

Sermon Notes

WORSHIP SERVICE - 12.7.2025

PART 44 - SAFE IN THE STORM

I. INTRODUCTION

- We spend most of our lives working hard to build the illusion of control.
- We convince ourselves that if we just make the right plans we can navigate safely through life.
- But every sailor knows the truth: you cannot control the sea.
- Sooner or later we face the storms of life that shatter the illusion of control.
- In a single moment, you realize you aren't the captain of your life, you're just a passenger on a boat that is taking on water and being battered by the winds.
- Today, we are nearing the end of Acts. We find Paul not in a pulpit, but on a prison transport, traversing the Mediterranean Sea, on his way to Rome, clinging to a battered ship, chained, powerless, and yet completely secure.
- The storm he encountered is so severe, Luke writes, "All hope of our being saved was at last abandoned."
- Some of you may have walked in here today feeling exactly like that.
- We're reminded in the text that Christ has not promised us a cruise-ship Christianity, he has promised us a safe arrival.
- But in the midst of terrifying storms, God's purposes and promises prevail.
- Let's walk through the storm with Paul and see how God sustains his people, not by removing the storm, but by preserving them in it.

II. THE ILLUSION OF CONTROL

ACTS 27:1-13

- Over two years have passed since Paul was first taken into custody in Jerusalem.
- Paul had appealed to Caesar and that was where he was going, to appear before the emperor of the most powerful empire in the known world.
- The Lord stood by Paul and told him he must testify about him in Rome.
- A few things to note:
- This is a firsthand retelling of the events. Luke is an eyewitness writing what seems to be like a detailed daily travel log.
- Paul is accompanied by Luke and Aristarchus from Thessalonica. In Colossians, Paul refers to Aristarchus as "my fellow prisoner." (Col 4:10)
- There were also other prisoners.
- A Roman centurion named Julius was in charge of Paul and the other prisoners. Luke describes that Julius treated Paul kindly.

- Under normal conditions, the trip to Italy would've taken an estimated 5 weeks.
- But the events Luke details put the journey at around four months.
- Luke records a tedious and difficult journey.
- They start off aboard a ship of Adramyttium and later switch ships to a vessel from Alexandria that was heading to Italy.
- They fight strong headwinds which slows their pace of travel.
- Notice the several references Luke makes about the trip:
 - The winds were against us
 - We arrived with difficulty
 - The wind did not allow us to go any further.
 - The wind forced them south.
 - They ended up hugging the southern coast of Crete until they reached Fair Havens.
- Because the trip was taking far longer than anticipated due to the delays, it was apparent that they would have to halt their voyage and winter somewhere for the next 3-4 months.

PAUL'S ADVICE REJECTED

- Paul, though a prisoner, speaks up and gives his advice.
- He's not an experienced sailor, but he was a seasoned seafaring traveler.
- He tells them that if they decide to keep going, there is going to be loss of cargo, ship, and lives.
- But the advice is not heeded. Impatience and financial pressure prevailed.
- Julius the centurion, paid more attention to the ship's owner and pilot.
- So they decided to press on a little farther west, some 40 miles to Phoenix, which would have been a better place to stay.

OFF COURSE

- V13 seals their fate. "Now when the south wind blew gently..."
- The sailors were lulled into a false sense of security, deceived into thinking that this would be easy traveling.
- Sometimes that's what happens, you make a decision that contradicts God's word. Disobedience often starts with a soft southerly wind. The immediate gratification can fool one into thinking they aren't sailing into a hurricane.
- Where do you ignore God's word like they ignored Paul's advice?
- You might want to ask yourself, What gentle breeze is deceiving me into thinking I can safely disobey God?
- The southerly breezes of life: comfort, ease, early success, are often Satan's lullabies before the storm.

III. THE WORD OF ASSURANCE

ACTS 27:14-26

- Things take a quick turn for the worse. Hurricane force winds, called the northeaster, came upon them.
- Look at the progression of despair:
 - A Loss of Control (15) The ship could not face the wind, they were being blown wildly off-course into dangerous territory in the open seas.
 - Took Desperate Measures (18-19)
 - It's all hands on deck, Luke helps secure the skiff.

- They fastened ropes around the ship to hold her timbers together, they lowered anchors to slow her drift, they jettisoned the cargo, they threw the ship's tackle overboard.
- They stripped away everything they thought gave them value and security, yet the storm raged on.
- Engulfed in Total Darkness: The heavens were blackened at night, no stars and sun were visible.
- Experienced Hopelessness: Panic filled the ship. Almost two weeks battling this storm and trying to keep the ship afloat and intact.
 - Luke describes the utter hopelessness and helplessness that overtook the entirety of the ship, "all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned." (20)
- The storms of life can lead one to feel this way.
- You might be in this exact spot. You've done everything you know to do. You're trying to keep it together. You've thrown the cargo overboard, you've cut the tackle. But you don't see daylight. You see no stars. And you have abandoned hope.

THE DIVINE WORD

- But it's at this exact point where human hope ends that divine revelation steps in.
- Paul stands up in the midst of them.
- Here he rises as a leader on board ship and issues a clear summons to the men.
- He summons them to courage. "Take heart, there will be no loss of life among you..."
- Why can he have such confidence in the face of the violent storm?
- Because Paul has a promise delivered by an angelic messenger of the God to whom he belongs and worships. He will stand before Caesar.
- Recall that while Paul was imprisoned in Jerusalem, one night, the Lord stood by him and summoned him to courage, and gave him the divine command that he must testify also in Rome. (23:11)
- These divine promises were the foundation and fuel of Paul's courage and his summons for everyone to maintain their courage.
- He believed God! He believed the character of God! God would keep his promises, even though there is going to be shipwreck.
- What promises anchor you when you feel abandoned?
- Steady your heart on God's unbreakable promises.

ALL WILL BE SAVED

- Not only is Paul confident that he will not die in this storm and make it to Rome, God has answered his prayers and granted that everyone on board will be saved.
- Notice, "God has granted you..." Paul prayed. He had a burden for the men on board that ship. He wanted them to be physically rescued but he also wanted them to be spiritually rescued as well.
- Do you pray with a burden for the unsaved around you?
- Paul says, "*I have faith in God that it's going to happen exactly as God told me.*"
- He had faith in God, not the storm, not the sailor's ability to navigate through it.
- They will make it safely through the storm because of God's providence, his promises and his presence.
- The gospels record some storm narratives where Jesus addressed the disciples' fear (Mark 4:35-41; 6:45-52).

- And those events happened to demonstrate that Jesus is Lord of the wind and storm.
- We can be terrified by the storms of life: bad medical news, a marriage in crisis, a depressing economic outlook, and our first instinct is to ask God to quiet the wind and storm.
- But faith says, *“God help me be faithful in the midst of the storm.”*
- Jesus can be trusted even when the waves crash around us and the storm is blowing fiercely.
- His presence and purpose will steady us through the storm and bring us through.

IV. THE MYSTERY OF MEANS

ACTS 27:27-44

- They have drifted in darkness for fourteen days.
- They suspect they are close to land and the sailors feared they might run aground on the rocks so they lowered the anchors and “prayed for daylight.”
- Some of the sailors try to escape by using the ship’s skiff under the pretense they were dropping more anchors.
- Somehow Paul knew their plan and reported it to Julius and the soldiers and told them, *“Everyone needs to stay together on the ship, unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.”*
- God’s promise to preserve everyone seems to have presupposed that they all stay with the ship.
- If God promised they would be saved, why does it matter if they get in the boat and head out on their own?
- Because God ordains the ends and the means.
- The end, the decreed outcome, was that no life will be lost.
- The means was that they all stay on the ship and use the sailors’ skill to beach the ship.
- That is the mystery of providence, God in his infinite wisdom has ordained the end and the means to accomplish his end.
- Our trust in God’s sovereignty does not mean we sit back because God has ordained everything.
- Some treat the sovereignty of God as an excuse for laziness.
- God uses means. We pray. We witness. We work. We stay in the ship. We trust God and we take action.
- Don’t expect God to work if you’re neglecting the very means God commands!

SHIPWRECK

- As dawn approaches, Paul brings another intervening word, *“You need to eat something.”* They were probably seasick or so stressed out they had no appetite.
- Paul uses some common sense. He urged them to eat. They need strength.
- He reassured them with the promise, *“not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you.”*
- Providence and human responsibility go hand in hand.
- Paul leads by example, he breaks bread and gives thanks to the Lord, and he does that in the presence of them all.
- His calm demeanor, his steadiness is contagious. They followed his lead and all ate.
- The way you go through storms and trials is an apologetic of your Christian faith before a watching world.

- When your unbelieving family members and co-workers see you going through the storms of life, do they see a calm, faith-filled, thankful in all circumstances believer?
 - Or do they see a frantic, panicked, stressed out, fearful, anxiety-ridden follower of Christ?
 - When the office is panicking about layoffs or people are fretting about the economy, how do you react?
 - The world panics. The Christian breaks bread and gives thanks.
 - You will be an effective gospel witness if you maintain your composure in a time of crisis.
 - From Paul's example we see a man of spiritual depth, with real faith in the living God, which gave him the confidence to stay calm and to lead.
 - And he also possessed Proverbs-like wisdom that enabled him to give practical instructions to others.
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- They prepared to beach the ship on an unknown island, but the ship struck a reef and they are stuck.
 - The pounding surf is breaking the ship apart.
 - The soldiers panic and plan to kill all the prisoners so they don't escape.
 - But Julius, wishing to save Paul, prevents them from doing that. Again, God providentially protects Paul through Roman intervention.
 - Julius orders the swimmers to jump overboard and make for shore.
 - And those who can't swim to use the planks to help them float to safety.
 - v44 God's promise is fulfilled, "And so it was that all were brought safely to land." Not on an intact vessel brought safely into harbor, but swimming in rough seas and on pieces of driftwood.
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- The Christian life is one of battle and storms and trials and shipwreck.
 - But God in his grace sustains us through it all.
 - Sometimes his grace looks like a piece of driftwood as he uses others to help us as we go through storms.
 - A friend buys you groceries when you lose your job.
 - Your family surrounds you when you go through a marital breakup.
 - Your church family prays and supports you through a difficult diagnosis.
 - These are all pieces of driftwood that are emblematic of God's grace.
 - God is not committed to saving your comfort and bringing you through life with ease.
 - God is committed to saving you.

V. THE CONFIRMATION OF PROTECTION

ACTS 28:1-10

- After the shipwreck, all 276 survivors washed ashore on Malta, cold, wet, and exhausted.
- The islanders show unexpected kindness, building a fire to warm them. As Paul helps gather firewood, a viper fastens onto his hand.
- The locals assume he is cursed, but when he simply shakes the snake off and suffers no harm, they realize something supernatural is at work and see Paul as a divine messenger.
- This is another confirmation of God's protection and Paul's divine commission to reach Rome.
- Paul then heals Publius' father and many others on the island, turning a disaster into a platform for gospel mercy and ministry.
- What looked like a detour was actually a divine appointment.
- God used the shipwreck to bring the gospel to Malta.

- After three months of ministry and witness, the islanders honored them and supplied all they needed.
- The storm had not delayed the mission, it was part of the mission.
- Don't waste your shipwreck.
- Your suffering may be the very platform through which the gospel comes to someone else.
- Your weakness may be the doorway for someone's healing.

CONCLUSION

- The waves finally calm, the ship is gone, the cargo is at the bottom of the sea, but the promise of God stands.
- This is a picture of the Christian life. God never promised to save your lifestyle, your cargo, your 401k, or your health. He promised to save you.
- Maybe your personal life feels like the events described today.
- You have two options when you are going through the storm:
- You can trust the ship's pilot and the owner, that is, trust in your own wisdom, your instincts, your finances, the so-called experts of this age.
- Or you can trust the God to whom you belong.
- If you are not a Christian here today, you are drifting on a broken ship without an anchor. When the storm comes, and it will, you have no promise of arrival.
- But there is a lifeboat. His name is Jesus. He dove into the storm of God's wrath on the cross, he was shipwrecked in the darkness of Calvary, so that you could be pulled safely to shore.
- You can experience his saving grace by turning to him for life and salvation.
- If you are in Christ, hear me. The ship may break apart beneath your feet but you will not lose your soul and your salvation.
- Cling to the wood of the cross and what Christ has accomplished for you. Trust the promise of the Captain.
- Stay in the ship, stay in his Word, stay in prayer, stay at his table, stay with his people.
- And trust the One who says, "Take heart, for I am with you."
- He may not calm every storm, but he will carry you safely through every one.

APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?