

**Acts 27: 27-44; “Paul’s Witness on the Sea”, Sermon # 90 in the Series –
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on January 22nd, 2023, in the Morning Worship Service.**

We find it stated in verse 37 that there were in all, 276 persons on board this ship that Paul was on. That is a lot of folks. They were all headed for Rome, many prisoners and others, and yet we see here, that they were not going to make it to Rome on that ship. Providentially, this was the will of God, this shipwreck. It was God’s will that Paul was going to become a great witness to these people in the midst of these great difficulties. The circumstances that God was going to bring them all into, would give Paul opportunity to speak to them at a number of points. And so, in the midst of this event of bad weather, Paul would have the opportunity to witness to many men who needed to hear what he had to say about God.

It will be good for us to ask – What can we learn from Paul’s witness before these men on the ship? We too, want people to be saved. What can Paul teach us? Let me relate to you now, the things that Paul said and did, to be a good witness for Christ in this difficult situation of the events leading up to the shipwreck. 1st – He witnessed by using words of warning. 2nd – He witnessed by using words of encouragement. And 3rd – He witnessed by cultivating a good relationship with the centurion Julius who had charge of him. Let us see whether we can learn something from Paul’s witness in order that we might strengthen our own.

1st – Paul witnessed using words of warning.

Now, I want you to see from the words that we have before us in this chapter, that it does not say that Paul preached Christ to these 276 men, at least publicly, together as a group. I have no doubt that, even though it is not mentioned, that he often spoke of Christ privately, to the passengers of this ship, either individually or in small groups. Paul did not have the fear of men in this regard, as can be proved from many places in the book of Acts, in regard to his entire life. He was not afraid to speak. But he wanted to be wise here, and bring God into the picture.

And so, since most of these men he was bearing witness to, did not know much of anything about God or Christ, Paul began speaking to them about what God had told him about the weather. A little later, he would speak about the true and living God to all the men in the ship. But he began his witness to those in authority, Julius the Centurion, the helmsman, and the owner of the ship, by speaking with them about his own perceptions about their leaving on this voyage, it being so close to winter. It says in verses 9 and 10 – “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, but also our lives.’”

What is he doing here? Well, he was not only a good observer of the season of weather that they were in, but he was also a prophet of the Lord. And as a prophet of the Lord, he was able to know what God had communicated to him by the Spirit, so that he could warn them of the coming disaster if they proceeded on. But it says in verse 11, that the centurion Julius was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things which were spoken by Paul. So, here was the apostle Paul, the man of God, at his best as a witness.

He began with what he knew. He knew sailing was now dangerous, and so he gave them his advise, which they didn’t listen to. But he had something far more reliable than his own mere observations as a man to give to them. He had God and God’s Spirit leading him and guiding him. He knew that there was going to be a shipwreck and that there would be much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but possibly of their own lives too, if they did not listen to him. Let me apply this to you in the context of our lives. If you are a Christian, you also have the Holy Spirit

in your heart and life, helping you and guiding you in relation to the many situations of life that you face every day. You can be a good witness to people around you if you simply become a good student of the Lord's Word and His Providential ordering of the weather. You, at the very least, can tell people around you, that God is in perfect control of the weather, and He always gives to us the weather which he orders according to the counsel of His own will.

There are many people out there who believe that all nature and the weather, goes on day by day, in some sort of patterns, but they do not believe in God's ordering of the weather, specifically. And many do not believe in His direct intervention in their lives giving them the weather that they have every day. But that God did so, here, is clear. And He did it in relation to Paul's being a great witness to these men. And so you, too, can be a great witness to people around you in just this way. We need to be wise with people around us. There are weather patterns, even as all of us are observers of the seasons of the year.

And it is good that we will care enough about people around us to tell them whether we think that they are wise in proceeding out in travel if it appears that the weather is not going to be good; icy or tornadic, or extreme cold. This is what Paul did, and this is what we also should do. But there was something more here that we need to warn people about when we speak with them about the weather, if we believe that we can speak to them about it. And that is, that God tests men by the weather that He gives to them. He tests them to see if they believe in His sovereign rule over them. For He gave them their life, and He keeps them in it too. Often they will not listen.

You see this in verses 12-14 – “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 Pheonix, a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, and winter there.” “When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete.” “But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon.” I want you to see this: These men thought that they had obtained their desire. And if they had reached Phoenix they would have felt justified in their having undertaken this voyage.

The soft south wind, at first, made them think that everything was fine. But it was not, and this strong Euroclydon wind came right after this, so that they could make no headway and actually had to allow themselves to be driven along by it. Even so, in spiritual things in relation to God's providence, many people are fooled by the weather. When it is summer and there is no storm or wind, people bask in the sun, thinking that all is well, both physically and spiritually speaking. The weather, or mother nature makes them feel good.

But then very suddenly a storm like the Derecho that we had two years ago comes out of nowhere, and destroys many trees and much property. This is meant to be a sign to them, and to us Christians as well. God gives the good weather in order for us to see that He is well able to bring joy and peace and happiness to us. But He is also able to bring disastrous weather too, when we least expect it. What is He telling us? He is saying that whether we have good weather or bad, that our faith ought always to be in Him.

He is saying in the storm that He is a Mighty Judge and that we ought to repent of all of our sins. But sometimes He when He brings a storm, it is so we might remember His Son. In storms rain is brought which is for the good of the ground and for the good of people. He is saying that it is only when we believe in His Son, the Lord Jesus, that we shall find real peace, and find grace in His sight. For He is the Son of Righteousness who bore the storm of the Father's wrath, so that we might be forgiven of all of our sins. He is the Sun of Righteousness, who has arisen from the dead, with healing in His wings. And so when you trust in Him, you can be as Paul was, calm in the midst of the storm.

All of us need to understand that God has certain expectations of us. Some people want to go their own way and do their own thing. They do not think that it is important that they stay with ship of the plans that He has for them; that is, that they should think of how their actions have an impact on the lives of other people around them. Remember what it says of the sailors in verse 30 – “And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under the pretense of putting out anchors from the prow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, ‘Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.’”

These sailors, realizing that they might be able to get away on their own, apart from the others on the ship, were intending to leave everyone else behind. They thought that they themselves were justified in trying to escape the shipwreck that was coming. But we must realize, all of us, that we are all together in this ship of life. Christians especially should realize this. God’s plan was to bring everyone safely to land. It was what He had told Paul through the angel. Therefore, for the plan to have a good outcome, everyone had to stay in the ship until they could do so no longer.

God had ordained to save everyone on the ship, in terms of their being brought safely to land. But those who would not stay in the ship, they could not expect that their lives would be spared. So it is with regard to the gospel. There is no promise that you will have eternal life if you will not stay in the ark of Christ. That is the ship which will bring you to heaven. Abide in the promises and you will be saved. Go your own way, and you will be lost. Let us be willing to warn people of this in a firm but loving way.

2nd – Paul witnessed using words of encouragement. (verses 21-36)

There were two major times during this voyage when Paul deliberately undertook to bring encouragement to all of the other people on the ship. The first is in verses 20-26 when he mildly reproved them when they had tried hard to weather the storm, but it did not let up. They had given up all hope of being saved. But Paul said to them– You should have listened to me and not sailed from Crete. I warned you of what would happen. And now it has. Things had gotten so bad that they had used cables to undergird the ship, and finally they had thrown the ship’s tackle over board to lighten it. They had not eaten any food for some time.

But it was at this very time that Paul stood up in the midst of them and told them to take heart; for none of them would lose their lives. This he had from God Himself through an angel who had come and spoken to him that very night. He calls him an angel of the God to whom I belong, and whom I serve. He witnessed to the fact that he belonged to God and he served God. Angels are God’s messengers who are sent out to render service to those who will inherit salvation, it says in Hebrews 1: 14. This angel told Paul not to be afraid, for he was going to make it to Rome to be brought before Caesar. And something just as wonderful for all of these men on the ship; God had granted Paul all those who sailed with him!

This was indeed a word of encouragement which Paul could pass on to all of them. God was thinking about Paul’s desire to make it Rome and bear witness there. But he was also thinking about their welfare, and how He would have mercy upon them all and do them this wonderful favor of delivering them from dying in the shipwreck which was coming! Therefore, He told Paul – Do not be afraid. And Paul, on the basis of God’s word to him was able to say for the 2nd time – Take heart men! And to add – I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.

You too, dear Christian, can be an encouragement to people around you if you will tell them of the Lord Jesus; the One who left the halls of heaven and came to this fallen world of woe to save sinners from the wrath, the storm of God coming against them. Tell them that you have been saved from this storm and will most certainly be brought to heaven based upon what He has done

for you, in the great work of redemption that He has accomplished on your behalf and on behalf of all who believe in Him. You can tell them that you believe that it will be just as God has told you in the Bible. They may run aground on a certain island. They may suffer the loss of their earthly ship and possessions. But if they will only believe, they shall most certainly come to the most desired haven of heaven.

The other time when Paul brought them all encouraging words is found in verses 33-36. It was after Paul had said that all the men must stay in the ship in order to be saved. And the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off. As the day was about to dawn, Paul implored them all to take food. He said – Today is the 14th day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing. Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you. And so when he had said these things he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken it he began to eat.

They were all encouraged, it says and also took food themselves. Ah, what a blessed thing it was, and what a wonderful witness it was to these men, that Paul was concerned enough about their physical welfare that he told them to break their fast and eat bread with him! He set the example for them and broke the bread and began to eat. He was telling them in effect: God is concerned for your physical welfare, and He would have you to eat and be encouraged in your eating. You shall not die but live and declare the works of the Lord.

In our witness it is always good to reflect on the physical needs of the person that we are trying to minister to. If there is something that we can do to help them, we should. If there is some way that we can encourage them, we should undertake to do so. We should not be afraid to do this in the name of the Lord, publicly giving thanks for what God has given. It truly is a witness. For if we think of the bodily needs of people they may actually think more about their need of the grace of Christ. You say that you have faith, but will you show others your faith by your works? In everything give thanks for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. Learn to encourage unbelievers to faith in Christ by showing that you care for them.

3rd – Paul witnessed by cultivating a good relationship with the centurion Julius who had charge of him. (verses 41-44)

“But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves.” “And the soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape.” “But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, and the rest, some on boards and some on parts of the ship.” “And so it was that they all escaped safely to land.”

Here is where Paul’s witness shone the greatest during this time, I think. It was when the ship was breaking up that Julius, the man who had charge over Paul, wanting to prevent the killing of all the prisoners, and because he particularly wanted to save Paul, he kept the soldiers from carrying out their sinful plan of murdering them all. I believe that this action shows that there had been considerable friendship evangelism that had been taking place from Paul to him, and that Julius was responding to it. We are not told that this man believed and was saved, but he certainly acted the part of one who believed in the God who Paul preached.

Paul had been assigned to this man during this time. It was no accident that he was. He had observed Paul carefully during all this time, and he at the very least sympathized with the reasons that Paul wanted to go to Rome. But if he did not believe, it seems hard to believe that he would do everything that he did here to see Paul make it to Rome, let alone preventing the killing of

the prisoners. Let us understand that some people whom we witness to, we may never know conclusively that they have believed in Christ in this life. But at the judgment, it will be revealed.

Matthew 25: 34 – “Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’” “Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give You drink?” “When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You?” Or when did we see You sick , or in prison, and come to You?” “And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’” How much more when Julius did what he did here for the apostle Paul.