

Through the Storm Acts 27:1-28:10

Scripture Reading: Mark 4:35-41

Introduction

Our passage this morning contains an exciting account that is full of action, danger, and suspense that Luke relates in a way that serves to emphasize its strong dramatic sense

It's the kind of biblical account that would make a very compelling action movie

But there is far more contained in these verses than simply a swashbuckling tale of survival

God has already told Paul emphatically that he *must* testify about the risen Christ in Rome and at long last after avoiding being killed by a vicious mob; after escaping a plot against his life; after more than two years of being unjustly held in custody; after three trials and an audience before King Agrippa, Paul is finally on his way

Paul may well have breathed a sigh of relief to finally be aboard ship and under way but as we will see this morning his difficulties are not over yet and he has more hardship to endure as he travels to Rome

God was certainly able to keep Paul out of the storm that was coming but he chose instead to preserve Paul through the storm

And God often chooses the same for us as he takes us through the storms of life whether they are actual **weather events**, **physical trials**, **emotional challenges**, **relational difficulties**, **social upheavals**, or any number of "storms" that we might encounter rather than routing us around them

Although it's necessary that we take some time to look at some of the particulars of the account in order to have a clear understanding of what took place, I don't want to spend a whole lot of time on the details of the voyage itself

After all, Luke provides a very vivid and detailed, first-person account that is easy to follow

Rather, our main focus this morning is going to be on seeing what we can learn from Paul's experience that will help us as we travel through our own storms

I know many of us have passed through various storms in the past and many of us find ourselves dealing with storms today and for the rest of us a storm is likely just around the corner – so let's get to it!

Please join me in Acts and follow along as I read the entire passage (**Acts 27:1-28:10**)

Travel in Paul's day

Travel was quite different in Paul's day as there really weren't any commercial vessels dedicated to travel as we know them today

In order to get from one place to another by sea people had to resort to booking passage on a freight-bearing ship and that's what was done in this case

These ships were typically utilitarian vessels that were designed for heavy hauling and not for being nimble

They usually had a large, square mainsail that caught a lot of wind but which made it very difficult for them to sail against the wind as they couldn't easily tack from side to side like a vessel rigged with triangular sails could do

Therefore the prevailing westerly winds on the Mediterranean Sea made for a long, difficult voyage when going from east to west as Paul's ship was doing

To make headway, the captains of the ships were often forced to use islands to provide some shielding from the prevailing winds whenever they could to make the voyage a little easier as we see the captains doing in our passage

Limited window for travel

There was also a limited window of optimal weather for travel – the summer months were the best but there were periods in both the spring and fall that were still passable although more dangerous and during the winter months travel was impossible

In **Acts 27:9** we see that Paul's voyage was sailing during a period of heightened danger when they encountered the storm in fact, they were right in the middle of the dangerous period

When Luke says that the “Fast” was over he is likely referring to the Feast of Atonement which took place on October 5th in A.D. 59 when this account took place

And captains and crews who dared to sail during the months of October and November typically did so only because they were paid handsomely for taking the risk which helps to explain why they sailed away from Fair Haven against Paul’s advice

Besides, Fair Havens was somewhat of a misnomer, at least during the winter months, because the port there left a ship vulnerable to punishing winds whereas the harbor at Phoenix offered more protection

The wind appeared to be in their favor and they were only intending to go another 30 or 40 miles around a point and a little further west along the coast of Crete to get there

[Show Map]

It certainly seemed like a safe enough venture to a crew who were used to taking risks for profit – they should have been there literally within hours of setting out

Remember, they had sailed south of Crete to avail themselves of its protection from the northwest winds so when the wind blew in gently from the south just like the favorable winds of summer sailing this short trip seemed reasonable

The storm

But when they rounded the point they were met with hurricane force winds that Luke refers to as “the northeaster”

These are seasonal winds that are caused by a low pressure depression over Libya that causes air to rush southward toward Africa from Greece and they were strong enough as they swept down between the mountains to immediately blow the grain ship off course away from the island and out into the open sea southwest of Crete

Their immediate fear was that the winds would force them to run aground on the sandbars and shoals called the Syrtis that run along the northern coast of Africa for hundreds of miles

Many an ancient ship met its end on the Syrtis and they knew that if they were pushed that far south they would be done for

However, they found a little protection behind the small island called Cauda which allowed them to take four measures to try to protect the ship

First, they **secured the small boat** that was towed behind the ship

This boat would have been used for various tasks like ferrying people to shore but was not exactly a lifeboat as we think of one

It was probably filled with water which would explain why it took effort to secure it

They secured it not only so they wouldn’t lose it but also so that the waves wouldn’t drive it into the back of the ship like a battering ram

Second, they **passed ropes or cables under and around the ship** in an attempt to hold the hull together against the pounding of the waves

Third, they **lowered the sea anchor** into the water so slow the movement of the ship as it went from crest to crest on the waves and to keep the ship’s bow pointed into the waves

Fourth, they **made the ship lighter** by throwing the cargo and non-essential gear overboard thereby reducing the strain on it and causing it to ride higher, thereby lessening the chances that the waves would sweep over the decks and swamp the ship

Having done all that they could to protect and preserve the ship they abandoned themselves to the wind and the waves

All hope abandoned

Luke writes in **verse 20** that after many days of not being able to even plot where they were due to the clouds obscuring the sun and stars “all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned”

Tossed about violently on the stormy sea and in fear of either running aground or breaking apart; not only were they not in control of where they were going, they didn’t even know for certain where they were

Imagine being in their place – full of anxiety, tired, wet, probably seasick, no means of navigation, and no hope

We read this account and we can't help but feel sympathy for them for being in such a sad and desperate situation

The storms of our lives

There are times when we too face storms; times when we find ourselves seemingly being swept along by events and feeling out of control

And when we find ourselves in the dark, disoriented and unsure of where we are or where the wind and waves are pushing us, and fearful of whatever fate awaits us – we too are tempted to abandon hope

I believe Paul was afraid and in danger of abandoning hope just like his fellow passengers because we see that God sent an angel to visit Paul in the night and in **verse 24** the angel told Paul “Do not be afraid”

Actually, the angel used the same exact phrase as the Lord did when he appeared to Paul in a vision in **Acts 18:9** which we saw at that time actually meant “Stop being afraid”

Fear is a normal human response that we all experience but there are ways to deal with fear and we can learn how we can stop being afraid and abandoning hope as we face our own personal storms by looking at how Paul faced his

The first thing you need to do when you find yourself in one of life's storms is:

I. Remember Who God Is

Look with me at **verse 25** where Paul encourages his travelling companions by expressing that God's would do as he said

God had sent an angel to Paul the previous night with the message that no one would perish in the storm

And Paul was able to have faith in God and confidence that God would do as he said because he knew who God is

Like Paul, we can look back to the accounts of Scripture and see how God never failed to do what he had pledged to do

Paul could look to all the same accounts from the Old Testament that we have and see God's demonstrated power and faithfulness

And Paul had repeatedly seen God's faithfulness demonstrated in his own life as God had time and time again been there and done exactly as he said he would – and we can look to those experiences of Paul and others in the New Testament

And we can look to our own past experiences and those of our contemporaries and see that God remains faithful today

God promised Paul that he would preserve all who were on board the ship and Paul had confidence that he would do so

Paul knew that God was the Creator and Sustainer of the world and as such was completely in control of the storm

Paul had seen the risen Christ and he remembered how God repeatedly acted on his behalf to deliver him from trouble

And those memories gave him the assurance that he could trust God in his present situation

When you find yourself in the midst of one of life's storms the first step toward preserving hope is remembering who God is

II. Remember Who You Are

That brings us to the second thing Paul remembered and that is **to whom he belonged and who he served (verse 23)**

Paul had committed himself to God and he served God as a slave serves his master and as God's servant he knew that God had given him a job to do

Paul had been assured that he *must* testify in Rome and he had confidence that God would preserve him until he had completed his task

If you are a believer, you also belong to God

And God has promised us that he will never leave or forsake those who are his (**Hebrews 13:5**)

Again in **Matthew 18:20** the Lord promised to be with his disciples to the end of the age

And **Romans 8:28** tells us that all things, and that even includes storms, work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose

God could keep us from all unpleasantness but that isn't his way because it wouldn't be what is best for us

James 1:2-4 commands us to –

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

We are God's adopted children and as such he loves us and wants what is best for us and that doesn't include shielding us from all pain

God has never said that he will keep us from encountering storms but he has promised to preserve us through the storms

God is able to protect us and he has deemed us worthy of his protection

So once you have taken time to remember who God is and who you are you need to:

III. Use the Resources God Provides

Divine guidance

Paul was undoubtedly bolstered and encouraged by the appearance of the angel and the message he brought

And we should certainly put a very high value on **divine guidance**

We should regularly be in communication and communion with God through reading his Word and engaging in prayer

We should be seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit and sensitive to his leading at all times and in all things

There is nothing to prevent the Lord from appearing to us directly or from sending an angel to bring us a message but the more typical way God provides us with his guidance is through our maintaining an intimate relationship with him

Human agency

Paul maintained an intimate relationship with God and he had given Paul a very clear promise that he would testify in Rome and God certainly could have supernaturally transmitted Paul to Rome the way he transported Philip to Azotus after he had baptized the Ethiopian Eunuch clear back in Acts 8

And while there is nothing to prevent God from using supernatural means to accomplish his will his usual method is to act through natural or ordinary, everyday means as people make choices and act on them

That is to say that God often uses **human agency** to accomplish his plans and chose to use people to get Paul to Rome

The Roman government procured passage on transport ships manned by crews of sailors to take them on their voyage to Rome simply because it was the wisest course of action from their point of view

Later it took all the sailors and some of the passengers working hard to secure the ship as we see in **verse 16** that even Luke seems to have been involved in getting the small boat squared away

And then in **verse 31** we see that Paul recognized that the expertise of the crew was necessary if they were going to safely arrive on land

Even then, they all had to make the effort to swim for shore – some of them clinging to pieces of wood to make it

We can't just fold our arms and expect God to see us through the storms

It would be unwise to simply sit back and say, "If God wants a particular thing to happen; God will make it happen" and wait for a miracle

God very well may grant us a miracle but more often than not that miracle will come about because of someone's efforts – through the exercise of faith which is taking action based on belief a– not merely sitting back and waiting to see God work

Our efforts must be biblically sound and divinely empowered but as we encounter the storms of life we will find that human effort on our part and on the part of others will most likely be involved in getting us through

Luke and Aristarchus

To that end, God also provides us with **friends** to give us godly counsel and to help us by bearing our burdens alongside us

Paul was surrounded by friends and he didn't hesitate to accept their companionship and their assistance

We see in **verse 1** that this is one of the "we" passages that we have been encountering which tells us that **Luke** was present on this voyage

And in **verse 2** we see that they were also joined by **Aristarchus** the Macedonian who has been a regular travel companion of Paul's

We first met Aristarchus in **Acts 19:29** when he was dragged into the theater along with Gaius by the mob in Ephesus and again in Acts 20:4 as one of the delegates carrying the offering for Jerusalem and Paul mentions him as sending along greetings to the church in Colossae and to Philemon

Julius the centurion

Paul was also befriended by **Julius** the centurion who was in charge of the prisoners being taken to Rome

It's a testimony to Paul that Julius was disposed to treat him kindly in that he allowed Paul to visit **friends in Sidon**

And Paul's winsomeness is further evidenced in that he even had friends in Sidon since we have no record of him having visited there

Publius

Paul also received help from a new found friend when they finally landed on Malta and **Publius** took him and some of the others in and showed them hospitality in his own home for three days

We are often reluctant to accept the kindnesses offered by others but we should be more like Paul and avail ourselves of the friends that God has given us because God most often chooses to work through people helping people

Because, when we insist on doing everything for ourselves we deny others the opportunity to exercise their God-given gift of service to their detriment and ours

God's guidance and assistance can be through supernatural means but most often it comes through the natural conduit of service from other people

We would do well to recognize that those people who desire to lend us a hand are gifts from God for our benefit as we face life's storms

Knowledge, reason, and experience

God also provides us with **knowledge, reason, and experience** to guide us and he wants us to use those tools as well

God expects us to learn from our previous trials so that we accumulate experience and wisdom for future trials

Again, we see that truth in **James 1:2-4** and also in **Romans 5:3-4**

Luke gives no indication that Paul received divine insight as to the safety of striking out from Fair Havens even though his warning proved to be prophetic in the end so we can safely deduce that he relied on his experiences when he counseled against it in **Acts 27:10**

Paul had logged literally thousands of miles in travel on the Mediterranean and we discover in **2Corinthians 11:25** that by this time Paul had already been involved in **three shipwrecks** and I would imagine he was reluctant to be involved in another one

It seems that Paul also relied on logic and reasoning when he warned the centurion and the soldiers that the sailors were planning to abandon ship in **verse 31**

It's possible that Paul was indicating that God would save those on board only if everyone remained on board

But it seems more plausible that Paul simply realized that no one else had the skill and ability to do all that needed to be done in order to safely land the ship and that the ship would be doomed without a crew on board actively working to preserve it – which takes us back to God's provision of human agency to fulfil his plans

It seems most logical to say that Paul was simply acting in accordance with what he had learned from his past experiences the same as any of us would do

One of my most frequent prayers when I'm in the middle of a "life storm" is that God would plainly reveal what he wants me to learn from the experience and the second goes along with the first – that I wouldn't waste the suffering by failing to learn what I'm supposed to – and need to go through a similar experience again

IV. Redirect Your Focus

The last thing I want to point out that Paul did as he went through this storm was he **redirected his focus**

When we are suffering, our natural tendency is to dwell on our suffering – to draw into ourselves and to feel sorry for ourselves

But that's not what we see Paul doing – Paul's focus was on others

In **verse 21** we see Paul stand up among the other passengers and crew to **give them encouragement** by sharing the word that he had received from the Lord

He reminded them that his expertise had been correct when he counseled against leaving Fair Havens

I believe he did this not as a way of rubbing it in – not as an "I told you so" – but in order to lend weight to the counsel he was about to give

Then in the words of the angel we see it implied that Paul was **praying for his fellow travelers**

The angel told Paul in **verse 24**, "God has granted you all those who sail with you" which implies that God heard Paul's prayers for them and graciously responded with the assurance that they would all be spared

Two weeks later as they were nearing land Paul again **encouraged** his companions to take nourishment to give them the strength that they would need and he **set the example** by giving God thanks and breaking bread and beginning to eat

Then in chapter 28 we see Paul get busy with serving others after they arrived on Malta

I'm sure Paul was as worn out as any of the people who had been on the ship but in **Acts 28:3** we see Paul serve in the menial task of **gathering firewood** to feed the fire their hosts had kindled

Then in **verse 8** we see Paul **pray for the healing of the father of Publius** who was suffering with fever and dysentery

And when God worked through the prayer of Paul and brought healing to him many who lived on Malta also came to Paul for healing and Paul took the opportunity to **minister to them all**

Perhaps you noticed how the natives decided that Paul was a murderer who wasn't being allowed to escape from the gods when the viper bit him

And how they determined that he must be a god himself after he didn't drop dead

This account is the reverse of what happened to Paul when he and Barnabas visited Lystra and the people tried to worship them as gods only to reverse course and try to stone Paul to death

But it serves to illustrate how easy it is for people to be mistaken when miracles aren't accompanied by the Word

So while Luke doesn't record it, we can have confidence that Paul also **presented the gospel** on Malta because that was the consistent pattern throughout Acts

The point though is that Paul kept his focus off of his own problems and on service to others

Instinctively, we tend to withdraw whenever we are suffering or going through difficulties when what we should do is get busy serving others

Because by redirecting our focus off of ourselves we find that we take our eyes off of the storm and it doesn't seem quite so severe

Conclusion

We've glossed over and even skipped over many of the details in this account

Details that would make for a fascinating discussion on their own

Perhaps we'll get back to them at some future date

But what I want to make sure we understand from the text this morning is that while God often takes us through storms we can rest on remembering who God is and who we are to God

God has promised to preserve us but that doesn't mean we will never suffer because suffering is what God often uses to help us to grow and mature spiritually

And God never promised that a storm won't take our earthly life from us – only that our physical death isn't the end and that we will rise again and live in his presence forever

We also need to remember that God provides us with what we need as we face the storms

He has given us his Word and access to his throne room via prayer

He has sent us his Holy Spirit to indwell us to comfort and to guide us and to give us understanding

But God has also given us each other and he's given us our minds – and he expects us to make use of both

And God has given us a job to do – a mission to fulfill

Therefore, we need to stay focused on how we can use even the storms of life to further that mission

Some say it was unwise for the centurion to listen to the ship's owner and captain when they sailed from Fair Havens

We know they wouldn't have gotten caught in the storm and suffered the things that they suffered

But God also would not have had the chance to show his providential protection and Paul would not have been on Malta to heal Publius' father and the others who were ill

And he would not have had the opportunity to share the gospel both in word and in deed

Can we honestly say that the storm wasn't exactly what God ordained for all of those purposes?

Storms come into every life because God never promised to keep us from the storms

But we can have confidence that the storms are meant for good and not for evil and while they may hurt they can't ultimately harm us in any real way because God has promised to see us through them

Let's pray