

Acts 27:1-26

“Tempest Tossed & Trusting God”

Family, we're just gonna board ship, & set sail through the scriptures today. So, if you'll turn your attention to Vs 1.

Vs 1-2

Now; if you just happened upon us for the 1st time, & here we are on a Sunday morning seeming to just kind of parachute down into the 27th Ch of the book of Acts, you would be well w/in your rights to wonder what's going on in this section of scripture. Who are these & what are they doing?

But let's understand that in the big picture we've been making our way through book of Acts, Vs by Vs, Ch by Ch, just shy of a yr & ½ now. & It's all the unfolding of the words of Jesus to His disciples when just prior to His ascension He said, *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*¹ & To put it quite simply; the remainder of the book of Acts is the chronicling of how that command played out (at least in part) in the 1st century church. There was Pentecost, 120 or so disciples were filled w/the Spirit of God, empowered for the service to which they'd been commissioned. (Because if God enlists you, He enables you; calls/equips) People were saved, the church was born & the gospel began to spread...

& We discover that all kinds of people were enlisted to the cause, it wasn't limited to that original group of disciples. & One such man who eventually received the calling of J.C. to preach the gospel was this man whom we're reading of today, Paul. & The story of his conversion is quite dramatic. From chief persecutor of the church to passionate preacher of the gospel (essentially) in a single moment of time! He came into contact w/J.C. & He was changed!

How many of you realize that an up close & personal encounter w/J.C. will change your life forever! You can never be the same once He's made Himself so personally, so powerfully & so profoundly real to you & such was the case for this man. He traveled all over the known world, preaching the message he once persecuted. *That Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, He was buried & on the 3rd day He rose again according to the scriptures. He was crucified for our transgressions, raised for our justification... hearts were changed, people were saved... but others were outraged. This camp Paul had come from was still seeking to stamp out the message of the resurrection of J.C., from the face of the earth.*

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ac 1:8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Long story short, they eventually got hold of Paul, tried to kill him, he was rescued by a Roman special-forces unit, placed in prison & ever since then the Jews have sought the death penalty. Only 1 problem, he hadn't done anything illegal or unlawful...

So after 2 yrs of being jerked around by the system to no avail, he appealed to Caesar. (To the Supreme Court, if you will). So here in Ch 27 we finally find him boarding the ship & setting sail for Rome.

But we discover that he's not alone. He's w/other prisoners & a couple of compatriots. - By the word "we" in Vs 1, Luke (the author of the book) lets us know that *he* boarded the ship as well (perhaps as Paul's physician)... As for the other prisoners, let's not be confused, they aren't like Paul. Paul was not a condemned man (at least yet), so we'll discover that Julius (the Roman authority over the transport) gave Paul great flexibility, he didn't treat him harshly, but rather he extended quite a bit of liberty to him. As for the other prisoners, (the word "other" in Vs 1 means "of a different kind" or "a different class" these would've been (for the most part) condemned criminals. Probably on their way to Rome to be executed by gladiators in the arena or perhaps be fed to the lions in the colosseum or something of that nature.

& W/that we're already seeing the grace of God begin to come into the equation, aren't we? Here are a bunch of men, condemned as criminals placed on a boat, literally sailing to their death. Yet God places an apostle in their midst that they might hear the gospel before they die...

How many of you realize that God does this same thing w/you & me? This world is filled w/people who are simply drifting toward eternity apart from Christ, & yet God (in His love/grace) has seen fit to place you & me (a people touched & transformed by His grace) on board, right in the midst of them. ☺

It's so important that we don't lose that perspective. Same sea, same storms, 2 different destinations. & God has called us to a time such as this, that we might share the hope of the forgiveness of sins, everlasting life through faith in J.C. to those who are w/out hope being w/out God in the world...

In Vs 2 we discover a couple more details, in keeping w/the sailing habits of the ancient world, we discover their plan wasn't to simply sail across the open Mediterranean Sea, but they would sail up the coast of Asia Minor, & that another friend accompanied them. Aristarchus, one of Paul's converts from Thessalonica.

Vs 3-8 (Map, To Rome We Go)

So you can see that Julius gave Paul a lot of liberty, probably for a couple of reasons. #1 He wasn't a condemned criminal. & #2 It was pretty easy to distinguish that Paul was a man of character, a man of honesty & integrity & he didn't need to worry about him trying to take off or anything like that.

Now; in Vs 5 we discover that they made their way to another harbor in Myra, on the coast of Lycia & there the centurion found a larger, Alexandrian cargo ship (a grain freighter) headed for Rome. Alexandria is on the coast of Egypt & Egypt was Rome's breadbasket. So these grain ships would commonly sail north to Asia Minor and then make their way west across the Mediterranean using the islands for as much protection as they could.

& We actually have a pretty good idea of what these ancient ships looked like (Model 1). The typical grain freighter of that period was about 140' long by 36' wide. It had one mast w/a big square sail (Model 2) & instead of a rudder as we might be prone to think, it was steered w/2 big oars (paddles) that protruded from the back of the ship. They were sturdy, but the design didn't lend itself to being able to sail into the wind.

That's why we read that it took "many days" to arrive off of Cnidus. They were sailing slowly & the wind wouldn't allow them to proceed west, so they turned southwest & headed down to the south side of Crete. & Even so, they passed that area, notice, "w/difficulty" until they finally arrived at a port called "Fair Havens".

Here's what we need to see. Contrary winds, sailing slowly, w/much difficulty...

Vs 9-10

3 Words in 3 Vs should be catching our attention. Vs 8, "difficulty". Vs 9, "dangerous". Vs 10, "Disaster". We're seeing an escalation of the situation. & Luke tells us why the sailing had escalated from difficult to dangerous, it's because the "Fast was already over." He's talking about the Fast related to the Day of Atonement which was on Oct 5 in the yr A.D. 59 which is more than likely the yr we're looking at here.

What's being communicated was the common knowledge that as winter approached (hurricane season), sailing became much more dangerous. It was difficult if not dangerous from mid September through early November, & downright disastrous/deadly after that. People just didn't sail out on the Mediterranean after the 1st week or so of November. (& We just learned that Oct 5th was already passed, so they're pushing on the redline.

So, when Paul stands up; it's not necessarily that he's speaking as a prophet of God (though he may've had some kind of witness in his spirit of impending disaster). The truth is, he simply knew the seasons & had a lot of experience on the Sea.

At this point in his life he'd already logged over 3500 miles of sea travel. Though he was a "humble preacher" he probably had more experience on the sea than many of the sailors on that ship. Not to mention that when we read 2nd Cor 11, Paul tells us that by this time he'd already lived through 3 separate shipwrecks & had spent a night & a day bobbing around in the open sea hanging on to debris from the busted-up ship... So; he knows the sea, he knows the seasons, he knows it's not safe & it's not wise.

But again, he's just a preacher-man, right? He's not a sailor. Plus (as history notes) they're in "Podunk Nowhere's Ville" in a harbor that's not well conditioned for winter storms & just 40 miles up the coast is a major port, a big city, lots to do if you're going to be there for a few months anyway.

Vs 11-12

So on the one hand you have Paul... On the other hand, you have the owner of the ship, the chief sailor & his crew. Julius is hearing them out (it's kind of mind blowing that Paul had a voice in this at all as a prisoner), Paul is saying, "I've been through this, I'm telling you this is going to go bad. We should err to the side of safety." & Then you have the guy who owns the boat, his most experienced sailor (those w/the most seemingly to lose) saying, "It's just 40 miles, it's a nice day, we should just go..."

Here's the take away. Pride (thinking we know better), impatience (we're already behind let's get going) & the appetites of the flesh (there's nothing to do here, all kinds of entertainment there) are ingredients for the perfect storm. They will drive us toward destruction.

Now; to Julius' defense, we understand him being persuaded by the helmsman & the owner of the ship more so than the things spoken by Paul. They were the ones who had more to lose, more experience (so on & so forth). So they opted to set out, along the southern coast of Crete for what should've simply been... "a 3 hour tour, a 3 hour touurr..." The weather started getting rough; the Alexandrian ship was tossed... If not for the faithfulness of the Lord, everyone would be lost... ☺

Now keep this thought in the back of your mind; when things seemed like smooth sailing, no one wanted to listen to the man of God...

Vs 13-16

Isn't it interesting, when we don't listen to sound counsel (for our application, the word of God). When we go our own way, do our own thing, initially we're just blown along softly, it's like things are going our way favorably. Yet invariably it turns from soft winds to stormy seas & we're blown away totally...

Again, pride, impatience, we might even throw in "Everybody is doing it," it was the consensus of the majority. But listen, we really don't want the opinion of the majority, we need to hear from the heart of God! It's not what everyone else wants, it's what does God want?

They were directed by circumstance (the soft southerly wind). Let me ask you (my friend) was the answer *really* "blowing in the wind"? ☺ Don't allow circumstance to dictate your course, we want to be governed by the Spirit of God... They were driven by the appetites of the flesh; they were a few hours away from comfort, entertainment, easy living... It wasn't, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" It was, "Hey, it'll be a whole lot easier just down the coast."

They were doing their best guess work, "They *supposed* they had obtained their desire." You can go through life "supposing" this way or that way is the best way. As for me; I don't want to be governed by what I *suppose*, but what God's word says...

They got out there, & not too long into their journey a "tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon" arose. (Or a northeasterner). What happens when southerly winds collide w/northeasterly winds? Ladies & Gentlemen, they were literally being rocked by a hurricane! ☺ They were caught in the storm, couldn't steer the ship, so they let her drive! & When they were driven over 20 miles south around an island called Clauda, Luke says, "We secured the skiff w/difficulty."

"We", in other words. Luke himself was put to work! We can only imagine how seasick so many men were, everyone scrambling to not be washed off the deck & so when there was even a hint of reprieve, the captain is all, "You! You! You! Grab the rope, pull in the skiff!" This was the lifeboat that they towed behind the ship, but in storms they'd pull it in lest it be totally destroyed, or be bashed against the main ship. & It was probably waterlogged & hard work to get it pulled in! Luke was all, "I'm a Dr. man, not a sailor!" (Star Trek reference☺)

Vs 17-19

Notice, Luke is taking part in all of this! Things were going from bad to worse. They tried to undergird the ship to strengthen the hull, they took the sail down & just let it drive in the open sea for fear of being grounded off the coast of north Africa on the Syrtis sandbars. The 2nd day, they started throwing cargo (wheat) overboard to lighten the load & on the 3rd day they threw the sails, the furnishings & whatever else they could overboard... They were trying to avoid being wrecked on sandbars (at this point it's a total financial loss, if they survive at all).

Vs 20

Underline that last phrase. "...all hope that we would be saved was finally given up." W/out seeing the sun or the stars, they had no idea where they were, it was their only way to navigate. For the last several days it was so stormy that exactly where the sun was, or where the stars were, they couldn't tell. They were just being blown out into the open sea... Finally, they all just kind of gave up hope. Vs 37 tells us there were 276 people on board.

Here's the take-away. They had stressed, strove, tried every option they could think of & it just kept getting worse. It wasn't until they came to end of thinking they could save themselves that they gave up hope... How many people share this story? "There was nothing more that I could do for myself, I'd tried everything & nothing was helping." The storms of life pulling us under, wrecking us (as it were), until we came to the end of every option we could think of & we knew we couldn't save ourselves...

Vs 21-22

Is it just me or does Paul sort of issue an, "I told you so" kind of rebuke? ☺ The truth is he's probably saying, "You didn't listen the 1st time & look where we are. Don't make that mistake again." He began as a prisoner, but he wound up the captain, right? He stands up & takes charge when all hope is lost.

It's been said that a crisis doesn't make a person, but it will reveal what a person is made of. & It tends to bring true leadership to the forefront. Something else we see here is that the faith of one man (or one woman) in the "storms of life" can make a tremendous difference. Paul's faith would impact ever person on that ship.

He says, "Take heart men, I have some good news & some bad news." (Btw they hadn't eaten, probably from seasickness or something, who wants to eat when you're just trying to live!)

But he brings the good news, “No one on this ship is going to die.” That’s great news! “But the boat will be a total loss, this ship is going down.” That’s bad news... how do we all live is the ship sinks?

Vs 23-26

Twice he tells them to take heart. & He tells them why, because God has given them His word... Notice, he says, “I belong to God, I serve God, & I believe God!” Guys, this is a big deal!

He didn’t say, “I believe in God.” He said, “I believe God.” Listen, the demons believe *in* God. That is, they believe God exists. The problem is that they don’t *believe* God. That is, they don’t believe His word, that He *can* do & *will* do what He says He will do...

When all hope was lost, Paul placed his faith in the promise of God’s word. Listen, just because you’re a Christian doesn’t mean you’re somehow exempt from life’s storms, the turbulent times, the trials (we see that exemplified even in Paul’s situation here).

But He’s w/you nonetheless, the promise of His word applies to you just the same. Sometimes we need that gentle (or hardy reminder), “Do not be afraid”. God is w/you, He’s not left you. Even though things are being shaken up all around you...

But I love this, 273 unbelievers on that boat & Paul doesn’t hesitate to make known his faith & his trust in God & in the promise of His word.

Now listen, don’t miss this. The angel told Paul that God had granted him (Paul) the lives of *all those who sailed w/him*. What’s the implication? That Paul had been praying for *them*... Paul’s safety was assured, he was going to Rome, but what about all those lost souls, headed for hell on board w/him? Paul was praying for them... Listen... God has given you a promise, everlasting life through faith in J.C. (Good for you, that’s truly wonderful). Things may get rough along the way, but in the end, you’re good to go. The question is; what about all your shipmates? Your family members, work associates, friends at school or in the gym... Do you care enough *about* them to intercede on behalf of them so that they too might be saved? Or as long as you’re good that’s really all you care about? ...

Every now & then I’ll run into someone who knows me on a plane who is nervous to be there & when they see me they’ll say something like, “I’m glad you’re here. Now I know we’ll make it because I know that God isn’t through w/you!” ☺ I’m thinking, “I wish I knew that God wasn’t through w/me!” Lol!

But how concerned are we for those who are on this journey with us, even those who may not be directly connected to us?

Paul was interceding for every man on that boat & God granted them life because he was willing to stand in the gap on their behalf. Ezekiel 22, *"So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord God.*"² God wants to do a work, He wants to save people, but so often people are so concerned for themselves that they won't stand in the gap on behalf of those who are on this "journey" w/them.

Let's stand in the gap. You may be tempest tossed, trust in the Lord. Believe God, set the example; people are watching to see if you'll believe God. Does your life challenge them to follow your example? Let's pray & ask God to make it so...

Prayer Points:

Lord God; work in us, strengthen us to have the kind of life that others can look to as someone who believes Your word, stands on the truth of Your word & refuses to be moved from the promise of Your word. & Give us that burden, the compassion to intercede for others who are onboard w/us in this life. We're asking for the salvation of the lost, the hurting & the hopeless around us. Give us boldness to share your love & the truth of Your word.

Maybe today you're in a place whereby, you've tried everything else, you've given up hope of being saved through some effort or achievement of your own & here you are. Let me encourage you; believe God, believe in the promise of His word, turn from your sin & place your trust in J.C. & you will be saved.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Eze 22:30-31]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.