

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

OCTOBER 17TH–18TH // THE BOOK OF ACTS

THE SHIP (ACTS 27:1–12)

A BIT OF BACKGROUND...

Paul has been in Roman custody for two years because of false accusations made against him in Jerusalem.

- He has had the opportunity to stand before both Roman governors and the Jewish King (Agrippa), who have found him innocent.
- But because of his appeal to Caesar, he would be transported to Rome.
- Chapter 27 describes Paul's sea voyage to Rome so he can bring his case to Caesar.
- V. 1 tells us that Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a Centurion named Julius for transfer to Rome.
- Sailing (and just travel in general) in the ancient world was much different than it is today, and sailing as a prisoner would have been even more different.

For one thing, the ship probably moved in daily legs from one coastal port to another.

- This seemed to be the way ships scheduled their journeys, and it would have been difficult to make precise travel arrangements as a lot depended on the wind and weather.
- Also, Paul seems to have had a lot of freedom as a high-profile political prisoner (v. 3)
- He had two travel companions as well (v. 2).

Luke (the writer of this account who was actually there) tells us that after the party of prisoners switched ships in Alexandria (v. 6), they encountered bad weather.

- The weather wasn't just unpleasant; it became downright dangerous (v. 9).
- Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) is mentioned in verse 9, indicating that this was toward the end of September.

Navigation in this particular part of the Mediterranean Sea was always dangerous in September and was considered almost impossible after the middle of November.

- So Paul, a veteran traveler, spoke up and advised them to not continue (v. 10).
- Not surprisingly, the centurion paid more attention to the captain and the ship's owner than to Paul. Paul had experienced dangers at sea, and he knew something about the Mediterranean.
- Three times he had been shipwrecked (2 Cor. 11:23–25), so he must have felt that his opinion on the situation had some merit.
- Against Paul's warning, the group pressed on through the bad weather for Phoenix, a large port 40 miles to the west, in hopes of spending the winter there.

OPINIONS, EXPERTISE, AND UNSOLICITED ADVICE

Paul gave the warning, but the pilot and shipowner disagreed, so the centurion chose instead to listen to the voices considered more credible.

- Paul had a strong (and well-informed) opinion on what needed to happen that he expressed, but ultimately, it was not his decision to make.
- How do we manage the tension between having an opinion and knowing when to share it?

QUESTION 1: "DO I NEED TO SAY THIS?"

Having an opinion doesn't make you an expert.

- A fool is more interested in expressing an opinion than gaining understanding about the situation, and true wisdom listens before speaking (Proverbs 18:2; James 1:19).
- Are we helping the situation, or do we just want to be heard because we want to be seen as important or significant?

QUESTION 2: "HOW DO I NEED TO SAY THIS?"

When we correct with an air of condescension or offer advice with an attitude of superiority, people aren't going to listen to us.

- You can be right in what you say and wrong in how you say it—truth without humility or tact quickly becomes arrogance.
- Ask permission before offering advice whenever possible, and be humble and tactful.

QUESTION 3: "AM I HELPING OR CRITICIZING?"

Social media and online spaces have turned us all into armchair quarterbacks.

- It's really easy to judge decisions when we're not the ones carrying the responsibility or consequences for those decisions.
- Cynicism, pride, and judgmentalism can masquerade as discernment and concern.
- Don't just point out what's wrong—help.

QUESTION 4: "WHAT IF THEY DON'T LISTEN?"

We can give advice when it's needed in an appropriate way, but we're not responsible for how others respond to that advice.

- Resist the temptation to get resentful, condescending, or self-righteous when people don't follow your advice. People have the freedom to disagree with you. Let God be the one who sorts all of that out!

TRUTH, HUMILITY, GRACE, AND SELF-AWARENESS

We should have the courage to speak truth when it needs to be spoken.

- We should have the humility and self-awareness to recognize that our perspective is limited and our opinion isn't the only one that matters.
- We should have the grace to respect others' choices when they choose differently than we would.

THE STORM (ACTS 27:13–26)

At first, the plan to keep sailing seemed solid, as they sailed along the coast of Crete enjoying a "gentle south wind" (v. 13).

- But then a "northeaster" hit them from over the top of the island and completely took over the ship.
- Different places call storm winds different things, and apparently this was a common name for a hurricane-type wind in the Mediterranean.

The crew started doing everything they could to save the ship and to save their lives.

- In spite of their efforts, this violent wind kept pushing them further in the direction they didn't want to go.
- V. 20 gives us a picture of just how bad things were, and the crew eventually decided that they were just going to die out there.

DESPAIR (V. 20)

Despair usually begins when we encounter a situation we feel helpless about or powerless over.

- Real despair sets in when we move from feeling helpless to feeling hopeless—when we have no expectations of things ever getting better or changing.
- To despair is to grieve the Holy Spirit.

But in the midst of this hopeless situation, Paul showed up on deck (v. 21).

- Although he started with, "I told you so," he assured the crew to take heart because God had spoken to him that they wouldn't die.
- God had sent him an angel to assure him that not only would they not die but that he would stand before Caesar and the ship would run aground on an island.

Paul had already heard God promise him that he would stand before Caesar, back in Ch. 23, so Paul had confidence that he would be OK.

- God's promise of protection had also been extended to everyone in the ship, and so Paul's message of hope in God extended beyond himself.
- Hope and confidence in God is something the world is looking for and needs.

It is not unusual for us as Believers to feel helpless from time to time.

- And it's not unusual for that helplessness to cause us to even feel hopeless.
- But we have to remind ourselves that just because we feel something, that doesn't mean it's true.
- If we're in Christ, no situation we face is hopeless.
- Just like Paul, we have promises from God that He will be our hope in troubled times.
- *"The LORD Himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged"* (Deuteronomy 31:8 NIV).
- *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."* (John 11:25–26 NIV).

The problem is that sometimes the wind and the waves are louder in our minds than God's promises that we're going to be OK.

- This is why it's so crucial for us to read and meditate on God's Word and to spend time in God's presence through prayer every day.
- We have to get into the habit of preaching truth to ourselves because we have an enemy who loves to tell us lies!

"WE HAVE TO RUN AGROUND..." (V. 26)

God's deliverance in our lives may sometimes look different than what we think.

- Sometimes, it may be an absolute wreck that we still have to walk through, but still He is with us and His hand of protection is on us.
- If absolutely everything in your life disintegrates and falls apart, if Jesus is your foundation, you're going to be OK.

"SO TAKE COURAGE..."

- This phrase (and others like it) appears dozens of times in Scripture, and the phrase "fear not" appears several hundred times.
- The courage God wants us to have is something we're invited to receive from Him—not to try and generate or drum up within ourselves.
- Our courage is grounded in our belief in God's promises, faithfulness, and goodness.

"I BELIEVE GOD..."

- Courage is a response to reality, not an attempt to manufacture an emotion or feeling.
- Our courage is grounded in the reality of God's presence in our lives, not in our ability to control a certain set of circumstances.
- Despair is the enemy's attempt to make us doubt God's goodness and faithfulness and abandon faith, hope, and love.

"...IT WILL BE JUST THE WAY IT WAS TOLD TO ME."

- If you've trusted Christ, what has God told you about how your story ends (Revelation 21:4–7)?
- On your journey to Heaven, there will be mountains, trials, pain, problems, and storms.
- Yet it will end just the way it was told to you.
- The storms are very real, but so are the promises of God. In Christ, your story ends in victory.
- *Do you believe this?*