head sailor and the owner of the vessel more than the opinion of Paul. After all, these 2 had much more to lose if the ship didn't make it to Rome. So, taking a vote of the crew, the majority decided to sail on to Phoenix. It seemed logical to the majority to head out and spare themselves from spending a miserable winter in Fair Havens. Of course, as per usual, the majority was wrong! They voted based on what they wanted instead of what they needed.

14-20 – Well, it didn't take long for everything to go to pot in this misadventure on the high seas. The warm Southern zephyrs quickly turned into a wicked Northeastern called Euroclydon. This wind was feared by ancient sailors for its destructive power. Helpless to properly navigate with this wind bearing down upon them, all they could do is go with the wind and see where it would take them. They were able to steer themselves to the leeward side of the island of Clauda but even with that, they immediately set about instituting normal emergency procedures.

The first thing they did was bring the skiff on board. This was normally towed behind the ship but taken aboard during bad weather so they brought it in; Luke says with some difficulty. How did he know this? He was probably pressed into service to help pull it in so he was speaking from experience. The next thing they did was to run cables under the ship to help hold the ship together in the rough seas. And as extra measure, to ensure that they didn't run the ship aground, they struck the sail and used the wind to push them out into the open sea.

The next day, seeing that the storm wasn't letting up, they began to toss some of the cargo overboard in order to help the ship sit higher in the water. The 3rd day, they were so desperate that they chucked all the ship's equipment overboard as well. These were the final 2 things done to help save the ship but even with these measures, the ship continued to be driven by the wind for many days. The end result of this, after many days with no direction and no discernable indication of where they even were, it seems that all on board – all 276 of crew and passengers - had finally given up. They had given up all hope of survival and had resigned themselves to their hopeless fate. Well, it was just 275 of them. There was still one guy on the boat who hadn't given up hope!

21-26 – We can't help but notice the great contrast here. All passengers and crew are in the same terrible storm. The sailors, who know how to sail in storms, are so frightened that they've given up all hope of being saved. But this little Jewish preacher, this prisoner of Rome who presumably knew very little about ships or storms; tells them to "Take heart (keep up your courage). . . . Do not be afraid." Paul's hope was to bring real hope to each one of them.

Paul's words in this section hold several principles by which believers can take courage and be fearless in the midst of life's storms. We might not be in the middle of a literal storm like Paul was, but we do experience storms. Storms come into all of our lives and they sometimes come on quite suddenly and are very fierce. One day we're in perfect health and the next day we're in the hospital facing a grim diagnosis. A storm has descended on our lives. Or, we're sitting at home relaxed and the phone rings with news of a tragic accident or the passing of a loved one or a close friend. A storm has arrived. How do we stand up to life's storms? How did Paul respond to this storm?

1) Paul knew God was with him. Here, an angel of the Lord appeared to reassure him of God's presence. This was powerful evidence but Paul was already aware of this truth, just as we should be aware of it. Jesus, when he was about to leave this world for the last time told His disciples, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (**Mt 28:20**). This promise is the same for us as it was for Paul: "Surely I am with you always."

Christians have found Jesus to be with them as they've gone through life's

storms. They testify to it again and again. The presence of Jesus been declared by countless believers since the very beginning of the church. Do you know that God is with you? Are you aware of (not “feel”) His presence? When the storms come, it makes a big difference. Unfortunately, many of us need reminding of this so often because most of our day is spent far from His presence!

2) Paul knew he belonged to God. When Paul mentioned God he identified him as the God to whom I belong. This means Paul recognized he was no longer the master and commander of his own life; he had been bought with a price; he now belonged to God. This truth is illustrated in several wonderful ways throughout Scripture. Christians belong to God just as a bride belongs to a bridegroom! The church is the bride of Christ. This is a precious, beautiful picture. Nothing is going to tear the bride from the arms of Jesus Christ.

We also belong to God as a child belongs to their father. We are God’s children. What would you think of a father who sees something happening to his child and simply walks off in another direction? We recognize a basic human duty to care for our children. If a father sees his child being hurt or taken advantage of or persecuted in some way, any decent father would come to their rescue. If we think that way, we can be sure that God does too. Next, we belong to God as sheep belong to the shepherd. Recall Jesus’ story of the shepherd who lost just 1 of his sheep. Although he still had 99 others, he goes to find the lost sheep and searches until he brings that sheep back.

When the storms of life come against you, when the world and the enemy bring an attack against you, we have both the privilege and the responsibility to go to the Lord in prayer and simply point out that these entities are attacking His property! It’s not that He doesn’t already know it but it helps to remind us what’s really going on. It’s not about us!

3) Paul knew he was in God’s service. When Paul accepted Jesus he didn’t just receive a savior, he also received a Lord! Accepting the gospel moves the believer into the kingdom of Christ, which means you are now under the rule of a King. To have Jesus as Lord means to commit oneself to following Him, serving Him and doing His will. Paul had spent the last few decades busy about his Lord’s business and he knew there was more to be

accomplished.

God had already told Paul what he was supposed to do: he was to bear witness of Him in Rome. But he hadn't gotten to Rome yet and it doesn't take a genius to connect the dots between those 2 facts. If God had told him that he was going to serve him in Rome, bearing a witness there, and if he had not yet gotten to Rome, then the storm that was battering the ship on which he was sailing was not going to take his life. God was going to preserve him. This wasn't because Paul deserved special honor. It was because God always honors His Word.

We don't have special revelations like that. God hasn't revealed to us any specific length of service or specific future place of service. But we can know that as long as God has a work for us to do, He will preserve us to do it. God will not be frustrated; and if God is not frustrated, we don't need to be frustrated either. If God has work for us to do, then He will keep us alive, equipped and empowered to do it. If you've finished the work God's given you to do, why linger around this old world any longer? We may desire to see heaven but until it happens, we need to busy ourselves with our Father's business.

4) Paul trusted God (25). Paul knew God. So it wasn't just a case of God's being with him or his belonging to God or God's having work for him to do. He also knew God as the God of all circumstances and Paul was able to trust God for all of life's details ([Phil 4:11](#)). Paul could be content in all circumstances because he knew God controlled them.

When I lose my job? When I have cancer? When a loved one dies? Even then! These things are not insurmountable to God. They are merely circumstances that He allows into our lives for His glory and our good. We love to quote [Rom 8:28](#) except when we are in the midst of the storm, when the hurt is fresh and the pain is real but it is no less true in the storm as it is in the times of joy. Some may ask, "What's the point of having faith and knowing God if you're still going to have to weather storms and suffer loss?" What difference does it make?" It makes a world of difference! Your knowledge of God brings a sense of security and peace of mind during the storms of life and the strength of your faith will actually encourage those around you who don't have faith!

27-38 – Paul’s unshakable confidence in God made him a leader among men even while a prisoner of Rome. Because of his faith and his knowledge of God, Paul was able to encourage others. This scene is exactly opposite of what happened in that other great storm that’s recorded in the OT. Jonah was running away from God so when the storm came to batter the ship that was carrying him to Tarshish, Jonah wasn’t on deck helping others. He, like so many Christians today, was in the hold of the ship fast asleep. Others were in danger but he was of no use to them.

By contrast, Paul was obeying God so when the storm broke, he emerged as the real leader in that situation. He was calling the shots and no one opposed him or disagreed. How could they, they had already given up all hope. In our last study, as Paul presented his personal testimony before king Agrippa, Festus the governor cried out and accused Paul of being crazy. That’s a normal response from the world. They often accuse Christians of being so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good but the truth is: they have it backwards. It’s the heavenly-minded people who are the most earthly good. Earthly-minded people are of no use whatsoever when the real storms of life arrive!

39-44 – The soldiers desire to kill the prisoners was not unreasonable for if any of the convicted criminal escaped, the soldiers responsible for them would face their punishment in their place. But notice why this didn’t happen: the favor God had given Paul in the eyes of the centurion is what kept Paul and the other prisoners alive. In fact, in a much broader sense, it was Paul’s presence on the ship that kept everybody alive. Here were sailors, soldiers and prisoners – 276 of them and all were spared a miserable death at sea because of the Apostle Paul. And yet, when it was all over and they all went their separate ways, how many of them ever thought about their deliverance again? How many of them acknowledged God’s hand in their deliverance and thank Him? Probably not too many!

It’s a shame how oblivious the world is to how much it owes its continued existence to the presence of Christians in it’s midst. For all their horrendous immorality, God was still willing to spare Sodom and Gomorrah if just 10 righteous people could’ve been found there. But there weren’t even 10 and those cities were destroyed. What about America? I am sure that for all our sin, evil, blasphemy and determination to eliminate any vestige of God from national life, God is sparing our country because of the remnant of believers

still here. John Calvin said, When God wants to judge a nation, He gives them wicked rulers. That was certainly true in the OT; take it for what it's worth today.

Storms will come, hurts are felt and the pain will be real. What are we to do with this truth? How are we to face it? Before Jesus was arrested, He gave a sermon on the Mt of Olives and in it He told His disciples that there would be wars and rumors of wars. This was a way of saying, "Life is filled with trouble, and you will experience your share of it." But then He added this little caveat, "See that you are not troubled" which literally means See to it that you are not alarmed by these things ([Matt 24:6](#)). Really? Not alarmed by war with all its calamities? Not alarmed by life's storms, as difficult as they can be? Not alarmed by sickness, disease, persecution, job loss? No. "See to it that you are not alarmed."

On its surface, this may seem like an unreasonable command but it's really not. It's not unreasonable because God is a God of circumstances and He is not only able to preserve us in the midst of difficult circumstance but He does preserve us! As such, it is our duty to trust Him at all times and to bear witness of Him to all people. This is our duty, our task, our job as long as God permits us to remain in the world. 😊