

I. Introduction

Good morning! In life there are many storms, but Jesus gives us courage to face the storms of life. Some storms are literal, but most are metaphorical. However, in all cases, Jesus' presence with us and the promises of Scripture can give us peace. In his ministry, Paul experienced storms of false accusations, unjust imprisonments, and plots to kill him. Today, however, we will read about a time when Paul was caught in a literal storm, a storm with winds like a hurricane.

Last week's reading ended with **Acts 26:32**, "**Agrippa said to Festus, 'This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.'**" King Agrippa and Governor Festus knew that Paul was innocent. But because of his appeal to Caesar, Paul had to be sent on to Rome. So, the arrangements were made and the day of departure soon came. Paul was shown considerable kindness on this journey, probably because he was a Roman citizen and because he had not been convicted of any crime. But, in truth, all of those on the journey should have been very thankful to have Paul along, because his presence and prayers saved them from drowning in the storm.



Let's read Acts 27:1-15. As we read, notice the use of, "we," in the passage. This indicates that Luke is travelling with Paul. And, we are also told that Aristarchus, who was first mentioned as travelling with Paul in Acts 19:29, is with them. Permission to have his friends travel with him is the first of several favors granted to Paul.

II. Scripture Reading (Acts 27:1-15, NIV 1984)

1 When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. 2 We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us. 3 The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs. 4 From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us. 5 When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia.

6 There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board. 7 We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone. 8 We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea. 9 Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Fast. So Paul warned them, 10 "Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also."

11 But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. 12 Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbor in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest. 13 When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had obtained what they wanted; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. 14 Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the "northeaster," swept down from the island. 15 The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along.

III. Teaching

This map shows the course of Paul's journey. At a port near Caesarea,



they boarded a ship that was travelling northward along the coast. They stopped at Sidon, where Paul was allowed to go ashore and visit friends and receive support. After that, they made slow progress against unfavorable winds, but continued on to Myrna. At Myrna, they changed ships when the centurion found a large ship that was on the way from Alexandria in Egypt to Italy with a shipment of grain. We know the ship was quite large, because later on Luke mentions that there were 276 people aboard.

They continued west to Cnidus, but the winds were against them, so they sailed south in order to pass below Crete. They went as far as a port called Fair Havens. At this point Paul gave a warning. **Acts 27:9-10, "Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Fast. So Paul warned them, 'Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also.'"**

The fast referred to is the fast of Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement. In AD 59, this would have been October 5th. As winter approached, sailing on the Mediterranean Sea became increasingly dangerous. Paul was not a sailor by trade, but he was a very experienced traveler and, as 2 Corinthians 11:25 records, Paul had already suffered shipwreck three times. Paul knew what he was talking about and his warning was soon proven to be prophetic. Nonetheless, the centurion and the ship's crew wanted to go on.

Acts 27:12, "Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbor in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest." The majority wanted to go on to a harbor that would be better for the ship, and, by the way, a larger city where the crew could have a more comfortable and fun winter break. This decision is a reminder that the majority is not always correct. Later on, they wished they had followed Paul's advice.

Acts 27:13-14, "When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had obtained what they wanted; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the "northeaster," swept down from the island." Sometimes an unwise decision can appear wise for a time. For days, the ship had made slow progress as it tried to battle into the teeth of a west wind. Now, a gentle wind from the south, excellent for their purposes, came. They set out quickly, but the favorable conditions did not last. Soon they were caught in a "northeaster." This was the *Euraquilo* winter storm that blew cold and furious from Eastern Europe onto the Mediterranean Sea.

In 1978, when I was a Marine serving aboard the USS Midway, we passed between two typhoons that were close together. I was amazed to see waves coming over the bow of the ship and washing down the flight deck, which was normally more than 60 feet above the water. Even on the largest modern ships, a major storm at sea can be frightening. But Paul and his companions were not on a modern ship.



The ships of that time were really only suitable for fair weather sailing. The ability of such ships to withstand a major storm was uncertain at best. The ship Paul was aboard was caught in a storm with typhoon-like winds. In such a storm, they had little control; their ship was simply driven along by the wind and waves. Let's read Acts 27:16-26 and see what happens next.



IV. Scripture Reading (Acts 27:16-26, NIV 1984)

16 As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure. 17 When the men had hoisted it aboard, they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Fearing that they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. 18 We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. 19 On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. 20 When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

21 After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. 22 But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. 23 Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I

serve stood beside me 24 and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' 25 So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. 26 Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."

V. Teaching

Historians tell us that the city of Rome was very dependent on imported grain from Egypt and North Africa. To meet this need, grain ships like this one (picture) carried hundreds of thousands of tons of grain across the Mediterranean Sea every year. Paul was aboard one of these ships when the storm hit. The ship was in a desperate condition and the crew did everything they could to keep the ship above water.



They brought the lifeboat, which was usually towed behind the ship, on board so that it would not crash into the ship and cause damage. They passed ropes under the ship and tightened them to help hold the ship together. To lighten the ship, they threw most of the cargo and even the ships tackle overboard. They did everything they could, but they were still in constant fear that the ship would be lost.

Acts 27:20, "When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved." The sun and stars were their sole means of navigating. So, after many days in the storm, they had no idea where they were. They would have been in total darkness at night and near darkness even during the day. Lost in the storm for days, they lost all hope.



Have you ever had an experience like this? Maybe you have never been literally lost at sea in a violent storm. But I think many of us have experienced times of severe discouragement. The storms of life are many. Not only are there terrible disasters like earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, volcanic eruptions, famines, and epidemics, but there also personal disasters like the loss of a job, loss of a home, divorce, cancer, heart attack, infectious disease, accident, injury, depression, loneliness, abandonment by friends or family, persecution, and the death of loved ones. Some of us are going through one or more of these things today.

But whatever sorrows and troubles we may have, we can be confident that God has not forgotten us. The author of Psalm 46 wrote (**Psalm 46:1-3**), **"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging."** We cannot always see what God is doing, but we can be sure that the Lord is with us; He is an ever-present help. God has not forgotten you.

God did not forget Paul and his companions either. They had not eaten in a long time; they were probably all sea sick. But suddenly a word of hope came. Paul stood up and spoke. First, he told them they should have listened to his warning; I think Paul just could not resist saying that. Then Paul continued with words of hope.

Acts 27:22, "But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed." The ship will be sacrificed to the angry storm. But, as we will see next week, everyone will be saved by staying on the ship until the end. This verse reminds me of how Jesus was sacrificed on the cross so that all who trust in Him will be saved. Jesus' death on the cross makes us weep. But because of His death, we may have life by trusting Him and remaining in Him.

Acts 27:23-24, "Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.'" Who does Paul belong to and who does Paul serve? Paul says, "the God whose I am and whom I serve." If we belong to God and serve Him, then He will help us in our time of need. It seems that even Paul had begun to be afraid. So, God sent an angel. I think God does this a lot more than we realize, but we usually don't notice, because the angel does what needs to be done to help us without revealing himself. The angel first reminded Paul that he had no reason to fear, because God had

already declared that Paul must go to Caesar.

Then the angel added something more, “**God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.**” God promised to save the lives of everyone on the ship. I am sure that Paul had been praying for the safety of all, but I cannot imagine that Paul prayed only for mere physical safety. In fact, I am quite sure that Paul prayed for the eternal salvation of all who were with him. If we consider this, the message of the angel takes on a far greater importance. I cannot be completely sure of this interpretation, but I, for one, fully expect to see everyone who was on that ship in heaven. When we consider that Paul had several weeks with them to share the love of Jesus through words and deeds, it is not so surprising an idea.

I think this verse should give us hope with regard to our loved ones as well. God hears our prayer and honors our witness. If we are faithful to pray for the people we see daily and to minister the love of Jesus to them in word and deed, then we can have great hope that God may graciously give their lives to us, just as He gave Paul the lives of his shipmates.

Acts 27:25, “So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.” When we are faced by difficult and seemingly impossible situations, we all need courage to continue on. Paul has this courage and he urges his shipmates to join him in the choice to be courageous. It is a choice, you know. When we are faced by trouble, we can choose courage. But courage without a foundation can become foolishness. So, we need a firm foundation for our courage. Faith in God and His promises gives us that foundation. Paul gives us the example, he has, “**faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.**”

VI. Conclusion

We will leave Paul at sea until next week. But we know that he has made the choice to have courage in the storm through trusting the Lord. He urges us to make the same choice. No matter what problems we have, we do not have to lead discouraged and defeated lives. Like Paul, we can choose to have courage in the storm and we can encourage the people around us to make the same choice. Whatever storm you are in, trust God and His Word and choose courage.

Let’s close with a word of encouragement from **Roman 8:35-39**. “**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**” Amen? Amen! Let’s pray.

VII. Prayer

Note: In the bulletin, there are more Scriptures related to today’s message. If you meditate on one these each day for a week, I think it will help you to make a habit of having courage in the storm.

Sunday: 1 John 4:18, **Monday:** Deuteronomy 31:6, **Tuesday:** Isaiah 26:3, **Wednesday:** John 14:27, **Thursday:** Isaiah 41:10, **Friday:** Psalm 56:4, **Saturday:** Romans 8:15.