

Acts 27:1-26

From the divine perspective, everything has a purpose in our lives, and everything occurs exactly as it should both as to what, how and when, BUT, from our limited human perspective, we are often frustrated and perplexed in the midst of trying circumstances.

Summary

In Acts 27:1-26, Paul travels to Italy to appeal his case to Caesar, during which he encountered various challenging circumstances, teaching us how to cope with difficult and unexpected providences in the Christian life.

1. Slow Progress vv. 1-8

Governor Festus had maneuvered the case against Paul to a satisfactory outcome for himself and his political future.

Some time during Paul's two-year imprisonment, Luke had made his way from Jerusalem to Caesarea. Even in his life-threatening trials Paul was surrounded and supported by Christian friends, as well as by compassionate unbelievers.

The centurion, Julius, booked passage for his prisoners, his soldiers, and himself on a small privately-owned ship. At Myra, they transferred to a larger Alexandrian ship. Contrary winds out of the west slowed their progress and after docking at Cnidus, the ship was blown off course. They passed to sheltered side of Crete until they arrived at a small natural harbor named Fair Havens. The harbor's size and its exposure to high winds from the south prompted experienced sailors to look elsewhere to stay the winter.

2. Prudent Counsel vv. 9-10

There was considerable debate on board about whether or not to try to move on from Fair Havens before heavier weather arrived. The ship owner and the pilot favored continuing their journey at least as far as Phoenix in western Crete. Conversely, Paul, a seasoned traveller advised caution. Anticipating the loss of the ship, its precious cargo, and its passengers, he recommended discretion over impatient haste.

3. Outvoted Reason vv. 11-12

Although the ship was privately owned, the centurion, as an imperial officer, had the authority to decide whether or not they would leave Fair Havens.

It was evident that the majority sided with the captain and the pilot and against the prisoner, and Julius approved their setting sail. Paul had no doubt that he himself would reach Rome, for neither high winds nor ocean depths could thwart Jesus' purpose (**Acts 23:11**) but he also wanted to spare those around him harm and loss so he offered his best wisdom to the shipboard community.

4. Storm Tossed Ship vv. 13-20

As they waited, the strong north wind gave way to a gentle breeze from the south, belying Paul's expectation of disaster. The sailors welcomed this window of opportunity as confirmation of their plan. They weighed anchor and set sail for Phoenix. Suddenly, as they rounded the cape, the ship was hit with a hurricane-force wind driving over the mountains of Crete from the north.

Ancient ships were not designed to be as maneuverable as modern craft, much less for advancing when facing into a north-easter, so all they could do was to turn tail to the wind as it drove them south-west.

The ship had drifted over twenty miles when they found some brief relief from the gale in the shelter of the island of Cauda.

The crew and passengers all helped to batten down the ship for the storm's fury. Soldiers, sailors, prisoners, passengers gradually abandoned hope of being saved but Paul had not given up, for he knew God to be true to his Word

5. Hopeful Word vv. 21-26

In this hopeless situation, with winds howling, waves breaking, and strength depleted, Paul stood to encourage his fellow travelers. In contrast to the warning based on his own traveling experiences, Paul now had a clear word from God that no human life would be lost, although the ship would run aground and be destroyed.

Paul's calm ability to encourage others sprang from his faith in God, his calm confidence that the divine Word would never fail.

6. More Lessons on Providence

Paul did not simply "let go and let God." Nor did he jump to the conclusion that a storm at sea must mean that the apostle was not walking in the will of God.

It is also fascinating to observe that the apostle warns against the taking of undue risks. If they continue the voyage, there will be a cost to pay in both cargo and lives. To risk the entire cargo, let alone the 276 souls on board, for the mere gain of a more convenient harbor to winter in was, for Paul, too great a risk. He calculates the risk based on his own knowledge of the geography and climate conditions of the region at that time of the year and the received wisdom of experienced sailors.

Sound judgment and deduction is something that Christians are entitled to employ in evaluating any course of action, particularly when some risk is involved. We should not engage in unwarranted risks, thinking that this shows strong faith.

In such instances, it is no longer strong faith but reckless faith.

God's specific word of promise to Paul is a reminder to us off more general truth: promises made by God are always kept.