

“Storm Preparations”

Acts 27

Are you more reactive than proactive? Do you have a tendency to over react at most negative pieces of information or circumstances (and even at positive news) or do you fairly quickly allow the truth and sovereign knowledge of God to balance what you hear with the confidence that God is in control? We all have a tendency to momentarily react with disappointment, sadness and anger at bad news but have we proactively trained ourselves to work through God’s biblical grid that He loves us, He is sovereign over my life and if its true, I can handle it in God’s strength?

We are living in an over reactive, angry, powder-keg world and even Christians are guilty of not responding well to negative circumstances or news at times. How can we be better prepared for life’s storms? How can we show a lost world from our balanced reactions to difficulties help them turn to God in their problems?

We’re going to use Paul’s stormy voyage and the great difficulties they faced on the sea as a life lessons to help us spiritually handle life’s ups and downs. All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable to train us in godliness, so there are spiritual analogies that we can draw from Paul here. So let’s sail with Paul, Luke, Aristarchus and the men on board of this very difficult trip. We’re going to read and follow a map on the screen so we get a better visual of the journey and we’ll draw some spiritual analogies. Let’s start in v.1 and read down to v.20

27:1 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. [Fast, referring to Day of Atonement in Oct]

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.



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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. [going NW]

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. [SW]

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.

So we’ll pause here – lost on the Mediterranean where hope is lost. And sometimes we overreact to negative news or circumstances and we see no hope. Is that true? No. For the believer we always have hope. So that we don’t lose hope in difficult situations ...

Assure Yourself that God is Always WITH You and FOR You (27:1-20)

How is Paul able to be so confident in God in this journey? Because he had the assurance from God that he would reach Rome. How and when did he know that? God spoke to Paul in 23:11 when he was arrested and a riot ensued when he arrived in Rome:

¹¹ *The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."*

And again at the worst point in the storm he gets a message from God through an angel;

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.'

But we don't get direct messages from God like Paul. No, but we have God's words through Paul, John, Jesus, Moses, etc., of the guarantee of His presence in our life and that we need not fear because He is with us. Verses like Heb. 13:5 which are quotes from God to Moses and God to Joshua and now God to us:

God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

⁶ *So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?"*

Is. 41:10 "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

These verses are God's Word to you and me. When should we assure ourselves that God is always with us and for us?

Regularly so we're ready when difficulties come (vv.7-10)

And they will come:

John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

What were the 'these things' Jesus just told them? V. 32 says,

³² *"But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me."*

The context of that verse is Jesus warned His disciples that when the crucifixion happens they will all get scared and run away. 'That's okay', Jesus says. 'I will still be with you and for you even when you're not 'for' me'.

We need to be in the Word of God every day because that's when God speaks to us and reminds us of His reassuring presence and love. We need to know that ahead of time because life's future difficulties will threaten our confidence in God's presence and love. This is what I mean by being proactive. Listen to Paul in the middle of these difficulties:

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."*

They wanted to keep going but Paul warned them that disaster awaited if they tried to go farther. Bad timing, bad weather. Only bad awaits us. But Paul's advice is not heeded.

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.*

After all what does Paul know about sailing? Well, actually Paul had done most of his travelling (by ship) which was approximately 3500 miles. And according to 2 Cor. 11:25 (which Paul had already written) he had been shipwrecked 3 times before this.

But they have a cargo of grain that needs to get to Rome. And they have other prisoners and staying in a small town all winter with prisoners doesn't sound like a winter vacation. Besides, Phoenix is only 40 miles away. What could go wrong.

We need to assure ourselves daily from God's Word that He is with us and for

Intentionally because we are inundated with godless messages all day (v.11)

Let's say we spend 15 minutes reading our Bibles in the morning before we go to work, school or engage our world. That means for the next 12 hours we're going to be inundated with messages not from God's perspective that we need to filter through with the Word of God. That's a lot of filtering. Can we keep up? Will we let some things slip? It's not enough to read Scripture we have to apply it and memorize it and live it. The philosophy of humanity is there's more people saying what we say than God's people saying what God says. 'Obviously' we're right and you're [Christians] wrong.'

And initially it looks like Paul's wrong?

*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.*

In my reading I learned that these ships were not designed well to cut through wind. And in a hurricane like conditions they are blown away from Crete and so we read

could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along.

They manage to get to Cauda where under the shelter of these islands they are able to bring the lifeboat up and secure it [it was tied to the back and floated behind] and tie ropes underneath the boat to keep it from breaking apart. And now they are at the mercy of the wind. They start lightening the load. They fear crashing into the shallows of the bay of Syrtis on the north African shore (the Bermuda triangle of the Mediterranean. Without sunlight or stars they have no way of knowing where they are going.

we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

Luke writes that. But when circumstances seem hopeless and we're unable to control the difficulties in our life Paul reminds us

Stay grounded when difficulties linger (vv.12-20)

Because God knows where they are and He sees what's ahead and can steer the ship – just as He goes ahead of us and points us in the right direction. God speaks to Paul at this point. Now Paul has the assurance from God that he will get to Rome. He doesn't know how, but he has that promise to hang on to and God comes through. And we have God's promises that we cling to when life seems to knock us around.

Paul addresses the crew in v.22

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."

I don't believe Paul is rubbing it in saying 'I told you so', I think he is establishing his authority from God and the voice of hope. See v.24 reminds Paul of God's promise that he will stand before Caesar. And because God will get Paul there he will answer Paul's selfless prayer to keep everyone alive. I think we can infer that God's message about everyone's safety is because Paul prayed for this. The follower of Jesus has the message of hope. And what is that message?

The Lost are Lost and We Alone know the Way **(27:20-44)**

The unsaved are called the lost because they don't know where they really are nor where they are ultimately going. We know the way. We have the words from God to point people in the right direction. Paul had a word from God at that point in time and we have the Word of God right now. People are lost and only we have the map. Because

God has spoken and we have listened (vv.20-25)

Paul hears from God because he's listened to God before. He's in a place where he recognizes God's Words and knows they are trustworthy and is confident in God's Word to help others find their way. So he unashamedly shares God's words of hope to a hopeless people. After 14 days of probably not eating at all or very little (sea sick), he says you need to eat something. What little they have they share. Paul thanks God for it (not communion because most of these are unsaved people) and they eat.

Still being driven by the storm the seasoned sailors sense land must be near by the sound of the water. They take soundings and know land is close. They drop anchors to slow them down and pray for daylight so they can see. But some try to steal the lifeboat and escape on their own. Paul sees this and warns the soldiers and centurion that the promise to save your life is only available if you believe God's Word and stay with the ship. And that's an interesting analogy. The promise to save your life is only available if you believe God's Word. From a human standpoint it doesn't sound sensible because the boat will crash. This is why we must trust God.

The message isn't easy and requires faith (vv.26-32)

I'm sure someone asked Paul, 'How do you know we will all be saved?' And Paul's answer would have been 'Because I have trusted His Word in my life for years and His Word has always proved true. And every promise He's made has come true so far.'

These sailors thought they had a better chance on their own. Paul said, everyone must stay together to survive. Every one is needed. The message from God requires faith. The message for salvation and the ongoing message for sanctification; walking and growing with God isn't always easy and requires trust in an all-knowing, 'For you and with you' God. The storm and Paul's leadership in it model for the reader the need to trust God and His Word in spite of what we see going on around us.

Paul led by example (vv.32-37)

.. and so must we. If we're not living by faith in God's Word, over reacting to life's difficulties whenever they happen how can the lost see what faith in God looks like? Paul eats food. Paul warns those who want to escape. Paul encourages the leaders that they will get through this. When difficulties happen, those without hope and answers look to those who have hope and confidence in what God is doing.

Which is exactly how the centurion and soldiers follow Paul (wasn't he a prisoner?). The boat crashes into a sandbar. Everyone gets off and swims or grabs a piece of broken ship and floats in. At this point the soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners (assuming that some would escape which meant a loss of your life if you lost a prisoner). But the centurion trusts Paul and orders that not to be done. What's happened? Paul had to

Trust God to work in people's lives (vv.38-44)

Paul had no control about what would happen. Everyone is saved just as God said. The centurion makes sure no prisoner is killed especially Paul. Why not? Because God's promise to Paul to get to Rome.

The analogy of a physical storm to the storms of life is valid because we see so many applicable links. If we're going to be ready when the difficulties of life come upon us we have to be proactive so we aren't over reactive. Stay in the Word everyday. Don't let the godless voices of the world drown out what God says. When we're in the Word every day listening to God speak to us, then we reassure ourselves that we have a God who is with us and for us. He will never leave us nor forsake us. He will get us through any difficulty in His power and strength.

The unsaved don't have this perspective. They are lost and we alone can share with them that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. Our world needs hope. They are so confused they can't even accept that God made them exactly as they are.

Believers in Christ have a clear perspective. We know He made us unique. We know everyone has a sin problem and that God alone makes it possible to find forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus and His completed work on the cross. He gives us new life and purpose. He doesn't leave us when life gets hard. We trust Him to show us how He's working and what He wants to do through the pain and problems that we all experience because of sin-tarnished world.

David expressed his trust in God numerous times in the midst of difficulties; Ps. 27 is just one example. But he ends with hope even as he waited for resolution and answers to prayer:

13 I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

14 Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart
and wait for the LORD.