

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Acts 27:1. We have four weeks left in our study through Acts. We'll have been in it about seventeen months. God bless you if you were here for all of them. I know I was. (Laughing) At the end of the four weeks, we're going to have a question and answer night with myself and Don Stewart on a Wednesday night. You won't have to turn in your questions early; just come and ask them, and we'll see what we can do to answer them for you. The following week, Don's going to come and give us an update about current events and Bible prophecy, and I think that'll be worth having him share that with us. And then we'll be gone for two weeks in Israel, and then we're going to come back and start on our favorite book of the Bible - the book of Ruth. And then we're going to go all the way through the rest of the historical books of the Old Testament - 1 and 2 Samuel and Kings and Chronicles - all the way to Ezra. We won't do Nehemiah because we've just done that a year ago or so. So that'll take us up to the prophetic books. So that's on tap for the rest of my life, I'm pretty sure. (Laughing) And then we'll see where we go from there.

So tonight chapter 27. We'll take half of it tonight, down through verse 26. We'll finish it next week.

Let me give you a three-minute review of how we got here. Paul arrived in Jerusalem on the end of his third missionary journey at a place where he had been planning to come for months and months, bringing with him Gentile church offerings with Gentile elders attached in the hopes of making peace with the Jerusalem church who was really having a tough time with Gentiles coming to know the Lord without first becoming Jews. And it was an issue of works and faith and all. And so Paul came and brought this gift he was hoping would bridge the gap. It did not. They received the gifts. The church was happy to see him. James and the elders in the church said, "Paul, we've got a lot of zealous people here, but they're not just zealous like your people; they're zealous for the Law. And so you have a bad reputation here. You're the guy that everyone's saying is going around telling people it's about grace and not at all about the Law." Paul should have said, "That's exactly right." But what he said was, "What do you want me to do?" And they said, "We'd like you to sponsor four guys. They're making a vow of a Nazirite during the time of the celebration here in Jerusalem. If you could just sponsor

them and go with them, it'd go a long way towards convincing people you're not that guy at all." Paul did what they asked; he compromised - for the sake of love.

They went fine for a week; at the end of the week, as the end was coming, the accusations from some in town from the Ephesus area, accused Paul of having actually brought a Gentile into the inner courts of the Temple (it was a no-no, punishable by stoning). He hadn't done it, but the people went crazy. They were there for their religious holidays. They beat Paul in the street - almost killed him. Claudius Lysias came to the rescue, the Roman head of the army, if you will. Paul asked if he could give them a sermon from the steps of the Antonia Fortress, which he allowed him to do. He shared God's work. Everybody listened how he got saved and everything until he got to the words, "And the Lord sent me to the Gentiles." And boy, that was all he had to say, and the rioting in chapter 21 broke out again. He was again saved by this Roman captain, and the army placed him in protective custody.

The next day he is brought down by Claudius to meet with the Sanhedrin - try to iron it out. But they weren't there to iron it out; they were there to make sure he died. Paul realized how serious the situation was. He looked around the room and saw half the Sanhedrin were Pharisees, who believed in a resurrection; the rest were Sadducees, who didn't even believe in life after death. And so he said, "I think I'm in trouble here with you guys because I believe in the resurrection," which won half the side over but not the other half. And so another big brawl took place in the meeting chambers, and, again, Claudius had to step in and rescue Paul; put him again under protective custody. He really wanted to figure out what was going on. He didn't know. While he was mulling around what to do, Paul's little nephew out in the street heard that there was an agreement made with forty guys who had sworn they wouldn't eat until they got Paul killed, and they asked the Sanhedrin, "Could you invite Paul down again? We can work this out. And while they're bringin' him, we'll kill him." This little boy found out about it; he told his uncle, who sent him to Claudius, who decided, "Man, this is trouble more than I can handle here. I'm going to send Paul under guard to Caesarea" where Felix was the governor. That's where Paul went. Paul laid his witness in front of Felix after these guys showed up with their high-priced lawyer, Tertullius, to accuse Paul. Felix immediately decided Paul was innocent, but he didn't let him go although he came to hear from him about the Lord, asked lots of questions, trembled when he heard the word. But that didn't seem to be enough. Trembling doesn't work; you've got to get saved.

And so he kept Paul in prison for two years, hoping that somehow he might get some money out of his friends to bribe his way out. Paul wouldn't take that way out, though it was available to him. So he refused it. He saw Felix one day go to Rome and never come back. He was called out for being a brutal man, and he was done. His wife would die that same year. And he would be replaced by a guy named Festus. He was 70 years old - been around for a long time. He understood the political leverage that he needed. He went to Jerusalem first to try to make peace; heard about this guy Paul who'd been kept in jail for two years, sixty miles away in Caesarea. They asked, "Hey, if you could just bring him here and we could try him, that'd be great." He went back and listened to Paul and said, "Hey, would you mind going to Jerusalem? We could fix it there." And Paul went, "No way. They want me dead!" And he knew it. "If you're gonna not decide on my case and let me go, then I'd like to appeal my case to Caesar," which was the right of every Roman citizen; which left Festus in a dilemma because he knew he was innocent - didn't really know what to do with him, what charges to level against him.

So, while he sits in wonder, a couple comes to him; they're brother and sister, also husband and wife (kind of a creepy couple) - King Agrippa II and his wife Bernice, who came to greet the new governor. Festus butters them up before asking them would they interview Paul so that they could help him come up with some charges. Paul, when he had an opportunity to speak, laid a heavy, heavy witness upon them. Festus seemed very resistant. We don't really know the response of King Agrippa II. He said, "You're almost convincing me to be a Christian," and Paul said, "Man, I wish it was not just you but everyone in the room." We don't really know what the tone was like, but they couldn't come up with any charges either. They blamed Paul for appealing to Caesar at all, "You might have been let go." Well, that was it. So, at the end of chapter 26, Paul is now on his way to Rome. And that's what we're going to cover tonight and next week, and then his time in Rome (in chapter 28), which will bring to an end Paul's journeys, which will bring to an end a little bit more than thirty years of history of the early church and will give us the background for all of the epistles that you will read from Paul as you go forward.

So that's where we start tonight - Paul going to Rome. Now, Paul had wanted to go to Rome for years. He said, back in chapter 19:21, "Look, when I've gone through Macedonia, when I've gone through Achaia, when I come back to Jerusalem, after that I'm going to Rome." And that was in his heart. But it was one of those things that was in his heart; he'd never really been able to do it or to travel there. In chapter 23:11, when the Lord appeared to Paul, He said to him, "You've been a good

witness for Me here in Jerusalem," which Paul needed to hear because, man, everyone hated him, "and when you're done here, I'm going to use you to be a witness for Me in Rome." And so Paul knew that one day, somehow, he was going to end up in that place of Rome, where he was going to be a witness for the Lord.

Sometimes God guides us by desire. You know that Scripture in Psalm 37:4 that says, "Delight yourself in the LORD, and God will give you the desires of your heart"? Now there're a lot of people that beat that to death and make it say what they want, which is like, "Hey, I'll just get what I want." But that's not what it says. It does say when you delight yourself in the things of God, God will form in you desires that will be in line with His will. You're going to want what He wants. Which is how I think God moves most of us around. Right? I mean, not all of you are good singers. Some of you are horrible. But to the Lord, it's music .... and only to the Lord. But it's to the Lord, music. It's good when we sing as a group because nobody hears you. We don't want to bring you up here by yourself or we'll all be, "Ahhhh, that hurts." Right? But yet some of you have a gift, and God moves upon your heart, and you get up here to lead us in worship, and we're thankful for that. But it's the work of the Lord in the heart. God leads us that way .... by the desire. You "delight yourself in the LORD, He'll give you the desires of your heart." You find the same thing in Philippians 2:13, "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." But there's that internal working.

And for Paul, this was a desire. He wanted to go to Jerusalem where he felt like he failed miserably, and the Lord said, "You've been a good witness for Me here, Paul." And Paul realized it wasn't the fruit, it was the faithfulness that God was looking for. And now he was headed for Rome - another place that he just longed so much to go. But, again, it was that work of God in his heart. So, Paul was ready to go anywhere at this point. I would imagine, after several years in prison, that it was time to go; he was ready. The problem was - at least from a physical standpoint - it was summer already, and as you headed toward winter this was not a good place to go sailing. This whole trip - these hundreds of miles across the sea - is a very dangerous trip, and there could be all kinds of bad weather. Paul leaves on this trip with one assurance, "God said I'm getting to Rome." If there was anyone in this boat, in this S.S. Minnow, who thought that he was going to survive it, it was Paul. "I don't know what's gonna happen to the rest of you guys, but I'm gonna make it because the Lord said I'm goin' to Rome. He didn't say I was goin' there in a box. He said I was going there to be a witness." So I think that he was going forward with that understanding. What awaited him there was anybody's guess,

but I suspect Paul was such a travel wanderlust kind of guy, just being able to go was enough. He wanted to go in the worst kind of way. So, he didn't know what was awaiting, though. He could be set free by Nero. Nero was a sketchy guy. He could be killed even though he was innocent. I don't know what kind of witness God had in mind. But with great faith, he heads out of Caesarea - where he had been for over two years - and he heads for a rendezvous with the emperor of the Roman Empire - the crown that ruled the world, not knowing what to think. It was the chief city of the Empire. It was a cesspool. I mean, if you've read anything at all about Rome, ever, you know that it fell apart from within. How much they needed God's Word. We know that there was a church already in Rome; we do not know how it started. There's no way, in a Bible sense, to track and figure who went to Rome and began to preach. We don't know. But we do know that when Paul arrives there, a whole bunch of people from the church come and greet Paul. "Man, we've been prayin' for you. We're so glad that you've come. We've heard all that the Lord has done with you." They were a lot more accommodating and welcoming than the church in Jerusalem, that's for sure, who had all but forgotten Paul existed. And so, by the time you get to chapter 28:15, they all come out and greet Paul along the way for tens of miles outside of the city. So the desire of Paul was the work of the will of God - one and the same - and Paul goes with a heart ready to serve, and he's in bonds, and he's unsure of his future. But one thing for sure - God has sent him, and that was going to be good enough for him. Sometimes that just has to be good enough for us.

So let's look at the first twenty-six (or so) verses of this chapter, and then we'll kind of put the brakes on when the boat crashes, and we'll just leave them in the water until next week. Verse 1, "And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to one named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment. So, entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us." Notice, in verse 1, Paul got put on this boat with a lot of other prisoners. We don't know why they were taken to Rome. Sometimes you went to Rome to have your case heard, appeal heard. Most times you were taken to Rome to be killed - for the amusement of the populace in the arenas, thrown to the lions, lit as a light in Caesar's palace, even, tarred and lit. Horrible. I mean, all you have to do is read any history of the Roman Empire, and you just shake your head. You think things couldn't get worse than we have them today? Oh, they were a lot worse then. It was horrendous. Paul and these prisoners were handed to a fellow named Julius. He was a centurion. He was from the Augustan Regiment, which was

one of (at least historically) Nero's elite imperial units who were used to communicate between Rome and the armed forces in the field around the world. So wherever the Romans were in power, which was just about everywhere, these were the kinds of guys that would run back and forth and communicate the will of the Caesar in Rome to the troops. Julius would have been a military man. He would have had great experience already. He would be trusted. It was a powerful position, and he's a guy that would be honorable.

By the way, centurions, in your Bible, are always seen as honorable men. There isn't a negative about a centurion in your Bible. Which is interesting to me. Whether it was that great faith that you find in that centurion that lived in Capernaum; whether it was that centurion that stood at the cross of Jesus when He died and acknowledged that this was indeed the Son of God; whether it was Cornelius, who God used to bring the gospel for the first time, officially, to the Gentiles, whose house was filled with hungry hearts, and he was a man who always prayed and sought the Lord; or whether it is this guy, Julius. Always in a favorable light. Which is interesting because Rome had a justice system that was pretty honest in terms of fairness of play unless the people involved with it were corrupt. But the gist of it was usually one of fairness, and you find these men as well.

Also notice, in verse 2, we read "we put to sea." The word "we" would suggest that Luke got on the boat with Paul. He's the writer, and whenever he's with Paul, it's always "us" and "we" and not "they" and "them." With him as well, verse 2, was a fellow named Aristarchus. He was a brother in the Lord. He was in Ephesus - that was when Paul was there planting the church for three years. You can read his name in chapter 19. He was there at the riot that took place that got Paul kind of moving again. In fact, he was one of the guys that was arrested when that riot took place. He would eventually join Paul in Jerusalem to deliver the finances. You read that in chapter 20 as well. He'll also be mentioned in the Colossian letter (4:10) as being a fellow prisoner with Paul and once more in the Philemon letter (verse 24), that he's in jail with Paul. So Luke, the doctor - the author of what is literally two books, 25% of the New Testament - who brings us blow-by-blow for thirty years, gets on a boat with a bunch of criminals, or so it seems, with prisoners, guys who are known for being trouble or, like Paul, were being unjustly accused. It was a risky thing for Luke to do because association with bad guys - if they got in trouble, you could go with them. It's like a big sweep. Had Paul lost this argument with Nero, or his appeal, Luke could have lost his life just as easily. So hanging around with guys like Paul - in this time - would have been a dangerous

thing to do; or Aristarchus as well. They had records a mile long, if you will. And yet he felt called of the Lord to go. This is a rough trip. It's a long way to go. Yet he loved the Lord, he loved Paul's ministry. He was by his side despite the cost. We could use some more men like this - who are devoted to the things of God, even to having to risk their own necks.

Notice, from verse 2 as well, that the centurion did not find an oceangoing vessel to cross the Mediterranean. So he put his charges on a coastal vessel, a coastal vessel that had come from Asia Minor, and they were heading home with cargo. Now there were no passenger ships in Paul's day, just solely passenger ships. You would always travel on cargo ships, anyway, and kind of buy space. So that is what the centurion did in taking his charges. Coastal ships traveled near the coast. Makes sense. They went from port to port. The plan of the centurion was, "We'll find a bigger boat as we go. This is probably not going to get us all the way to Rome, but it'll get us moving." Which is exactly what he did.

Verse 3, "And the next day we landed at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him liberty to go to his friends and receive care. When we had put to sea from there, we sailed under the shelter of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. And when we had sailed over the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, and he put us on board. When we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under the shelter of Crete off Salmone. Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea." So they got on a boat in Caesarea (you can see the map behind me). They sailed sixty miles north to Sidon; Sidon still exists today - it is in Lebanon, along the coast. And their first stop - because they have to stop, it's a coastal ship and drop cargo off and take cargo on - Paul was shown great kindness by this Roman centurion. "Go see your friends. Go find what you need." You maybe need a jacket, you need some money, you need food. Prisoners weren't taken care of by the government. They had to take care of themselves or they died. So they were dependent upon people who loved them to care for them. So, interesting picture. Julius lets a prisoner out of his sight, a guy that he barely knew, that might very well be a flight risk because he was about to go see Caesar (and who knows how that would have turned out), and he lets Paul go to the church to be blessed. The Roman law said if you lost a prisoner, whatever his sentence was, if he were in your care, then you would have to carry out the sentence he would have gotten. So it was a pretty amazing kind of grace of

God that allowed Paul to leave. You might remember, if you were with us back in chapter 21 that Paul, on his way to Jerusalem, had stopped here and had been greeted by the church, and they had shown him such love that when he left, and they had said, "Don't go to Jerusalem, things are bad there for you," they accompanied him all the way back to the port, and they got on their knees, and they prayed for him before he left. It was a wonderful church that loved him, and they were able to refresh Paul; they were able to give him food for the journey, maybe blankets or water or money or contact information. I don't know. But whatever he needed, not having been out of prison to plan for himself, they were able to provide.

Well then we get like a travelogue, down through those next few verses, and you can look at the map, again, behind me. That they took off and they sailed under Cyprus, and you'll see that there between Cilicia on the land and Cyprus down below. They sailed on the leeward side of the island, the north side. Today Cyprus and above there is what we would call Turkey. They sailed off the coast of these provinces of Cilicia and Pamphylia. They eventually got to Lycia and to the city of Myra, where they were able to locate what was a large grain vessel. We know that because verse 38 says it was a large grain vessel. Just read ahead; you can teach the Bible anywhere. And it had come from Egypt, from Alexandria, the breadbasket for the Romans, and it was headed for Israel. Now, we know from history again that the big grain ships that sailed in the 1<sup>st</sup> century from Egypt to Italy were the largest oceangoing vessels that were made. They were 36' wide, they were 130' long. They had a 30-foot draft in the water, according to the history books. And because Egypt fed the world with bread - I mean, it literally was the breadbasket - they were forever traveling. We don't know how many people were onboard - well, we do know - that at least the one that Paul got on was able to take at least 276 passengers because that's how many would survive this thing. We don't know if it could have held twice that, but we know it could have held at least that many folks plus the cargo. And, again, all that information because we read ahead.

Notice in verse 7 and in verse 8 that, when they had sailed off the coast of Cilicia, had gotten to Lycia, they changed ships to this ship - this big oceangoing vessel - and then they began to sail, but progress was slow. In fact, it was so slow that they "arrived with difficulty" to the point there, Cnidus, and the wind wasn't then allowing them to proceed, and so they were kind of pushed by the wind down underneath the shelter of Crete, hoping to avoid that blowing wind; and with great



difficulty, they were able to drop to the south, notice, and ended up at a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea, which happened to be on the southern coast of Crete. So they tried to make westward progress. They were able, barely, to pull out of the city. The winds were contrary. And rather than allowing them to land, it pushed them back into the ocean. They weren't able to fight it, if you will. They were barely able to pass by the (you see on the map here) Cape of Salmone. Today they would tell you that's a death place; that's kind of like the Sandbanks of Northern Africa that they were kind of being pushed to. It was a place that people lost their boats. It was treacherous, if you will. So they sailed to the south end of Crete. They were protected by the winds. They pulled in at a port of Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea. It had been a rough road. It had been difficult. Sailors were tired. Landlubbers were probably green. Everyone was ready for land. And they landed.

I'm not good at boats. I get sick rather quickly from motion. I don't know. I've never gotten ..... I had a boat for a while when I was a kid just to try to get over bein' sick. I said, "Well I've got the keys. I can move the boat." But you can only move the boat so much before you have to go back in, and that's exactly ..... it was horrible. So if you've ever been seasick, you know how this must have gone. Horribly.

We read, in verse 9, "Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, saying, 'Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives.' Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul. And because the harbor was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, and winter there." It was a place far more accommodating to a bunch of people that would have to spend the winter before they sailed. So we're pushing weather now. Right? And we don't have any reference (verse 9) to how much time was spent. We don't know if they were there to fix the boat, to do business. I don't know what the schedule was. But we are told that they spent an inordinate time here, and then we're told that the Fast was already past. The Day of Atonement in 59 A.D. was on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October. So we're pushing well past summer, towards the winter. It was a highly questionable and far more dangerous time to sail. It would have been smarter to just wait till the spring because these weren't boats with huge engines; these were sailboats

with hope. Right? And when the wind blows to the east and you're trying to go to the west, and you can't tack into the wind very much with this big boat, it's going to take a long time, if you can make it at all. Bad idea. And notice that Paul, the prisoner, speaks up. He probably was the most seasoned traveler in the midst. He was certainly the most seasoned guy as far as being shipwrecked because that had happened to him; he said it to the Corinthians, "Three times I've been shipwrecked" (2 Corinthians 11:25), so he was very experienced at crashing. And then he said, "I've spent a day and a night in the deep. I've been floatin' and bobbin' in the water for 48 hours or 24 hours. I've been there, man. We don't want to do this. This could hurt everyone. This is a bad idea." And so with some lessons about sinking boats and all, to Paul this looked like *deja vu*. So he gives some practical advice, "Let's not leave. Why do we want to even risk our neck? We're not gonna make it. Not before the spring, anyway. Why don't we just wait it out?" He clearly, in verse 10, voiced his opinion: loss of ship, loss of cargo, loss of life.

Now here's the unbelieving centurion, who doesn't have a relationship with God, who has other factors to consider. Number one - this is a prisoner who's in no hurry to get to Rome. Probably worried about him losing his life. Well, he's probably got an ulterior motive to tell us all about that. Second of all, the captain who does this for a living - especially from Egypt all the way to Italy - he says everything is fine. And then the guy who has the money involved - he owns the boat - he says, "Everything's fine, we've been doing this for years, we have lots of experience." So a prisoner who's in no hurry, a guy who's got his money all-in, and a captain who's really good at what he does. And so the centurion, from a practical standpoint, certainly seems to make the right call. He says, "Well, I guess if you want to go, we'll go." And they said, "Well, we don't want to go all the way to Italy. We just want to go up the road a piece. We just want to sail to the other side of the island where there're good movies and restaurants and hotels and good places to eat. If we're gonna hang out in the winter, man, on this island, let's find a place that doesn't have too much exposure to the sea and has some good places to hang around." So, the ayes have it. "We won't make Rome. But, look, we're on the far west of the island. It's only a 60-mile trip from here. It'll be a great place to winter. It lies northwest of where we're headed, on the southwest corner of the island." And so the centurion sides with the experts on board, ignores Paul, and makes the decision to go.

Verse 13 says, "When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete." They didn't go back

out into the water; they stayed as close to the shore as possible. So here's factor number five - the weather changed, the southerly winds began to blow, and it seemed like, "Ho, ho, this is perfect. We'll just ease our way down the road." In so doing, the centurion is a classic example of how not to determine the will of God. But he's not looking for that; he's just trying to figure out what he's supposed to do and what he's responsible for. But for you and me, because this is narrative - and narrative, you learn by putting yourself in the picture - if you ever want to know God's will, this is not the way to do it. Because God's will was to get them moving. Right? Or just to stop. But they had other ideas. This is not the way you want to learn the will of God. Number one - don't just follow expert advice because sometimes experts are wrong, and God's not. Second of all, never just look for comfort. "I think the Lord's in it because it'll be comfortable for me." Also, I would say never follow the majority opinion - you'll probably be wrong - at least in terms of your spiritual life. And, don't see calm seas as a sign that God's in it. So you've got four things kind of working against you. Right? Expert advice, majority opinion, it'll be more comfortable, and the seas are calm. Ah ah ah and ah ah. To be sure, that's a formula that will keep you far from the will of God.

It does appear, from our narrative, that no one was praying except Paul and his buddies. No one mentions the Lord. No one. "I perceived" is a word that would suggest that it isn't just Paul relying on his wisdom but Paul relying on the Spirit of God. It made every bit of sense on paper to go. It looked doable. But it would prove to be anything but. It was a good thing, I think, that Paul's on board. Because as the days are going to grow longer, having someone that is in touch with God I think kept them all from ending up on the bottom of the ocean. I mean, God blessed them because of Paul's presence with them. If the world could see that, they would be more acknowledging of you and me as Christians. Even from a political standpoint - from building in a city - churches aren't seen as valuable. We don't bring a lot of income, we don't pay taxes, we're non-profit. There's no benefit to you and me being here. Or is there? But you see, it's not a financial benefit, and that sometimes can be the difficulty. So no one seemed to care for Paul's spiritual relationship with God. That didn't matter to them, though he shared it. Everyone said, "Well, look, the majority opinion, the experts say, we're gonna have movies and restaurants, and look how nice the wind is blowing." They push out, they get away from the shore.

Verse 14, "But not long after," (uh oh, that doesn't sound good) "a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon." It's a nor'easter. Right? "So when the ship

was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let her drive. And running under the shelter of an island called Clauda," (and that, again, is on your map there; it's a little tiny island) "we secured the skiff with difficulty. When they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship; and fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis Sands," (you can see the Sandbanks off of Northern Africa there in Libya) "they struck sail and so were driven." And they just kind of had to let the thing run. No sooner had they gotten out from the nice warm southerly breeze than a typhoon kicked in, a hurricane condition. And instead of sailing down the coast of Crete, they are pushed west and soon south into the open seas; and there's nothing to stop them. There's no way you and a will and a sail can fight these kinds of winds. Twenty-three miles off the coast (I know it looks like it's just a hop, skip and a jump), Clauda, there, was about as far as Catalina is from Huntington Beach. I mean, you can see it. Twenty-six miles. This is twenty-three miles off the coast. According to verse 16, it was their only hope. It was the last place that they could hide themselves from the wind and so much so that when they got out from underneath it, it was all hell breaking loose. They had a great difficulty just getting their skiff, their lifeboat, on board. They ran ropes underneath this wooden ship with cables to give it more integrity, kind of strap it together - cinching their hopes on that. They feared that the wind would drive them into North Africa graveyards, where everyone that got there just sank. They had no way to control it. It was terrible weather. They couldn't see. And so they finally just had to take their sails down and wait. Imagine that. Totally out of control. Thinking they were headed south to their graves. If you cheat and read ahead, you will look (even at the map) that where they end up is really where they were going. Oh, they may not have gone quite so southerly, but through the Aegean they could have passed and pretty much had to go south anyway to get through the boot there. So, God was bringing them to where He wanted them to be, but they certainly didn't know it. And, for the next two weeks - two weeks, imagine you on a ship, wind howling, can't see your hand in front of you, no place to control it, you're just beat around in the middle of the ocean for two weeks. I would have jumped off board the third day. Oh my goodness. It was hopeless! And yet, behind it all, God is moving them to their destination. They had no idea where they were. Stormy, overcast, horrible.

We are told, in verse 18, "And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next day they lightened the ship." (Day two, we threw over all of the non-essentials to lighten the ship.) "On the third day," verse 19, "we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands." (Second day, non-essentials; third day, some

essentials - the extra sail, the cables, furniture, the baggage; we need it, but if we die, we won't need any of it.) We then read, as we continue, "Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up." From day four to day fourteen, despair set in. "Hey, experienced captain, what do you think of your choice now? Hey, boat owner, bragging of your experience, great move." They had done all that they could. The ship was lightened, the ship was fortified. It was out of their hands, and they despaired. They had no place to turn and nowhere to look. It must have been a horrible storm to have people that are this experienced conclude that they're all going to die. Notice at the end of verse 20, "all hope that we would be saved was finally given up." "We're not gonna make it through this." Terrible days of the wind howling and the boat creaking. And I don't know.....you keep prisoners down below. I can just ... it makes me ill to think about it. I want to do this (Pastor Jack rocks from side to side), just to give you, "How you doin'?" you know? It doesn't take long.

By the way (it has nothing to do with our study), I remember taking a speech class - a college debate class or public speaking - and this was my tendency (he rocks from side to side.) And they'd say, "Jack, stand still." "I am.....I'm not." But then I'd start talking and get nervous, so I'd do this (he rocks from side to side.) Honestly. I got a "C" or a "D." But, because kids aren't nice to each other, when I started doin' this, pretty soon all the kids were doin' like this (he rocks from side to side.) (Laughing) That's another story, but if it comes into your mind, you might as well share it.

We were on a flight how many years ago in Paris? Fifteen years ago? Longer? You don't remember (Pastor Jack is talking to his wife, Debbie). When was it, Gerard? (Pastor Jack asks Pastor Gerard.) Over twenty years ago. So we were taking a small group to Israel. Maybe there were only twenty people with us. And we flew to Paris, and we were supposed to spend the night there and then fly to Israel. So we got on a plane in Paris, went up to altitude, and one of our two engines blew out. And there was oil, and you could.....it blew out. We had 300 people on a plane with two engines, and one of them went out. So they announced in French what had happened, and our stewardess - right in front of us - fainted. (Laughing) And I said to my wife, "This can't be good." (Laughing) And we had some people with us that flew a lot and kind of looked at them. Well, then they announced in English, "We lost an engine. We're going to have to fly down to 10,000 feet to maintain integrity in the air." And we were over the Pyrenees, and it was not good. So then

we landed in Greece or in Austria first. Anyway, I think we landed in Austria, in Vienna. So they put us all inside, and they worked on the plane; sent somebody from Paris. Nineteen hours they worked on the plane. They tell us, "Get on the plane. Everything's good as new." "Great." Take off. Thirty minutes later, same engine blows out again, and people freaked. Then we ended up in Athens, I think. We landed in Greece. And then there were a whole lot of political problems with people going to funerals in Israel, and they bury their people the same day, and they had to be there, and they can't take off again. Anyway, everything was fine. But when the stewardess started to go (Pastor Jack leans over as if he's going to faint), I thought, "That's not good. You should be the last one." And then you can't understand French, and then they tell you in English, and this girl.... Well, I'm thinkin'. I don't know. A long time ago.

Anyway, you get on a boat with guys that own ships that are sailing thousands of miles with grain, they make their living at it, and they go, "That'll be great," and now they're goin', "We're gonna die," I think you'd give up pretty quickly as well. "We're gonna die!" And that's exactly what happened. Everyone gave up hope .... all except for Paul and some guys with him who are down below, praying and hangin' on for dear life. He was sure he was gonna get to Rome. Why? Because the Lord had said, "You're gonna get to Rome." But he had no idea what God had planned for Luke or Aristarchus (his old friend) or the captain or Julius. And so Paul is downstairs praying for the people that are with him. Like I said, it's so good to have Paul on board. Paul might have come and said, "You know, I did mention this." But that's not the way it works. And so Paul finds himself in a horrible storm that was none of his choosing. He told everyone, "Let's not go," and they went. Maybe you've been in a position where you just knew the Lord wanted something else, but you weren't in a position to make the decision. Maybe your boss or your family or somebody forces your hand, and now you're suffering because they're stupid. They didn't listen. What do you do? Yell at them, scream, blame someone else? Not Paul. He just went, "Lord, save these folks that have made such a bad choice." He started praying for those who had made the worst call of all.

I remember hearing a story of a guy that was falling from a 10<sup>th</sup>-story ledge, and he grabbed on to an 8<sup>th</sup>-floor flagpole and said, "Lord, help me." And the Lord said to him, "Let go." And he said, "No, Lord, please help me." And the Lord said, "Let go!" And he said, "Is there anyone else up there?" (Laughing)

I think we usually want the favorable winds and the calm seas and all. But, look, don't be so upset about the strange trials that are to try you as if some strange thing has happened to you (1 Peter 4:12). So, I don't know what your reaction would be. Put yourself in Paul's shoes for a minute. Would your reaction be, "This is awful, and no other Christian's ever faced this, and this storm's gonna be my death, and how come You're doin' this to me, Lord"? Look, Paul just knew he was gettin' to Rome, but he wanted everyone to go with him. "All things work together for good to those who love the Lord" (Romans 8:28), and the last few years had proven all that. So he didn't know what to do, but he knew he needed to pray. In fact, if you look at the end of this story, it's pretty powerful - that God had them going in the direction He wanted all along. How bad was the storm? If you don't see the sun or the moon or stars, if no one eats for two weeks, if the captain of the ship says, "We're all gonna die," it couldn't get any worse. That's worse than a stewardess passing out right in front of you. Paul was resting in the Lord while the world and the ship, notice verse 20, they gave up. Right? They gave up.

Verse 21, "But after long abstinence from food," (and I suspect it's because that's not a good way to eat) "then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, 'Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.' " Everyone was seasick, practically. Spiritually they were also not doing well. But Paul, down in that hold in the ship - the worst place you could have been held, was praying. I don't know if you were in the hull of that ship, if hearing that you were going to survive was good news or bad news. I think, "Oh, please, I just wanna die." Paul said to them, "I told you so." But I want you to notice something. He didn't say, "I told you so" until he was able to say (in verse 22 and in verse 25), "Just take heart." He wasn't just willing to go out of his way to say "I'm right, and you're wrong." He was willing to say, "You should have listened to the Lord, and here's what He's promised to do." In other words, his complaint only was delivered once he had not just criticism but a blessing and a hope and a direction to give with it. And I think that's helpful. Because what would the other have accomplished? I love the picture (in our narrative here) that Paul, the prisoner, is now the captain of the ship. Right? He's callin' the shots, he's tellin' them what's gonna happen. He'll tell people when they're tryin' to sneak off, "Let 'em sneak off, we all die. All bets are off. God's gonna quit!" I mean, everything he says from here on out,

people are listening to. They're lettin' Paul be kind of the guy in charge. No longer the captain, no longer the owner, no longer the centurion. Man of God. Pretty cool. "Cheer up, man. God has shown me that we're going to lose this ship, we're going to lose the cargo, but we're not going to lose any of you. The Lord has plans for me. I've been praying for you, and He's given all of you to me. You're going with me." Isn't that great? One Christian in the right place saves everyone. And I thought there are so many examples in the Bible of those whom God uses, puts them in lives of people, and they acknowledge that, because of the existence of that person, his proximity to their lives, their lives changed. I thought about in chapter 18 of Genesis, when Abraham hears from the LORD about how He's going to go destroy the city, he says to the LORD, "How about if, in the city, you find ten righteous folks? Then would you destroy Sodom for ten righteous?" And the LORD said, "If there are ten righteous people in the city, I won't destroy the city." Now, because we read through, we say this, "There weren't very many righteous. The place got wiped out." But don't lose the other lesson, and that is God, for the sake of a few, spares the many. For your sake blesses the places that you find yourself. When Laban found out that Jacob was leaving him (there in Genesis 30), he said, "Please stay, if I've found grace in your sight, for I have learned that the LORD blesses me for your sake." He realized that a child of God brought blessing to a guy that was as crooked as.....Jacob was, really. When Potiphar took Joseph into his house (in chapter 39 of Genesis), and he made him overseer of his entire house, we read that Joseph brought blessing upon the Egyptian's house and all that he had "for Joseph's sake." Joseph shows up, and he's the reason there's blessing.

So here's my question - do you bring blessing to your job, to your family, to your friends, your neighborhood? Just because you're saved and you're willing to be saved and express that to others. Are you the blessing? People may not like you initially because there's a lot of warfare that comes with your witness, but ultimately people begin to realize that there's blessing, and I'm hoping that the city sees you that way and me; that there's blessing to be had from having compassion on the poor and helping the needy and feeding the hungry and visiting the sick and being citizens of a city that obey the laws and bless those that persecute you and pray for those that are placed over you. There's a great benefit to you being there.

And that was certainly the case with Paul. I love where he says, in verse 22, "I urge you to take heart," or, really, "Don't give up now." Verse 20, "We give up." "No, no, no. Take heart."



He says, in verse 25, " 'Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.' " "I believe God." "Take heart" in the midst of a hurricane at sea with just a bunch of - almost 300 people and a sail - "take heart" sounds kind of ridiculous unless God stands behind it. So Paul says to these guys, "Cheer up! Be encouraged. I believe God's going to do what He said. I don't know if you believe it or not, but I do." And Paul brought great counsel and great comfort. It does often boil down to that, anyway, doesn't it? Do we believe God or not? The Lord said to Adam and Eve, "If you eat of this tree, you will surely die" (Genesis 2:17). And Satan comes along and goes (Genesis 3:4), "Well, one thing for sure. You're not gonna die if you eat of this tree." Who're you gonna believe? One word of difference and on it hinged the health and the happiness and the holiness of man. What would Adam and Eve do? Who would they believe? The door of salvation swings that way as well. You know, the world says just work your way to heaven, do the best you can, bring your resume, God'll be impressed. The Bible says you need Jesus, believe in Him, you'll have life. Right? Only one name given (Acts 4:12). Who're you gonna believe? And Paul said to these guys, "I know you think we're gonna drown. I'm tellin' ya God told me this. I believe God. So cheer up. If you don't have faith, run with mine." Do you want to believe in Darwin, or do you want to believe in Moses? Do you really want to believe that man evolves upward or that man is a fallen being that needs to be redeemed? Do we really want to believe that we all evolved from a common ancestor, or do we want to believe that, ten times in the book of Genesis, God says that everything develops after its kind? Who're you gonna believe? Who're you gonna believe? Paul yells over the howling winds, as the deck heaves and so do the passengers, "I believe God." The rest of you will get that later. It's okay. (Laughing) I thought it was funny.

The whole ship, now in hopefulness, is dependent upon the faith of Paul, and he invites them to stand with him, trusting God. In a few days, they would hit an island. I suspect quite a few of them might have gotten saved on this trip, although we are not told. But in the storm, the question becomes who will you believe? Who will you believe?

I love the story. I'm so glad I wasn't there. I just get nauseous reading it. I remember going to my first job - my first job, I worked for years as an optician, and then I worked for a lens company. And we all went fishing. It was gonna be a great team bonding thing. And these were guys that weren't Christians, and they were drinkin' a lot and eatin', and I was just, "Oh, you gotta be kiddin'." And I took that Dramamine (that didn't help at all), and then I fell into the bait tank

(Laughing), and then I (Pastor Jack makes a sound like vomiting). And then when you're with your peers, it's the worst thing in the world. I hated it. I still hate it. I love the water and hate the boat. I don't have any idea how that's supposed to work out. But I love the story. Look how *God* works. In the storm, who're you gonna believe? And when all hope is lost, the world has nowhere to turn, and you still have plenty of places to look, don't you?

Next week, we will finish the story of the three-hour tour and see what *God's* plans are next. And I think it's an amazing story - their landing, their arrival, and then we're going to finally get Paul to Rome. So *God* bless you guys for stickin' with it. I hope the Lord is speaking much to your hearts.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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