

Scripture Reading:

Acts 27:6 “6 [At Myra] the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, and he put us on board. 7 When we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under the shelter of Crete off Salmone. 8 Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea. 9 Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, 10 saying, “Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster & much loss, not only of the cargo & ship, but also our lives.” 11 Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul. 12 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 Phoenix, a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, and winter there. 13 When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete. 14 But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Eurocladon. 15 So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let her drive. 16 And running under the shelter of an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty. 17 When they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship; and fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis Sands, they struck sail and so were driven. 18 And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next day they lightened the ship. 19 On the third day we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands. 20 Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up. 21 But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. 22 And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. 23 For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, 24 saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ 25 Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. 26 However, we must run aground on a certain island.””

"The Storm at Sea"

We come to a passage this morning that gives us a tale of great peril at sea and some profound applications about how we are to have peace in the midst of life's many storms.

- And speaking of storms I should begin by reminding us that the Apostle Paul was no stranger to storms and mishaps at sea.

Luke gives us only this report in his orderly account but we know from Paul's writing that there were others. This should not surprise us because Luke is writing an orderly account and not an exhaustive account of what transpired in the life of Paul. There are many details we can wish we had and I as a pastor would certainly have enjoyed reading a few more of Paul's many speeches & sermons!

- However, I think we can all agreed that the Holy Spirit has given us all that we need in the Word of God, just as He has delivered it down to us!

In writing to the Saints at Corinth some years earlier, Paul said this in his second letter to them:

II Corinthians 11:26 “... three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.”

We see here the history that Paul has on the seas and our first taste of the proper application for us when it comes to trials...

- Our greatest burden should always be for the Body of Christ!
- We must remember that while our various physical or spiritual trials are stressful and must be addressed, we must never lose sight of the greater work that God is doing in the world.

So with that in mind let's take a look at the account that Luke provides for us about Paul's trial at sea. November to February were VERY dangerous times to sail in the Mediterranean, a fact well known to Paul and these other seaman. Luke begins by pointing this out with the reference to the Day of Atonement having already past and Paul gives wise counsel that is ignored by the ship's captain and owner. It is important to note that Julius the Centurion was the man ultimately in charge... We know that he trusted Paul but in this case he takes the easy way out and puts the matter to a vote...

- Another good warning against the dangers of democracy!

As is often the case when wise counsel from a godly person is ignored they soon see what seems to be a confirmation of their human wisdom... We read in verse 13: "When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete."

- Their desire was to reach a better port at Phoenix, a journey of only forty miles that should have been accomplished in a matter of hours.
- The winds were favorable and success was within their grasp, but God is about to change things, confirming that they should have listened to Paul's wise counsel.

14 "But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclodon. [what is today called the North-easterner] 15 So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let her drive."

- Their simple plan to reach Phoenix has been foiled as this very strong north eastern wind forces them away from the island of Crete. *[explain location on map]*
- Having rejected the wise counsel of Paul, the captain and crew now know they are in grave danger and thus they take very wise actions to prepare for the violent storm ahead:

16 "And running under the shelter of an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty. 17 When they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship; and fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis Sands, they struck sail and so were driven.

- They used the shelter of the island to bring the life boat on board, to shore up the ship *[explain wooden ships]* and to do all they could to move west rather than south!

18 "And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next day they lightened the ship.

19 On the third day we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands."

- They were at the mercy of the elements and had little control over the ship and thus they did all they could to keep it from sinking.

20 "Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up."

- They have truly reached a point of despair having NO idea where they were!
- As God often does, he brings them hope at this very point of utter despair...

21 "But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss.

22 "And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship."

- Some struggle to understand why Paul begins by reminding them that they should have listened to him... It is seen as a sort of untimely “I told you so.”
- I think Paul is simply reaffirming his authority as one that Julius should have trusted so they will believe his message now.

23 “For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, ...

- Paul leaves no doubt about the source of his authority!
- The Romans & Greeks had a god for EVERYTHING, but Paul makes it clear that he serves THE God of all heaven and earth: He who made and controls the sea! [a stark contrast to the disciples during the storm on the sea of Galilee who panicked and awoke Jesus and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"]

23 “For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, 24 saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.' 25 Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.”

- Paul had announced on the Island of Crete that taking this voyage would result in the loss of the ship & their lives!
- Now he tells them that only the ship will be lost...
- These men, & all of us, are being given a lesson in God’s mercy!

Now we can see a strong contrast between the Apostle Paul and the Prophet Jonah... Jonah fled to avoid God’s commandment, not because he was afraid of the people at Nineveh, but because he was afraid that if he warned them about the just judgment they deserved and were going to receive, that they might repent and that then God would have mercy. Just listened to Jonah’s response when God does relent after their repentance:

“1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. 2 So he prayed to Jehovah, and said, "Ah, Jehovah, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger & abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.”

- May we never be those who regret or scorn God’s mercy!
- Paul brings a messages of hope and this time Julius and the others on board will listen to the wise counsel of Paul and God does have mercy & save all those on board.

As you can see on the map, they are adrift for over two weeks and end up on the Island of Malta, a shipwreck that we will study in detail next week.

For today, this is one of those passages where the application portion is both simple and overwhelming... The obvious application would be to ask what lessons we can learn about the storms which come into our lives, and there are many.

- Of course our storms come in many shapes & sizes and certainly do not have to be just on the sea.
- We must also realize that these lessons apply to little storms as well as big ones!

We certainly have had our share of examples of big storms here in recent months... I spoke a few weeks ago about the Biblical truth that the day of our death is appointed and then comes word that Pastor Tim Tucker’s 18 year-old son is killed instantly in an automobile accident. Ford was not being irresponsible and was not in the wrong place at the wrong time...

- It was simply his day.

What a storm this is now for the Tucker family and the others involved with this accident.

Judy is with us this morning and as you know she lost her twin sister to a sudden heart attack earlier this year and in recent months has been dealing with Doug's serious medical problems.

The rest of us can be tempted to look at these & simply be thankful we don't have such BIG storms in our lives. But here is the danger:

- **Sometimes it is the BIG storms where we find ourselves being the most obedient because we clearly know that we cannot handle them without God.**

As I review the lessons that we should learn, we need to evaluate whether we have also been wise with the smaller storms that we always face in this life... The unexpected trouble with one of our cars, or that person at church who irritates me, or the boss at work who tries my patience or perhaps the latest government law or regulation that we have to follow...

It could even be something as simple as having my favorite coffee drink mixed improperly or realizing that you have run out of wipes just as the baby made the biggest mess of the week!

- **Often these trials, or small storms, test us in much more practical terms.**
- **So what are the lessons?**

I see three very simple ones to follow whether the storm is large or small. First and foremost:

- **Listen to wise counsel!**

IF Julius and the others had listened to Paul they might have had some minor inconveniences staying in Fair Havens over the winter, but they would have avoided the perils of this storm. Had they listened, they would have had the joy of realizing just how right Paul was when that Euroclodon came sweeping over the island.

Here we must remember that following wise advice is a habit that is learned in little ways...

- **If you don't listen to God when He gives small & simple commands or instructions, you are not likely to listen at more critical times. *[repeat]***

A husband who does not love his wife as Jesus commands should not be surprised when he finds himself living with a very unhappy woman.

A woman who refuses to honor and submit to her husband should not be surprised to find herself living with a husband who shows no leadership and is mostly irresponsible.

A child who refuses to honor and obey their parents should not be surprised when they grow up thinking that any and all authorities are out to get them.

We must always be hearing and doing to the Words of Jesus...

- **And yes they are right here between the covers of this Book!**

Hearing and doing to the Words of Jesus is the foundation of rock that Jesus said would be able to withstand the storms of life!

- **Hearing and doing to the Words of Jesus can also help us avoid many of the storms of our own making!**

But there are also storms that we simply CANNOT avoid, whether they are of our own making or not.

- **Taking the ship into this storm at sea was NOT Paul's fault, but he had to endure it none the less.**

This account gives us another important lesson for when we face such storms or trials...

- **Prepare for the worse!**

We see this in the sailors' actions as they briefly pass by the island of Claudi.

- First, they brought in the lifeboat:

Sometimes what can provide safety in quieter times can be a real danger in the midst of the storm. I am sure that Pastor Tucker has a favorite get-away where he likes to go and reflect on things and pray or relax.

- However, in this current storm, he has to stay on board the ship and provide wisdom and comfort for his family and the church!
- The second thing that we see this crew do is to strengthen the boat in preparation for what lay ahead.

A ship that functions well in the open sea can fall apart in a massive storm without those extra lines holding it together. Again, using Pastor Tucker as an example, I am sure that he has a regular time in the word and in prayer, but this past week would have seen a need for much more. Those of us who pray one for another must now come along side with extra help, like the special offering we will take this morning.

The last lesson in preparation is this...

- Do all you can to avoid letting the storm damage get worse.

Being blown about on the open sea not knowing where they were at was a very frightening experience for all those involved. However, they also understood that if they just sat back and let things run their course they would run aground on the quick sands of the African coast and all would be surely lost.

As helpless as these men felt when facing this storm they still did all they could to keep the ship moving to the west and to prevent it from sinking. I was reminded of this and touched by the mother of the young boy Daniel who was injured badly in the same auto accident when Linda and I visited her in the hospital.

- In the midst of her trial, she was deeply and sincerely concerned for the Tucker family & wanted to make sure we continued to pray for them.

After many days in this storm all hope had been lost from a human standpoint and that brings us to our final lesson...

- God never leaves us or forsakes us!
- Again this is one of those great truths that is SO easy to affirm... and SO hard to believe!

The disciples failed miserably on this front going into a panic with Jesus right there in the boat with them. I am sure that each of us has failed in similar ways with those times where we cry out or at least think to ourselves...

- Where is God or why does God not care about... Well, you fill in the blank!

So it is easy to point to Paul and say that he should be our example...

We may be quick to respond and say, yes, I want to be like Paul!

- Paul did not waiver and trusted God even in the midst of the storm!
- Paul is certainly a worthy example and following him a worthy goal

However, we might not be as quick to sign up if we remember all those beatings and shipwrecks that Paul had to endure along the way!

In addition to facing such trials, are we ready and willing to put in all those years of study and prayer and experience that brought Paul to the point of trust he needed for this final journey?

- I hope and pray that we all are willing to take up such a noble calling as witnesses for Jesus!
- To do so we must learn and apply the lessons before us this morning.

I hope in the end, that we can all proclaim with the Apostle Paul what he did to the Saints at Corinth when discussing his service for Jesus:

In I Corinthians chapter nine we read:

“19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; 20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; 22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 23 Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you. 24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. 25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. 26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. 27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”

Communion Meditation:

Matthew 8:26 “Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. 24 And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. 25 Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" 26 But He said to them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. 27 So the men marveled, saying, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"”