

Acts 27:27; 28:1-6

**“Don’t Jump Ship; Serve God!”**

I’m not sure that movie could be made that would capture the epic saga that comprised the life of the apostle Paul. This guy had one wild ride this side of heaven. The kind of stories that if it were anyone else telling you, you wouldn’t be sure if you could even believe them!

He was a murderous terrorist to the Christian community, he saw Jesus risen in glory which changed him instantly & he began preaching passionately. He himself was stoned/left for dead & raised up (seemingly miraculously). He preached all over the known world, God healed people through him, raised the dead through him, divinely protected & preserved him... He penned 2/3s of the N.T. & impacted more people (outside of Christ Himself) probably than any other single human being in world history...

& As we enter back into Ch 27, we’re right in the middle of another “hair-raising”, “nerve-racking” scenario. He’s been placed on a ship to be transported to Rome as a prisoner where he will stand trial before Caesar Nero. He appealed to Caesar back in Caesarea after being incarcerated & not receiving a fair trial on trumped up charges over 2 yrs earlier.

But after sailing up the coast to Asia Minor & making their way w/much difficulty (having changed ships already to a larger grain freighter headed to Rome) southwest toward Crete, once they arrived at a harbor called “Fair Havens” Paul advised them to winter there. He knew the seas & the seasons. **He’d already logged over 3500 miles on the sea, he’d survived 3 shipwrecks & he knew that to press forward at this point was to ask for another one. It was already mid-October, which made it very dangerous to sail on the Mediterranean, & by Mid November it was downright deadly.**

Long story short, the sailors/soldiers ignored his advice. Their pride, impatience & fleshly appetites drove them on. They thought they could make it a mere 40 miles up the coast to winter there in a much more luxurious town & major seaport. But just as he told them, the answer my friends definitely was *not* blowing in the wind, circumstances should not have dictated their direction because this “3 hour tour” wound up “rocking them like a hurricane” & for the last 11 days they’ve been “riding the storm out”. ☺

**They’ve thrown out tackle, they’ve thrown out cargo, they’ve given up all hope of being saved... & it’s then that Paul stands up. & He says, “Guys, you didn’t listen to me before & here we are. You need to listen to me now.”**

& He tells them that he belongs to God, he serves God & he believes God. & That the night before an angel of God stood beside him & assured him that he'd see Rome. He told them that not one life on that ship would be lost because God had granted every one of them to him (that is Paul) who had prayed for them... Essentially, he shared the promised of God's word w/them & stood fast upon it. He said "I believe God, that it will be just as it was told me."

What a word for you & me today, in times of confusion, uncertainty, unrest in our country. Yet God's word remains the same. Jesus said, *"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."*<sup>1</sup> Here's a classic quote from the scriptures, *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."*<sup>2</sup> Question; do these words apply in the midst of civil unrest? How about politically charged pandemics? (Not to say a pandemic isn't what it is, but that if you think there's no political agenda in the midst of it, you're fooling yourself).

Listen to this one, *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*<sup>3</sup> Look at the next 2 Vs, *"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you."*<sup>4</sup>

Family, these are passages & promises of God's word. Do you *believe* God? Funny thing about promises, they really only benefit those who believe them. What I mean by that is, God says, "I'll give you peace" but if I won't believe it, then guess what, I'll suffer anxiety, be filled with worry... Believe God, it will only bless & benefit you.

Paul is right in the middle of a horrendous, life threatening situation. He didn't just believe God when things were going good, but in the tough/treacherous times as well.

How many of you realize that there are times when God will actually send us *into* the storm (Luke 8:22-25)? Sometimes it may be for corrective purposes, sometimes for directive purposes, it might be for *perfective* purposes, to increase our faith.

<sup>1</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jn 14:27]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>2</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ro 8:28]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>3</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Php 4:6-7]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>4</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Php 4:8-9]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Being in a storm is not indicative of being out of God's will. In-fact it may be God's will that has you there. Listen, faith isn't a pill we take. It's a more like a muscle we work. Therefore, the Lord will send me into a storm from time to time not for correction, but for perfection because the way I react to storms internally will tell me where I'm at spiritually. Storms provide a unique opportunity for me to see where I'm at and to grow in my understanding that the Lord is always with me, He'll never forsake me.

Remember these words, *"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior;"*<sup>5</sup>

Do you believe God? Paul believed God. He said, "The ship will be lost, but your lives will be saved."

**Vs 27-29**

2 Straight weeks of terror on the open sea being tossed about. But perhaps hearing waves crashing in the distance, they sensed they were drawing near to land somewhere (just as Paul had said) so they started taking soundings. Literally "heaving the led". They would release line weighted on the end w/some led & see how deep the water was.

Initially it was 20 fathoms (or 120') then it was 15 fathoms (90')... They knew they were headed for shallow waters & started freaking out because they didn't want the ship to be busted up on the rocks. So they threw 4 anchors off the back of the boat (trying to stabilize it a bit) & prayed for day to come. (The reason they threw them off the back to was so that the front would be taken toward land if they were to run aground).

Interesting isn't it? How that a terrifying situation will make prayer warriors out of pagans? It may not be true categorically, but the principle is communicated generally when we say, "There are no atheists in a fox hole." When your life is in imminent danger, or you find yourself in a place of desperation or hopelessness, it'll make a person of prayer out of you. What seemed so outlandish (that's there's actually a God out there somewhere) suddenly seems reasonable or at least worth reaching out toward! These soldiers, these sailors, these prisoners suddenly became prayer warriors!

Now; I wanna say something about these 4 anchors that they threw out to try & avoid being shipwrecked.

<sup>5</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Is 43:1-3]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

It's not an interpretation; but allow me to make an application. Because as believers we're going to go through storms from time to time. We wonder "why" it's happening, or "if" we'll survive... But there are some anchors that we can employ that can help keep us from being "shipwrecked" if we'll remember them in time of need. (There are many actually, but let's limit it to 4 for the sake of our text).

### 1. We need to remember that God is all powerful.

That will anchor you in troublesome times. We wonder if our situation is too much for God; it's not. For w/God nothing will be impossible (Luke 1:37)

### 2. God is good

If God is all powerful, then why is all this happening to me? We start questioning God's goodness. It's so important to remember that God isn't evil, He's not a mythological being who toys w/His creation. He plans have my eternal well-being in mind. Write it down, look it up later (Jer 29:11). God is good (Ps 73) He works w/an eternal perspective & His thoughts toward you are good. *1 John 1:5 "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all."*

### 3. God loves you

If God can do anything, and God is good, then why am I dealing with this? Doesn't He love me? Again, God doesn't demonstrate His love through primrose, problem free paths, but through the cross of J.C. *Romans 5:8 "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

### 4. God never changes

You may treat people differently depending on how you feel. God never changes. He's always for you, always loves you, will never forsake you. *Hebrews 13:8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."*

We're not always going to understand the "why" behind the "what" is happening in our lives. But it'll help you to have some anchors in your life. Things that steady your direction.

God told Isaiah, *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."*<sup>6</sup> That being true, we can't hope to understand everything that God is doing in our lives.

& Whenever we're confronted w/something we don't know. What do we do? We fall back on what we *do* know (God is all powerful, He's good, He loves me, has my eternal good & His eternal glory at heart). I trust Him & hold on...

### Vs 30-32

The sailors adopted the "every man for himself" philosophy & acted like they were gonna row anchors off the prow & drop them off to further steady the ship. In reality they were seeking to save their own skin & Paul called them out on it.

Couple things w/this. #1 God had told Paul that the men would be saved so long as they were w/him. God had granted *Paul* the lives of those on the ship (Vs 24). If you go out on your own, you're out on your own & you can't save yourself. That's the principle that's beginning to surface here. They had to be saved God's way, they couldn't be saved their way. The question was whether or not *they believed* God's word, yes? Paul told them *he* believed, but if they're to be saved, they must believe as well. (Guys, God has made us a promise, but we're only going to be saved His way. We have to believe Him.)

If they truly believe God's promise (this is #2) they won't jump ship & leave everyone else to deal w/the aftermath. They all need each other; Paul knew that the expertise of the crew was necessary to help everyone as the ship would begin to bust apart. The prisoners & the soldiers would need the sailors to survive. (Yes, God gave them a promise, but so often God's promises are worked out through practical means).

Here's the point for us. Don't jump ship, don't bail out when the going gets rough. There are some rough storms in life, instinct tells you to abandon ship & save yourself, but Paul's words here are important for us as well... Listen, some people don't do "difficult" very well. Their marriage gets difficult, they jump ship. They feel things are unfair at their job, they bail. They find some fault in their church... time to go.

Perfect churches don't exist. The church is filled w/real people, w/real problems, who make real mistakes, say & do things they wish they never had, they sometimes even unintentionally hurt people's feelings... So now what? Abandon ship? To me it's a mark of maturity to say, "No, we're all aboard the same vessel & we're gonna make it through this storm together. I'm not going to abandon ship every time it gets difficult, I'm going to stay, trust God & see this through to the end."

James tells us that God uses trials to work patience in us, to help us "bear up under" not abandon ship. We're all in this together, good, bad & the ugly we sink or swim as one. Stay on board... The soldiers immediately responded, cut the ropes & the skiff fell away.

## Vs 33-38

Again, look at how the faith of one man is influencing/impacting everyone on board. He was a profoundly spiritual yet incredibly practical. He says, "Hey, I'm telling you, God is going to see you through this, so you need to eat." The idea is that they'll need strength to swim & cling to the debris as they're being washed to shore.

& He encouraged others by by example. He gave thanks to God for the food before them all. I wonder how many of us pray over our meal in public? Paul wasn't ashamed to acknowledge the blessing of God in providing for him.

& As he ate, they were encouraged & they ate. I'm just telling you, people are watching your life. What do they see? It's been said, "You can *impress* people at a distance but you can *impact* them only up close." – Howard Hendricks

His example encouraged the others to join him, & it didn't take long before everybody felt better. Again, one dedicated believer can change the whole atmosphere of a situation just by trusting God and making your faith visible.

Now; they'd already thrown the cargo over, evidently they saved enough for personal survival & now that they've eaten they throw that overboard as well.

## Vs 39-44

Just FYI, the place where the ship came aground is now called St. Paul's Bay on the island of Malta.

Now; why did the soldiers want to kill the prisoners? Because if they escaped, Rome would charge the fate of the prisoners to the soldiers responsible for them. But once again, Paul saved their lives. God had given Paul favor in the eyes of the Centurion, so he kept all the prisoners alive. (Can one person bring blessing to others simply because they belong to God? Absolutely)

But check it out. God promised that they would all escape with their lives. God has kept His promise. God's word *will always* come to pass.

## Ch 28

## Vs 1-2

Check it out, the island of Malta is nearly 600 miles west of Crete & only 65 miles southwest of Sicily. In the last 2 weeks that storm blew them (they had no clue where they were) but it took them 600 miles west, 65 miles south of Sicily. In other words, they were right on target & way closer to Rome than where they were gonna winter. God has this way of getting us where we need to be.

If your bible calls the natives, barbarians, all it means is that they didn't have a Grecian culture. It doesn't mean they were savages or whatever. As a matter of fact, they showed "unusual kindness". Kindled a fire, made them welcome because of the cold & the rain.

### Vs 3-6

This is the nature of humanity & why we err to seek the validation of the crowd. One minute you're a murderer, the next you're a god! ☺ One minute you're the answer to everyone's problem, the next minute you *are* the problem... Listen, just serve the Lord & let the chips fall where they may.

But we love the servant's heart we find in Paul. There were 276 people on that boat, surely someone else could've done it, right? That wasn't Paul's mentality at all. It's amazing how many people want to be seen as spiritual, but never want to do anything practical. Listen, most ministry is incredibly practical... It didn't really matter what the need was, Paul was there to help meet it... It's been said, "It's only the little man who refuses the little task."

Paul just wanted to help keep the fire going. Question; What fire, can YOU keep going? Maybe you see a ministry dwindling down, the fire is fading, how can you grab some wood & make it your aim to restoke the flames? It may cause someone else to shine, or be warmed, is that ok? R U willing?

Now; there he was gathering sticks, it's cold he grabs a bundle that has a viper lying dormant in it. But as it got near the fire it lashes out & attaches to his hand, there it is, dangling off his hand!

It's interesting how we get this concept that if we're serving the Lord, everything should be going our way. & We get confused when something seemingly unfair, or unjust takes place. But how many scenarios in scripture are you aware of whereby the servant of God simply had life on easy street? They all experienced different struggles, different trials, different trying times. Many experienced injustice; many were persecuted, many unjustly put to death... Yet we feel like we should be the exception.

Here was an apostle of God, as if it weren't a difficult enough past couple of weeks... driven around on the open sea, not eating for days, everyone thinking they were going to die, that the ship would sink, it got stuck in the sand, busted up, it's cold, it's raining... I'm just trying to do what I can to help everyone out in the name of Jesus, grabbing some wood for fire & what does it get me? A poisonous snake, dangling from my hand...

But he wasn't all, "God, why!? I can't do this anymore!" "I'm just trying to serve You!" He just shook the thing off in the fire & kept serving. The islanders were all, "This guy must've done something horrible! He escaped the sea only to be bitten by a venomous snake!" They're waiting on him to swell up & die.

But he doesn't. So they change their tune, he must be a god! In reality neither was true. It wasn't that Paul was unstoppable, it was that nothing would stop God's promise to Paul (he's going to Rome) from being fulfilled...

Family, that's the take home here. God has made you a promise, & though the serpent may try, nothing will keep His promise of everlasting life through faith in J.C. from being fulfilled. So let's pray, & give God thanks for the faithfulness of His word.

### Prayer Points:

God, surely You've exhorted us today to believe You. To believe Your word. No doubt we're all experiencing different things, maybe different emotions, different circumstances that surround us, varying hardships or trials. Yet You've given us the promises of Your word. May we stand fast upon them, receive peace through them & bring glory to Your name.

There are all kinds of promises in the word of God for you. But it starts with just one, believe on the Lord J.C. & you will be saved. Do you believe God? Turn from your sin, trust in Jesus today.