

Believing God

Book of Acts

By Ken Wimer

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Acts 27:23-44
Preached On: Sunday, December 8, 2019

Shreveport Grace Church
2970 Baird Road
Shreveport, LA 71118

Website: www.shrevegrace.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/shreveportgracech

Let's turn together in our Bibles to Acts 27 and my text is at verse 23 down to verse 44 and the title of this message is "Believing God." There's a difference set between saying believe in God and believing God. Even the devils believe in God and tremble, that's what the Scriptures say.

We run into many today that say, "Well, I believe in God." What is the difference between believing in God, if there is a God, and believing God. How many in our generation they hold tenaciously to this Bible being the inspired word of God and yet they don't believe the God of the word? And that takes the Spirit of God. [unintelligible] But here's a good example of what it is to believe God. It's exactly the language used by the Apostle Paul as he's on this journey to Rome and God himself had told him that he would be brought before Caesar and that nothing would deter him from getting there.

So we begin, I started with verse 23 but let's see where we left Paul and the people on the ship. It was no small tempest, it said there in verse 20, but laid on that "all hope that we should be saved was then taken away." This is what God does, he takes away any hope in ourselves to prove himself to be mighty.

So verse 21, "after long abstinence," in other words, there wasn't a whole lot to be eaten there, just whatever was necessary to get by, "Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss." So again, Paul is pointing out that even though these were excellent sailors that traveled these seas and these ships were not modern ships like you have today when you get on a cruise ship, they're all electronically driven and whenever there's a wave or a storm, it's designed to try to keep the equilibrium. It's an amazing technology when you consider what goes into ships being built today. Back here the strength was in those who were sailing, the expertise of the sailors, and here's an example where these thought themselves capable as most of us would, putting confidence in our flesh that, no, we can go ahead and go when in reality the Lord had purposed otherwise.

But here's what he says in verse 22, "And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship." Here's an example where

the Lord will bless even the unbelieving for the sake of his elect. The reason that God purposed the safety of the men's lives on this ship was because of his elect that were on that ship. Paul, as we saw last time, there were other companions that went along with him. We have to believe even Luke because he's writing this at firsthand experience, so it wasn't just Paul. And for the elect's sake, God would be merciful even to these others that were not believing.

And here's why, he's not just hoping that this would be the case, he's basing this on the revelation of God himself in verse 23, "For there stood by me this night the angel of God." The Scriptures say that he gives his angels charge over those who are heirs of salvation, to watch over them, to keep them. God's a God of means. He has created this world and he's set this world in motion. There's times when God may intervene directly in the lives of people without any human means, but for the most part when God has purposed, is purposed to do his work, it is through means and these angels described here as this here, "this night the angel of God stood by me this night," that it would be by God's direction. They're called flaming spirits that are sent forth to protect and to assure that God's will is accomplished.

So it says here, he "stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve." Now there's some that look at that and certainly it could be, the word "angel" doesn't necessarily mean a created being because Christ is called the angel of the covenant in the Old Testament, he's called the messenger. That's what that word really means, a messenger sent of God and some read this as none other than Christ himself who stood by him, and certainly he does watch over each of his own. He'll not lose one that the Father has given him.

"Saying," verse 24, "Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." So here is a word spoken to Paul for his encouragement. The fact that it says there in verse 24, "Fear not," doesn't mean that in our nature we don't fear. How many of us know and believe but Bob just read there in Romans 8, yet we're so weak in the flesh and fear for any reason strikes at our heart. But here this messenger is sent to encourage Paul, that all would fail, that though all would fail, yet not one would be lost and that's a comfort. When the Lord brings home his word to our heart to remind us in the storm, that though all may fail, God himself is going to accomplish his purpose in saving and keeping every one that he has purposed to save, and it's based upon God's promise there in verse 24, to "be brought before Caesar." That being the case, it was certain that he would not perish at sea no matter what happened. But again, we see that this isn't just fatalism, this is God using every situation by his Spirit to cause Paul even to reflect upon God's glory and who he is and what he's promised. But there would be a storm and even here as we all do, we need assurance from God. We all lack that assurance even though we know that it's God who is directing all things.

So he says, "Don't be afraid." You could read that, "Stop being afraid, Paul." A lot of times we don't express the fear in our hearts when we consider the storms and afflictions that God is bringing us through and yet it's when the Lord speaks peace to this heart that

there will be peace. So that's why he says here in verse 25 which is the heart of the title of this message, "Wherefore, sirs," he's directing this to a mixed congregation. Some that are with Paul the Lord had taught by his grace and certainly their hope was in Christ, and yet here were all these others. Think about how many times God brings us through certain situations along with those of the world and God through that gives occasion to speak to the glory of Christ even though they don't know it.

So he says, "Wherefore, sirs," he's speaking there to the ship men and certainly he's speaking there to the guards, the centurions and others there present. This would never have been an opportunity to preach Christ and exalt him were it not that the Lord brought this wind and this storm, that even with their best expertise it was beyond their capability and ability to act.

He says, "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer," and in this case it's not just, "Well, perk up." No, to be of good cheer comes by the Lord himself granting peace, peace that passes all understanding, and here's why he says it, "I believe God." It didn't say there, "I believe in God." He didn't say to them, "Everybody needs to pray to their god." He is declaring, "I believe God," where God means supreme magistrate, sovereignty, one who judges according to his will and brings all things to pass according to his will.

He says, "I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." Here's that specific revelation, again, by this messenger sent of God. As I said, true comfort and peace and cheer come through the Lord Jesus Christ. So I have no problem at all with this being none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, but even if it were a created angel that was sent according to the Scripture, that would still be according to the will of Christ, that messenger speaking on behalf of Christ.

And he says, "I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." This gives us, then, an understanding of what it is to believe God. I said that a little while ago, well, this isn't just believing any god but it's believing God. When someone says, "I believe God," it means there's absolute trust in who he is and what he does, whether we understand it or not. He brings us to despair of ourselves but to be totally cast on him and trust him, and that's not only true in the everyday experiences of this life but particularly in this matter of salvation. The greatest storm and sea that we have to face is death and that's really what this was about, facing death. Our lives are gonna be disrupted one day soon. The Lord has brought us to this point. If you're hearing me speaking right now, it means that God has preserved you through life's storms right to this point, right to this time. Well, let's be transparent in that the greatest unknown to us is dying, and not only when we will die but how we will die, and it is a sea that none of us is going to escape. I think about this all the time as days go by, why is it that the Lord has preserved me to this point. I look around and see others that he's taken at a very young age and yet here I am. One more day waking up the Lord has given each of us, but it may not continue that way.

So in that storm, wherein is our hope? Well, we believe God, then we believe exactly what has been told us as it says there in verse 25, "it shall be even as it was told me." Have you ever stopped and asked yourself, "Well, how do you know that when you die

and stand before a holy God, that Christ, we just sang it, on Christ the solid rock I stand, all other hope is sinking sand, how do you know that's so?" Most people out in the world if not all, especially all that are outside of Christ, in whom Christ has never been revealed, they have a hope-so. I've had some tell me that, "Well, when it comes down to that final hour, I hope that I have enough faith to see me through." They're thinking of pulling themselves up by the bootstraps and getting through the situation. As we see here in this shipwreck, none of these sailors, as expert as they were, were going to be able to have any confidence in their expertise. This would take other than themselves to be seen through it and that would be God. That's why Paul says here, "I believe in God." It's that absolute trust that what he says, it is so.

There are two portions of Scripture that we can consider on this point because God-given faith with Christ revealed in us, is a persuasion. It's not a performance, it's a persuasion. Over here in Philippians 1, we read here where Paul says in verse 6, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Do you see that word "being confident"? That's that word "I believe God." Absolute trust, being confident that what he has begun, he will perform until the day of Jesus Christ. This isn't us holding on by our bootstraps, this is him who begins this work of grace in the heart because of what he's purposed to do for sinners such as we are, and performing it, accomplishing it until the day of Jesus Christ. That's why I believe God. It's not up to me. I often say in life I'm just a passenger on the ship that the Lord has set to sea, and thankfully it's not me guiding the ship, it's the Lord himself who is that persuasion. Even Paul said, "I am persuaded that that which I have committed unto him, he'll keep unto the day of salvation."

But also over in Hebrews 6 there's another Scripture that clearly defines what it is to trust God and believe God. I said Hebrews 6, it's Hebrews 11, verse 6. It says, "But without faith it is impossible to please him." You can read, where do we see faith in Scripture toward Christ, about Christ, because Christ is the object of faith. Without Christ it is impossible to please God. Outside of Christ, there is no pleasing, our best efforts pale before a holy God, but with faith, with that God-given faith which is the revelation of Christ and his finished work accomplished for sinners, we are pleasing to God. Not just acceptable but accepted in the Beloved.

"For he that cometh to God," now notice those that come are drawn. Christ himself said, "No man can come unto me except it be given him of the Father." So to come to God is to come to Christ, come to God in Christ, but it's by believing, notice, "that he is." There's a lot in that expression, believe everything about what he has revealed himself, of himself here in this work. We haven't even begun to plummet the depths of who he is. We could spend a year just studying Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The sovereign magistrate, Lord of all. He's sovereign in creation. He's sovereign in providence which is what these here would come to experience. He's sovereign in salvation, determining who he saves and who [unintelligible] in condemnation. There were many that in these storms perished at sea but not this cargo, not this particular group because of what God had purposed to do in bringing Paul and those accompanying him to Rome.

But they must "believe that he is." There's that complete trust and confidence in being utterly cast upon him and it's not us holding him, it's him holding us. "And that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." When it says he's a rewarder, it's not like as parents we hand out little allowances and things because a kid's been good. No, but when it says he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him, it means that all that he promises and all that he says we're going to find to be exactly so. So when I come to that moment when the Lord is pleased to take me, I am utterly cast upon who he is and what he says and I believe God, I believe that what he has promised, he fulfills. He rewards exactly as he's promised that any that are saved, it's gonna be in that one righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ alone. I have no other hope. I want no other hope and Christ is that hope.

So coming back here to my text, this is where we see Paul, just in that one simple statement, declaring that persuasion that God had given him and that it must be that it would be so. So Paul believed God when there was nothing else to believe. This is how God works, he'll strip us of every hope in ourselves in order that he get all the glory. He certainly couldn't believe the sailors. They'd already blown it. They said, "We ought to go ahead and go," and the next thing you know, oops. That's why Paul said to them and have gained this harm and loss.

Let us also remember this when we face other trials, that our confidence isn't in men. You might have been told that you have a terminal illness and that the doctor has said you've got so long to live. Well, that doctor doesn't know. He hasn't determined, he's not the one who determines the end from the beginning. God does. And so even though we make use of the wisdom that God gives to men, yet we don't put confidence in them. Our confidence is in the Lord.

Paul couldn't believe the ship, these ships even though they weren't anything modern like we'd do it but they were built to withstand storms and yet here again, God is stripping away any hope in the ship. Or the sails. Or the wind. Try thinking, "Well, maybe the wind will change." No, even God, he has his way in the wind and the storm. The centurion put there to guard Paul and make sure he arrived safely in Rome, but it wasn't going to be because of the centurion. In fact, even the centurion as we're going to see feared for his life and would have killed all the prisoners just to spare his life rather than let one escape. Can't put any confidence in the centurion or any kind of human ingenuity, anything else, only God.

Is that sufficient? I pray so because that's how God does his work, he'll not share his glory with another and he's going to prove himself as God. Go back there and read in Job where the Lord continued to hammer Job, brought him down to where he sat on a garbage pile scratching himself with potsherds and friends, so called, around him saying, "Well, why don't, why don't you confess what's going on here because obviously you've done something." Well, if God should mark iniquity, who could stand? But that wasn't the purpose for God's bringing this trial to Job, it was to prove himself so that others might know and even Job himself that he is God and his will would be accomplished. And even in the middle of his trial, he declared there in Job 13:15, "Thou he slay me, yet

will I trust him. I will go to my grave believing God." No ifs, ands or buts. Well, if he would've just done this. No.

So that's what we see here. This storm and this danger were real. I know we're reading this as a story but this is real. When I was a kid growing up, we used to like to read these kind of stories, "Lost at Sea," or "Mutiny on the Bounty," or other things but you can't find anything more fascinating. Even with our kids, you know, we often say, "Well, what, where, what do we read?" Reading the Scriptures to your children because everything is in there for life and death as to who God is and how he purposes all things.

But even as real as the storm and the danger were to Paul, guess what? Paul calls God was even more real and present with him in this very dreadful circumstance. Paul wasn't ashamed. This is an opportunity for him to declare who God is. He wasn't ashamed to say that he believed God. Against all other gods, all these sailors had their god as we know in the case of Jonah, they all started crying unto their god. There wasn't time for a prayer chain here. Everybody would start crying out to your god and let's hope one of them will hear. No, he clearly declared, "I believe God." Let God be true, the Scriptures say, and every man a liar. And I know when we look back on our lives, right now in your mind you could see different situations that were hopeless, you didn't know which way to turn and yet God was at work. God was accomplishing his purpose, and all you can say when it was done was, "I believe God. God did it."

So this unshakable confidence, it wasn't in Paul. That's why he had to be encouraged. That's why the Lord sent his messenger and told him, "Fear not." Had to remind him that even this situation was of him as he had purposed. And so in verse 26, you see, when God gives direction, he doesn't necessarily reveal everything that is to take place. We know that we can go out here with this confidence, there's nothing that's going to take place and happen unto us but what God has ordained it, yet at the same time we don't know the outworkings of the detail and that's what we read here in verse 26, "Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island." The Lord didn't even reveal to Paul what that island would be, he just believed God that wherever this ended up, that it would be God doing his will. He knew that the ship must be lost. That was said up there in verse 22, "there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship." So this was a temporary vehicle that God had purposed to use to get them from point A to point B, but then the ship itself must be destroyed and they must be utterly cast upon the Lord for moving forward. So he says, "We're all going to be shipwrecked on an unknown island but everyone will be alright. Everything's gonna be alright."

So as you read on in verses 27 through 29, "But when the fourteenth night was come," so that means they were two weeks in this particular situation of uncertainty, two entire weeks of misery and terror of the storm. Here again is an example that believing God doesn't mean that he's necessarily going to remove the trial immediately but we can be sure that it's the Lord that's directing even the timing of it. Some of us as we consider certain trials in our lives have been enduring that trial for some time and there are times where you cry out unto the Lord thinking, "I can't go on," and yet the Lord gives you

strength to go on. But the trial is not going to go away until God has purposed, until God says so. He's the Lord of all.

So when the fourteenth night had come, it says there, "as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight," and that shows right there they had no control even on the ship, driven up and down, going to and fro and yet it wasn't going to land until God determined when, where and how it would land. I think of the ark of Noah, that the storms that battered that ship for all that time that Noah and his family were in that ark, and yet it was the Lord that purposed the time that it should come upon dry land and all that were in the ship be saved. That's the picture of salvation in Christ. It's not by our determining but the Lord's.

So about midnight it says "the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country." This shows even here that they had no clue. They were piloting on instruments. In other words, it was dark and stormy. There was no way of telling but they sensed that they were drawing near some land. I'm sure that these sailors were accustomed to the different sounds of the waves and whenever you're getting close to land, what do you hear? You hear breakers. There's a different sound and so the sailors began to take proper precaution against being crashed against some unknown rocks. They were unknown the sailors but not unknown to God.

So it says there that, "And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms." How did they sound it? They dropped anchor and did it from the stern of the ship, "and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms." So they could tell that they were getting close to land.

"Then fearing," it says in verse 29, "lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day." That's all that those that are unconverted and don't know the Lord can do is, "Well, let's hope for the best." How different that is with those that are the Lord's, that await the Lord to intercede and believe that he will according to his will and purpose.

Over in Psalm 130, this has become a Psalm that is very dear to me and I know any that the Lord brings through trial and hardship, but what a difference to believe God than just hope or wish for the day, wishful thinking. We can read this as it pertains to us, we can also read it as what our Lord Jesus Christ would have endured in his suffering through the storm as the God-man, the substitute. But it says, "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD." This is what it is to believe God. It's not just hoping for the best but it's directed to him who is the Lord.

"Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications." Certainly our Lord was heard in that he feared and even as we're brought to cry unto the Lord, we have this assurance of him being attentive to the voice of our supplications because of who we are in Christ. He's the one that gives the cry. We don't know how to pray as we ought but he does. He intercedes on our behalf.

"If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" If it would depend upon anything in us, who could stand?

"But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." Now here's the part, they wished for the morning, they wished for the sun to come up so they could now visually have some hope in sight of land but here it says, "I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning." I'm sure a number of us have dealt with situations like that with regard to our children or a loved one or others, where even the most expert doctor has to tell you, "Well, we'll see what it's like in the morning." You're not putting any hope in the doctor. He goes out the room and he's gone. What do you do? You wait. You wait and that's what we see here.

"Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption." You see, our hope is in who he is and the fact that nothing moves or arms us but what comes through his gracious hand.

"He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities." Every one that God purposed to deliver even in this situation, there is no question but what they would be delivered.

So come back here, "And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship." That's man's nature is to seek other refuge than what the Lord himself has directed, "when they had let down the boat into the sea," so they had a boat attached to this boat that they hoped would be able to rescue whomever, "under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." There's a picture also that our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. They sought another way than what Paul had clearly indicated by God's word. Don't leave the ship, and yet their nature was to cut and run.

So verse 32, "Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off. And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you." Does that sound familiar in reading in the Gospels that not a hair falls from our head but what not just that God permits it but what he wills it. And so he's encouraging them here. Still there's no safety yet evident and so Paul's saying, "Take nourishment." That's what people do when they believe God. They're not acting as others, fleeing in panic, but rest in believing God and what he's said he certainly would accomplish.

"And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat." Isn't that what our Lord did for those that, the multitudes that were there and hungered? He took five loaves and two fishes and fed them, the multitudes. Certainly here we find Paul encouraging the

passengers and these others who did not know God, but by his own example that they should trust God, and in this we find that Paul showed that rest that the Lord had given him even by giving thanks to God in the presence of them all as it says in verse 35.

"And when he had broken it, he began to eat." I couldn't help read this but think about our Lord breaking bread with his disciples and it says here take meat, [unintelligible] was some meat there that they had taken on the ship that had been killed and was there for their provision. Now the bread. What a beautiful picture of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, his blood shed, and him being the bread and the wine, and Paul here finding comfort in this even in all that Christ was to him.

Then it says as a result, verse 36, "Then were they all of good cheer." Notice this is the Lord's doing. They weren't out of the woods yet. The worst part was yet to come and yet they were all of good cheer. That's the work of the Lord strengthening the heart of each one.

"They also took some meat. And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls." That would be 260 then add 16 to that, 276 souls on this ship and yet not one of them was to be lost. Here's a good picture too of what Christ said of all that the Father has given me, I should needs not.

"And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea." That was quite a move as well because here now is what might have remained for the rest of the journey and yet there was not to be a rest of the journey. They were to be cast upon this land and so the heaviest, even though it was their nourishment, went into the sea.

"And when it was day, they knew not the land." Here again, it wasn't by their determining that they landed where they were but God's. "But they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship." They're trying to bring this into land safely when the Lord had already said that the ship would be lost. So they couldn't even, here is an example again, put confidence in their navigating skills. Here's an inlet. Here's a place where we can get the ship in.

"And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore." You see, this is where, again, people go wrong thinking, "Well, God goes so far but then the rest is up to us." No. They were using all of their skill in sailing to bring this ship safely to shore.

And it says, "falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable." So you stop and think, "Ah, now we've got it." But it says, "the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves." All the while they were directing this into what they considered a place of safety, the Lord was beating the hinder part of the ship to pieces. He's the one who ordains the wind and the waves.

That's when "the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape." The soldiers, this made sense regardless of what God had said by his word. This shows, again, that even though they'd heard the word that Paul had to declare and was a comfort to him, yet to them they heard nothing because according to the Roman military law, a guard who allowed his prisoner to escape was subject to the same penalty that the escaped prisoner would have suffered. That's why in the story of the Philippian jailer, he thought all had escaped. Paul had to cry out and stop him, he was ready to take his own life and Paul told him, "No, we're all here." And that was for God's purpose because that Philippian jailer unbeknownst to him and even Paul at that point was one of God's elect, one for whom Christ paid the debt. It was impossible then that he should do himself any harm. And as we read on, we have some hope that even some of these that accompanied Paul were, indeed, God's elect; that through this he would draw them unto Christ.

So that was their determination and here's where I'm thankful that man proposes, God disposes. There's not gonna be one thing that man's gonna do contrary to what God has purposed. "But the centurion, willing to save Paul," it's amazing how the Lord gave him a tenderness for Paul, "kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land." Every one of them because God had purposed. As I said, even these that did not know God benefited from the blessing of God for the elect's sake, for Paul's sake. Such is the God that we worship and serve. We believe God.