

FINDING FAITH IN THE STORMS OF LIFE

Acts 27

INTRODUCTION

As we come to chapter 27 of Acts today, we find the Apostle Paul at the conclusion of his court hearings in Caesarea. For several years after Paul's return to Israel, he was in custody because of the Jews' hatred toward him for upsetting their religion. He went before the Jewish high priests, Governor Felix of Caesarea, Governor Festus, and even Herod Agrippa II. Now in chapter 27, because of Paul's appeal to Caesar, he has set his course for Rome. What's interesting is that this is the first of Paul's missionary journeys that he doesn't initiate. Rather, he is forced along the way as a prisoner. Yet we can't help but notice the providence of God in this newly charted course. It has been the desire of Paul for quite some time to find his way to Rome, to preach the Gospel there and to encourage the Roman believers.

Of course this journey to Rome for Paul is anything but smooth and straightforward. Along the way, his ship encounters a storm of epic proportions that drives them far off course, even to the point of abandoning all hope. Nothing ever seems to come easy for Paul. Even this despairing situation wasn't new for him! We learn in 2 Corinthians 11:25 that Paul has already been shipwrecked three times prior! It continues to say he also spent a night and day adrift at sea!

Paul's passion to be a faithful follower of Jesus and to fulfill his ministry resulted in hurricane-force opposition from Satan himself. ***Rarely is any journey in this fallen world smooth-sailing for a Christian trying to swim upstream against the striking power of sin.*** I am sure today that many in this room, especially those who have followed Christ for most of their life, will testify in agreement to the struggle of life's storms. ***These storms don't just occur because we are boldly pushing back the mission of Satan; they occur because we are trying to push our way through a darkened and cursed world.***

In the same way a storm can shake a ship, cancer can shake our health; losing a job can shake your finances, continuing in a wearisome job can shake your endurance; being blasted by a coworker or friend can shake your peace; losing a dear friend, a spouse, or a child can shake your sanity and joy; facing a temptation can shake your self-control; and facing a setback of any kind can shake your patience.

But most importantly, when a storm of life clouds overtop of you, Satan wants to shake your faith in God! Similar to Job's wife's appeal, Satan wants you to curse God and die in bitterness! Don't be so sure in your faith to assume it couldn't happen to you for a season, if not for the remainder of your life in the event of something catastrophic happening. It's a scary, yet healthy diagnostic to consider what tragedy might make a shipwreck of your faith. ***It might not result in a full-fledged turning from the Lord, but it might plant a root of bitterness that like a weed grows into places of your heart that contaminate and compromise your love for the Lord.***

Therefore, there is good reason for all of us to come to Acts 27 today to find faith in the middle of the storm. Amidst the meticulously detailed narrative of this ship's journey, the Apostle Paul sets before us a faith worth emulating. So we will ask and answer two questions today from this text:

1. How do storms challenge our faith? (and conversely...)
2. How does our faith challenge the storm?

BODY

HOW DO STORMS CHALLENGE OUR FAITH?

1. Storms challenge our comfort zone. (v.7-9, 14, 18, 20)

A passenger on an ocean liner was enduring a rough Atlantic crossing. As he leaned over the rail, his face a shade of green, a steward came along and tried to encourage him: *"Don't be discouraged, sir! No one's ever died*

of seasickness yet!” The nauseous passenger looked up at the steward with horror and said, *“Don’t say that! It’s only the hope of dying that’s kept me alive this long!”*

That’s probably how Paul’s fellow-passengers felt after two weeks of enduring the storm at sea. ***This journey was challenging from the beginning.*** As they departed in v.4, the wind was against them. In v.7 they sailed slowly and arrived with difficulty at Cnidus (“Nidus”). Then in v.8 they continued *“with much difficulty”* to Crete, to a place called *“Fair Havens.”* Now this sounds like a good place to rest for the winter! Paul certainly agreed! He says in v.10, *“Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.”* Paul wasn’t a sailor, but he knew the Mediterranean Sea better than most, especially considering his previous shipwrecks! He knew that it was now a dangerous season to sail. In v.9 we learn that the Fast (or the Day of Atonement) was now over. This was usually in late September or early October. For ancient travel on the Mediterranean, rarely would anyone travel past September, and all travel shut down from November to February.

However, the centurion, Julius, overseeing Paul, paid more attention to the pilot and the owner of the ship. Fair Havens was a boring, small settlement that provided no shield from the harsh westerly winds. Phoenix, on the opposite side of Crete, was a much preferred long-term resting place. So the journey continued! As they set out along the coast of Crete, v.14 says they were struck by a tempestuous wind called a northeaster. They couldn’t face the wind, so they gave way to it and were driven along until they resecured the ship 25 miles south off the coast of a very small island named Cauda.

Storms almost always challenge our comfort. That’s why we don’t like them. People often say they like change. What’s true though is that people like change as long as they can initiate that change! In the case here, all the sailors could do was lower the mast and *“give way”* to the storm. If you noticed that your lap bar on the roller coaster wasn’t locking as you went up

the first hill, you wouldn't naturally still raise your hands. You would do all you can to hold yourself down and bring control to your chaos!

However, we all know that pushing back against all forms of resistance stunts our maturity. I was watching **Wall-E** with my kids a few weeks ago and noticed what happens when all challenges retreat. In the movie, the last remaining humans fly away from all their problems aboard a luxury spaceship. This ship provides them all they could ever want or need, including hovering chairs to keep them from all physical exertion! As a result of zero resistance, everyone's waists expand, they grow increasingly dense, and unreservedly passive.

The hard question here is which ship would you get on? The one destined for unending ease or the storm-tossed ship on the seas? Maybe the greater philosophical question is, ***"What were you made for?"*** A boat was never made to rest on the dock just a spaceship was never made to rest on the launching pad. Ephesians 2:10 says, ***"You are Christ's workmanship created for GOOD WORK which he prepared beforehand that you might walk in them."*** God made us to perform good works, which do sometimes require sweaty exertion!

But it's also in the sweaty or suffocating work that we walk closest with the Savior. Paul prayed in Philippians 3:10 that he ***might know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. He knew there was a certain summit-like experience of Christ in the valley that the mountaintop couldn't compete with!*** It is our Lord's preference that we might know the pain of resistance and the uncertainty of unknowns.

Emma shared a quote from an anonymous writer with me last week that spoke right to this: ***"To take you to His end by the way you know would profit you little. He chooses for you a way you know not, that you may be compelled into a thousand intercourses with Himself, which will make the journey forever memorable, both to Him and to you."***

By being taken out of comfort, we are crafted into His likeness by way of experiencing His nearness! For those who have experienced real loss and disappointment, you know the sweet fellowship of Jesus that meets you there - moments that you forever remember are forever changed by. ***Yes, storms challenge our comfort, but in them we can give way to a comfort sourced in Jesus that's altogether sustaining.***

2. Storms challenge our values. (v.18-19, 38)

It says in v.18 that since *the boat was violently storm-tossed, they began to jettison the cargo*. V.19 says on the third day *they threw the ship's tackle overboard*. Finally in v.38 they further lightened the ship by *throwing all the wheat into the sea*. Now this ship was likely a wheat transport ship. We learned in v.6 that it was an ***Alexandrian ship***, which is a ship from the northern coast of Africa. It's route was therefore from Alexandria to Myra in Asia Minor, then straight west along coastlines to Rome. ***For these men to throw the wheat overboard was synonymous with throwing their livelihood overboard!*** But when threatening storms come, it's better to throw your livelihood than your life overboard! Storms change salesmen into survivors and entrepreneurs into endurers.

It's amazing how purifying storms can be for our values. We are quickly thrown into a position of saving what we inherently know is most important. I personally love attending ***funerals*** - not because I have a darkside that appreciates the grim reality of our end. No, I love funerals because they refine what matters most to me. ***They are a means of God's grace to recall that we brought nothing into this world and we take nothing with us when we leave.*** They remind me that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. It challenges me to examine what legacy I'm leaving and whether I can further purify away the dross of wasted time.

For some of us, storms are a rude revelation of our skewed values. Years ago there was a famous European wrestler from Turkey named Yeseuf Yismael, who was the greatest wrestler in Europe. He was

nicknamed “The Terrible Turk.” He weighed 305 pounds and won all the wrestling tournaments in Europe. Then he came to America to wrestle “Strangler Lewis.” And Yusef won the International Title and wanted to be paid in gold coins. When he accepted his gold coins, he kept it all in a pouch around a special belt that he tightly wore. The key to unlock this belt was kept in a secret place away from his person. Contained in this belt was about \$8,000-10,000 of gold coins! But on his way back to Europe upon the USS Burgoine, the ship got caught in a storm and began to sink. Everyone began to jump overboard, but because he had that gold belt wrapped around him, it acted like an anchor that pulled him down into the water where he sank to his death.

This reminds me of the proverb in Proverbs 11:4 - *“Riches do not profit in the day of wrath.”* → During the storms of life, we have the sudden opportunity to reorder our priorities. Storms refine what we value most. Job 23:10 - *“But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.”* **Seeking to have this gold won’t cause you to sink to your death; instead it will lift you up to all the pleasures of God!**

3. Storms challenge our commitment to the Lord (v.30-32)

When the anxiety, stress, and strain of storms surround us, we can be tempted to escapism. What is escapism you ask? Escapism is the love obsession of our pleasure-saturated culture. **When life tries to submerge us, we are surrounded with a thousand pleasures we can escape to:** our favorite tv show, 1-2 beers to give us a buzzed sensation, a great dinner out to a new restaurant, a quick trip to the clothing store to buy a new outfit to reassure us of our outward beauty, an hour of mindless scrolling through social media posts, yielding to a temptation that if we’re honest is an addiction, or a weekend getaway for a change of scenery. Nothing is sinfully wrong with most of these gratifiers. **But when we repeatedly turn to them in our travail, are they not acting like mini-saviors?**

In v.30, when the storm about reached land, several sailors wanted to escape a certain shipwreck by hopping into a mini-savior, that being the small rowboat (or dinghy) attached to the ship. They tried to make it look like they were intending to lower the anchors in the bow of the ship, but their self-seeking motive was to escape safely to the island! Paul realized their impure motive and required them to stay onboard for the safety of all persons. If these skilled sailors left, it's highly unlikely all would have survived the storm. Finally in v.32 we read that they "*cut away*" the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go.

I wonder what escape boat you might need to cut away in the midst of a storm. You see, when you turn to mini-saviors, you lose your ability to trust the Savior! ***Your commitment to Him becomes tarnished as you look to the world to give you what you need.*** We said before that storms have a way of maturing us. This is the case when through them we learn to trust Jesus in new ways. But if we turn to lesser gods to get us through our trials, we come out loving Jesus less and the world more.

Scripture's promise to us in storms is that the Savior will come to us. Hosea 6:1-3 says, "*Come, let us return to the Lord (not to our worldly pleasures); for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck up down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.*" → ***Rather than escaping your problems, wait for the Promised One to meet you, heal you, support you, encourage you, strengthen you, and restore you.*** Learning to wait on the Lord to bring all his goodness is a much-needed lesson for us all in our instant-everything culture.

HOW DOES OUR FAITH CHALLENGE THE STORM?

We now transition from a focus on how storms challenge our faith to how our faith challenges the storm. You could say we are transitioning from defense to offense. ***You see, the Christian doesn't just hold an umbrella***

beneath the raindrops of a storm. No, the Christian filled with the Spirit has the ability to rise above the storm clouds and soar with wings like eagles! We don't just want to endure a storm; we want to be empowered to overcome the darkness of a storm!

So the next best question to ask is how our faith challenges the storm? It's necessary to briefly pause and clarify what most affects our ability to overcome the threat of a storm - is it our faith or is it the object of our faith? ***In your notes, you will see the key point is that our confidence is not in the quality of our faith but in the character of God.*** The character of God is the object of our faith. Jesus said you could have the faith of a mustard seed and move mountains! ***This is because the main mover is not your faith, but the God who is the "mountain-mover!"*** The important thing for us is that the faith we do have should be directed toward that object! This is comforting because it takes the focus off ourselves and puts it on God.

For the sake of a sea analogy, today we will talk about letting down anchors. ***What we see from Paul here is three anchors he learned to put down that steadied his faith in the midst of the storm.*** And to clarify again with this analogy, the main effector is not the anchor; it's the ground into which the anchor settles. You are called by God in faith to let go of the anchor and trust that the ground into which it settles will hold you steady in the midst of the storm. Of course we know that the ground in this scenario is the character and promises of God. ***When your anchor settles into God's promises, you learn that it will never be moved.***

- ***Psalm 121:3*** says, ***"He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber."***
- ***Psalm 66:8-12*** says, ***"Bless our God, O peoples; let the sound of his praise be heard, ⁹ who has kept our soul among the living and has not let our feet slip."***
- ***Psalm 112:6-8*** says, ***"For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered forever. He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is***

firm, trusting in the Lord. His heart is steady; he will not be afraid, until he looks in triumph on his adversaries.”

It's clear from Scripture that when a believer puts his anchor (faith) in God, God promises to keep that person from making shipwreck of their faith. He steadies their faith.

We must learn to put down three anchors to steady our faith in the storm:

We must let down the anchor of ownership. (v.23a)

In v.21, when things were at their worst and all hope of being saved was lost, Paul stood up and spoke to the men. He said, *“Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you (good news), but only of the ship (bad news). For this very night there stood before me an angel of God, to whom I belong...”*

Paul makes it clear here who owned his life. **God was the owner of his life.** He belonged to God. Scripture affirms this: Psalm 100:3 says, *“Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.”* 1 Cor 6:19-20 says, *“You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.”* Isaiah 43:1 says, *“I redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine.”*

A Christian is not ultimately responsible for the outcome of their life; God is! ***If you are God's property, then you are God's responsibility!*** An old man was once asked by a group of young people, *“What do you do when you are in the midst of a trial?”* *It's easy, he said, “I lift my eyes to heaven and say, “God, your property is in danger!”* You may say, “Yes, but I have this sickness, or I have this difficulty at work!” → That's His responsibility!

This brings peace to our frantic striving. This brings hope to our feelings of despair. ***Instead of trying to paddle your way out of the storm, you can confidently entrust your soul to the One who stands above the storm.***

Learning to savor His sovereignty in the middle of suffering leaves a sweet taste in our mouth.

How do you do this? I suggest you confess the honesty of your feelings to Him - all the bitterness, sadness, and hopelessness. Then you make a concerted effort of faith to give these sorrows to Him. We learn from 1 Peter 5:7 ***that we don't just confess our sins and troubles but we cast them upon Him.*** You have every justified right in Jesus to do this because he bought you at the price of His own blood. ***Part of His owning of your life is that He gets to deal with and handle the problems in your life.***

Think of it as the difference between owning a home and renting a home. When the dishwasher breaks, the owner carries the stress of having to sacrifice to make the repair. But if you are renting a home and the dishwasher breaks, you don't need to carry any of the stress because you cast your problem onto the owner by way of a phone call. Jesus owns your home, that is your life. ***Cast your problems upon Him and let His right as owner handle it in His good way.*** Let's learn to put down the anchor of ownership to steady our faith in storms.

2. We must let down the anchor of worship. (v.23b)

V.23 says Paul stood before an angel of the God to whom he belonged and whom he worshipped. The word for worship here in most other translations is translated as "***service.***" They are basically synonymous terms. When you worship God, you are offering your life to Him in worship. Romans 12:2 says that you are putting your life on the altar as your ***spiritual act of worship.*** This is how you give service to God. And being put on an altar is not the pleasant and flowery picture you may have in your mind. ***The altar of the Old Testament is where sacrifices were slaughtered as offerings to God!*** When Abraham offered Isaac, his son, in Genesis 22, it says he put him on an altar! This was Abraham's spiritual act of worship.

Of course, as you know, Isaac wasn't slaughtered. God provided an animal sacrifice in his place. ***This is a beautiful picture of the Gospel because***

even as God calls us in worship to lay ourselves on the altar, we don't need to bear the burden of being the sacrifice. Jesus was our sacrifice in our place! So why are we then called to still get up on the altar? Because Jesus calls us to follow in His footsteps of service and self-sacrifice on behalf of others. This means that we will sometimes feel the pain of legitimate suffering as a Christian - heartaches, setbacks, losses of dear friends, temptations we struggle to overcome. **But Jesus' promise to us is that the pain will never result in our ultimate defeat.** Psalm 30:5 says, "*Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.*" It's the reason the Psalmist can say in Psalm 121:7, "*The Lord will keep you from all evil.*" It doesn't mean God keeps you from the presence of evil, but He promises to keep you from the overwhelming power of evil!

Paul knew that his act of worship to God was to be on that ship. **The evil of the storm may seem to win the day, but Jesus had already won the war!** Therefore, Paul didn't need to be concerned about what the storm might do to him. In Christ, he was invincible until God's work for him was finished. **And did you know that if you are on a mission from God, you are invincible until God is done with you on that mission?** You might hear people say, "*Oh, he was so young when he died; he died before his time!*" → *No, he died right on time!* You don't know his time; only God knows his time. God is the one who appoints the end of all people in His time and in His way!

The challenge here is not focusing on trying to save our life, but to invest our life in the worship of the King! There is a famous scene from The Lord of the Rings in which Frodo was talking to Gandalf about the ring and said, "*I wish it need not have happened in my time.*" And Gandalf aptly replied "*So do I, and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.*" → **Our concern is not what will happen to our life (the Gospel confirms that we are secure in Christ). Our concern is what will we do with our lives to make a difference for God.** This is our

spiritual act of worship, and it's an anchor we must learn to put down in storms.

3. We must let down the anchor of trust. (v.25)

After sharing the good news of their promised survival and the bad news of the impending shipwreck, Paul says in v.25, *“So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told.”* Paul really believed God that everything would work out as he had been told. Everyone else is frantically trying to save their lives and Paul is at peace. In similar fashion, Jesus was at peace, asleep in the stern of the boat when the storm was raging on the Sea of Galilee. The disciples frantically tried to fight the storm. ***They didn't know yet that the One who allowed the storm and has power to stop the storm was onboard with them!***

The difference now for you is that ***you do know*** the One who controls the waves of the sea and the storms in the air. ***We must move from considering to concluding and ultimately to clinging.*** We must decide to cling in trust to the Promise Keeper!

So how will you decide today to trust Jesus better in the middle of your storm? Do you need to change an attitude, a behavior, or a relationship? Do you need to let go of a worldly attempt to deal with a real problem in your life? Do you need to cling closer to Jesus since He holds the source of all hope and life?

The one thing you cannot do is claim to be a victim of the storm.

Those who are victims doubt God's goodness and doubt God's plan. And James 1:6 tells us, *“The one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.”* The next verse says, *“That person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.”* ***Victims fall powerlessly prey to the storm. Victors powerfully overcome the storm in Christ.*** It doesn't mean that your legitimate grief turns to a flippant happiness. But it does mean you can possess a serious joy that sustains

your hope in the midst of real suffering. We receive this from the Lord as we learn to put down the anchor of trust in the midst of the storm.

CONCLUSION

The best news of all is that the storms of our life do eventually come to an end. We are not forever on a battered journey, wandering from one place to another. ***Similar to how Paul and every sailor safely arrived at shore in v.38, we too as believers of Jesus will one day safely arrive at that great celestial shore of heaven!*** You have been stamped by the owner of your life with the words, ***“Destined for eternity with me.”*** We learn in Revelation 21:4 that at the end of all things, ***“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”*** God’s promise to you is Psalm 34:19 - ***“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.”*** Believer who suffers today, there will come a day very soon when you will look back on the pain of your life as a distant memory. Do you believe that?

If you do believe that today, I encourage you to look to Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith. He will get us there as He strengthens our faith today. Let’s pray to Him now to do just that.

CLOSING PRAYER