

Storms

Turning the World Right Side Up . . . The Apostle Paul – Part XI

Acts 27

Introduction

Several weeks ago, my wife and I, along with tens of thousands of other North Carolinians, watched the weather reports with incredible interest. Bonnie, the hurricane, was on the way, and it was headed right for the coast of North Carolina.

Those of you who experienced Hurricane Fran in our area, no longer take refuge in the fact that Wake County is far enough inland to shelter you. That particular hurricane went directly over us – or through us, I should say.

Now, just a couple of years later, here came another one – getting closer and closer. Fortunately for us in this area, the storm eventually stalled and then was pushed north by another mass of air. I remember feeling tremendous relief.

No one volunteers to go through storms. You avoid them at all cost. Any storm for that matter – including what we call, the storms of life.

No matter how hard you try, the storms of life, like hurricanes and thunderstorms, sometime hit you with full fury and force. It may come on the heels of a telephone call, a letter, a medical report, a company that is forced to downsize, and suddenly, life is turned upside down. All you can do is run for cover and ride out the storm.

I find it fascinating that Luke records for us, one of the most detailed accounts of a storm in his biography of the early church. In Acts, chapter 27, there is one of the most detailed accounts of a hurricane and its effects on the ship and passengers that you will find in almost any of the ancient

maritime history accounts. This passage, by the way, gives us some clues on how to ride out the storms of life.

Let us pick up our study with chapter 27, as Paul begins his journey to the center of the civilized world, or Rome, and to the high court of the emperor, Nero. We will join the journey at verses 7 through 9.

When we had sailed slowly for a good many days, and with difficulty had arrived off Cnidus, since the wind did not permit us to go farther, we sailed under the shelter of Crete, off Salmone; and with difficulty sailing past it we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea. When considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast was already over, Paul began to admonish them,

This passage, by the way, gives us a chronological clue. The mention of “the fast was already over,” is a reference to the Day of Atonement. In other words, winter is approaching, and it is cold; the weather is turning surly; it is time to settle in at Fair Havens, not to be sailing the Mediterranean.

Continue to verses 10 through 12.

and [Paul] said to them, “Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.” But the centurion was more persuaded by the pilot and the captain of the ship than by what was being said by Paul. Because the harbor was

not suitable for wintering, the majority reached a decision to put out to sea from there, if somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

Now, they are about to refuse Paul's advice. This provides for every generation hence, some practical reasons why we create certain storms of our own.

Reasons for Encountering Some Storms

Let me give several reasons for encountering some storms.

An unwillingness to wait

1. The first reason they were about to sail right into a storm was the simple fact of impatience; an unwillingness to wait.

Go back to verse 4b and read the words,

... the winds were contrary.

Then, look again at verses 7a and 8a, where we are told,

When we had sailed slowly for a good many days, and with difficulty had arrived off Cnidus, since the wind did not permit us to go farther . . . and with difficulty sailing past it we came to Fair Havens . . .

On one hand, it is easy to see why they are impatient and frustrated. It has been a much longer journey than usual already.

Paul said, "Let's wait until after winter."

They said, "Now is our chance. Let's make a run for it."

You may have heard those same voices that say, "You've got to hurry. . . make your decision now . . . don't wait . . . you'll never have a better chance than now!"

Ladies and gentlemen, Satan always shoves you; God leads you. Satan is like a salesman who says, "If you don't buy it now, you'll lose it . . . I have someone coming by this afternoon to look at this, and they're really interested, but I'll let you have it, if you act now. Hurry!"

My friends, we do not have a problem with impulse buying – that is a symptom. We have a problem with impulse living.

We so willingly cooperate with the flesh, the world, and the devil who want us to act on impulse. God, however, wants us to act with insight.

In this first century account, they just do not want to wait.

Following expert advice

2. The second thing they did that sets them up for the storm was that they followed expert advice.

Paul said in verse 10a,

Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage . . .

The Greek word means, "I perceive from past experience". And Paul did have experience, by the way. According to II Corinthians, chapter 11, verse 25, he had already experienced three shipwrecks.

When the centurion looked at Paul and then back at the ship's captain, however, he underestimated Paul and overestimated the captain.

A desire for comfort

3. The third lure into disaster was a desire for comfort.

Verse 12 says,

... the harbor was not suitable for wintering . . .

Evidently Fair Havens was not so fair. It was a crummy little port village with very little to do all winter. Evidently the chamber of commerce had named the harbor such, in hopes of misleading tourists looking for cheap vacations – "Come to Fair Havens."

Fair or foul, they would soon be happy for that simple village over what they are about to experience.

I wonder how many times we say, "I just don't sense God's peace about doing this or that." What we really mean is, "I don't want to do this or stay here or keep going because it makes me uncomfortable, and I don't like it."

I think we blame far too much on the peace of God or the lack thereof.

This crew had a desire for comfort.

Listening to majority opinion

4. The fourth thing they did wrong that sealed their fate was that they listened to the majority opinion.

Verse 12 tells us that,

. . . the majority reached a decision to put out to sea from there.

They took a poll! We are not the first confused society to take polls. They took a poll, and the majority said, “Let’s sail!”

Can you imagine asking some two hundred passengers, “What do you think we ought to do?!”

What do they know!

I like the story of the census taker who knocked on the door of a cabin in the backwoods of North Carolina. A fellow came to the door. The census taker cleared his throat and said, “The President has sent us across the country to find out how many people live in the United States.”

The man replied, “Well, I’m sorry you came all the way out here to ask me, ‘cause I ain’t got the faintest idea.”

They said, “Let’s set sail!”

And, they sailed right into a hurricane. Look at verse 14.

But before very long there rushed down from the land a violent wind, called Euraquilo;

The Greek word “euros” means, “east wind,” and “aquilo” is Latin for “north wind”. This was the northeasterner feared by all who sailed the Mediterranean. The northeasterner is a storm with violent winds – the word for “wind” is the Greek word “tuphonikos,” which gives us the word “typhoon”. This was a terrifying storm that was caused by the clashing of opposite air masses creating hurricane winds and pounding rain.

The majority opinion had sent their boat into Hurricane Euro.

Paul’s Anchor In the Time of Storm

Look at verses 15 through 20 to discover the outcome of riding into the storm.

and when the ship was caught in it, and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and let ourselves be driven along.

Running under the shelter of a small island called Claudia, we were scarcely able to get the ship’s boat under control.

After they had hoisted it up, they used supporting cables in undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might run aground on the shallows of Syrtis, they let down the sea anchor and in this way let themselves be driven along.

The next day as we were being violently storm-tossed, they began to jettison the cargo;

and on the third day they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands.

Since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing us, from then on all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned.

Notice those heavy words, “hope . . . was gradually abandoned.”

Have you ever felt that way? Have you had a time when hope just begins to slide out of your grasp?

Paul evidently, believed that this moment was the teachable moment. So, in verse 21, we read that,

. . . Paul stood up in their midst and said, “Men, you ought to have followed my advice . . .”

What a word for today. While everyone else wants to know what the majority opinion is, is anyone listening to Paul?!

My friend, you may be smack in the middle of a storm simply because you listened to everyone but the inspired scriptures, penned by the apostle Paul.

Now Paul does not stop with that rebuke, he continues on with the revelation. Look at verses 21 through 24.

Yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, saying, “Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.”

In these brief words, we discover Paul’s strong anchor in the time of storm.

There is a God

1. The first anchor, Paul says, is that there is a God.

Paul said in verse 23,

... this very night an angel of THE GOD... stood before me

This is what John Phillips called, “practicing the presence of God.”

In other words, you do not see Him; you cannot hear Him; everything in your life seems to point to the fact that He has abandoned your boat.

There is something incredibly powerful about the faithful testimony of someone who is in the process of being shipwrecked. In front of more than two hundred people, Paul was composed, steady. And he says, “There is a God.”

That is the same confidence W. C. Martin wrote about in an old hymn text that you may want to commit to memory. The words are:

*Though the angry surges roll
On my tempest-driven soul
I am peaceful, for I know,
Wildly though the winds may blow,
I’ve an anchor safe and sure,
That can evermore endure.
There is a God.*

I belong to Him and He belongs to me

2. Paul also said, as his second anchor, in effect, “I belong to Him and He belongs to me.”

Notice the phrase in verse 23 again,

... an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me

Underline those words, “to whom I belong”!

Do storms bring that confidence out in you?

The fascinating thing to me is that anyone could have said, “If this God is your God, why did He allow the storm? And why is He putting you through this Paul? What could He possibly have in mind?!”

The truth is, the Bible does not give us that answer!

A trip that should have taken two or three weeks, will end up taking Paul seven months. Why? We are not told!

I have every reason to believe that Paul was not told why either. Maybe one of the greatest developments of your faith and mine is that, while we are in the midst of a raging storm, we still muster up the courage to look people in the eye and say, “The

God who created this storm – these waves; these winds – is my God. I belong to Him and He belongs to me.”

The focus of scripture in this chapter has nothing to do with why shipwrecks are allowed by God or who causes storms to enter our lives. It does focus, however, on the believer’s response.

Can we respond like Job? After a hurricane killed all of his children, Job said, as recorded in Job, chapter 13, verse 15a (KJV),

Though He [God] slay me, yet will I trust in Him...

Paul shouts above the howling storm and crashing waves, “My God is alive. I belong to Him and He belongs to me.”

That truth is bigger than any storm!

I believe what God says will happen, will happen

3. Paul goes on to say, and gives us his third anchor, “I believe what God says will happen, will happen.”

Notice verses 25 and 26.

Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on a certain island.

Sometimes God allows shipwrecks so that you can relate that truth to people around you. Storms allow Him to work through us in ways we could never imagine.

Now, let us just read what happens near the end of the chapter and the end of the storm. Look at verses 27 through 44.

But when the fourteenth night came, as we were being driven about in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors began to surmise that they were approaching some land.

They took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms; and a little farther on they took another sounding and found it to be fifteen fathoms.

Fearing that we might run aground somewhere on the rocks, they cast four anchors from the stern and wished for daybreak.

But as the sailors were trying to escape from the ship and had let down the ship’s

boat into the sea, on the pretense of intending to lay out anchors from the bow,

Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, "Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved."

Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat, and let it fall away.

Until the day was about to dawn, Paul was encouraging them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have been constantly watching and going without eating, having taken nothing.

"Therefore I encourage you to take some food, for this is for your preservation; for not a hair from the head of any of you will perish."

Having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to eat.

All of them were encouraged and they themselves also took food.

All of us in the ship were two hundred and seventy-six persons.

When they had eaten enough, they began to lighten the ship by throwing out the wheat into the sea.

When day came, they could not recognize the land; but they did observe a bay with a beach, and they resolved to drive the ship onto it if they could.

And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea while at the same time they were loosening the ropes of the rudders; and hoisting the foresail to the wind, they were heading for the beach.

But striking a reef where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern began to be broken up by the force of the waves.

The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none of them should swim away and escape;

but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land,

and the rest should follow, some on planks, and others on various things from the ship. And thus it happened that they all were brought safely to land.

Application – Lessons Learned in Rough Waters

Let us apply this text with several lessons learned in rough waters.

The benefit of Christianity is not the absence of storms, but the presence of God in the midst of the storm

1. First, the benefit of Christianity is not the absence of storms, but the presence of God in the midst of the storm.

The lesson of Christianity is that while we want the Lord to deliver us, He wants to develop us

2. Secondly, the lesson of Christianity is that while we want the Lord to deliver us, He wants to develop us.

In I Thessalonians, chapter 2, verse 18, Paul said,

For we wanted to come to you – I, Paul, more than once – and yet Satan hindered us.

Why did God allow Satan to rough up the waters? Why not send the angel to still the water? Why not stop the storm? Why not rescue the boat from destruction? Imagine all the inconvenience God allowed Paul to go through – and for what? Why allow anything but sunshine and smooth waters?

Ladies and gentlemen, we are simply too interested in getting to Rome. God is interested in who we will be when we get there.

The perspective of Christianity is that even the worst storms cannot derail the plan of God for your life

3. Thirdly, the perspective of Christianity is that even the worst storms cannot derail the plan of God for your life.

What is your storm today? Where are you turning for help?

Are you meditating on God's word, or has the storm driven you away from the pages of the Bible? Have the winds and high waves spun you away from prayer? Have you lost sight of the fact that God is alive?

The most important time in your life to practice the presence of God is in the middle of a storm.

Though the angry surges roll

On my tempest-driven soul

I am peaceful, for I know,

Wildly though the winds may blow,

I've an anchor safe and sure,

That can evermore endure.

While you are bracing for the worst of the storm, hold on to the anchor – God is alive; I belong to Him; He belongs to me; I believe His purposes for my life will be accomplished; what He has said in His word will come true.

Then, as we are told in Psalm, chapter 46, verse 10a (KJV),

Be still, and know that I am God . . .

Can you think of a storm or two in your life? Is it something you have encountered because of your own doing?

Let us mentally run through the checklist:

- Was it because of impatience; an unwillingness to wait?
- Was it due to listening to the wrong advice? Are you still listening to it, or will you begin to listen to God's word?

- Was it a desire for comfort that clouded your perspective?
- Was it because you followed the crowd; the majority opinion, and the majority opinion was wrong?

Perhaps the storm is not of your own doing. Did it occur to you, as we studied this passage, that Paul was having to go through a storm because of the decisions someone else made against his own advice?

Did Paul act like a victim? If anyone had a right to rage, it was Paul. Yet, he is encouraging the crew – with the facts.

And, Paul is clinging to three unmovable truths that we should cling to as well:

- God is alive.
- You belong to Him and He belongs to you.
- God's plans for your life cannot be blown off course by a storm. In fact, His plan for your life included the storm.

Will you verbally whisper to Him, "Father, I cannot see Your hand at this moment in my life, but I will trust Your heart. I do believe that what Your word says is indeed the truth."

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