

The Unstoppable Gospel

Acts 27:1-44

Halifax: 8 September 2013

Introduction:

Today, as we continue our sermon series in the Acts of the Apostles,

- we come to chapter 27.
- In this chapter, we continue to learn about Paul's journey to Rome.

We first learned of his plans to go there back in Acts 19:21 where we found that the Holy Spirit directed him to go to Jerusalem, and that Paul also purposed to go to Rome.

- **Acts 19:21: When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."**
 - It appears that the plan to go to Rome was, at this time, only something that he had planned; that the Holy Spirit only made it clear thus far that he was to go to Jerusalem...
- But however that may be,
 - We learned for certain that the Lord had purposed that Paul would make it to Rome in Acts 23, when the Jews were trying to kill him.
 - The Lord came to him to encourage him that he would get to Rome...
 - Acts 23:11 says:
 - **Ac 23:11: But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."**
- And since then, we have seen how many times the Lord has brought Paul through various ordeals to fulfill that promise...
 - There were multiple plots and attempts to take his life, and it appeared for a time that he might be left in custody in Caesarea forever,
 - but most recently we have seen that he had appealed to go to Caesar and that his appeal had been granted.
- With the opening of our text today, we find him finally sailing away to Rome, under the custody of a Roman centurion, another just and honourable centurion.
 - But as serene as that may sound, there is no smooth sailing for Paul and those who are with him!
 - We have instead one of the most dramatic accounts in Acts
 - And account of a storm at sea told by Luke with eloquent polished Greek to his Greek recipient.
 - It is interesting to note that the Greeks loved to tell and hear stories about the sea, and in this wonderful account we are able to see the wonderful ways that God works to accomplish His purposes.
 - So let's read this wonderful account— again, it is Acts 27.
 - And understand, of course, that this is not merely from Luke, but from Luke as he was carried along by the Holy Spirit...
 - So give reverent attention because this is the Word of God.

Acts 27:1-44: And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other

prisoners to *one* named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment. 2 So, entering a ship of

Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us. 3 And the next *day* we landed at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave *him* liberty to go to his friends and receive care.

We will see that as with all centurions in the Bible, Julius is a just and honourable man who is kind to Paul.

4 When we had put to sea from there, we sailed under *the shelter* of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. 5 And when we had sailed over the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, *a city* of Lycia. 6 There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, and he put us on board.

This is a wheat ship that was used to take wheat from Egypt to Rome.

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.

The wind, blowing from the west, made it difficult for them to make much progress. But a technique that was used was to stick close to the shore where there was a current that flowed westerly and to take advantage of the gentle land breezes at certain times of the day to inch along.

9 Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over [the *fast* is a reference to the Day of Atonement which in AD 59 would have fallen on Oct 5], Paul advised them, 10 saying, “Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and 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.

Paul does not claim to speak an oracle from God here—simply as an experienced traveller on the Mediterranean who knew how unpredictable the weather could be this later into the year. He had probable already experienced at least one of his three shipwrecks that he refers to in 2 Corinthians by this time. But the centurion follows the advice of the experts—which is understandable.

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*.

This was only about 40 miles away.

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 Euroclydon. [a wind from the northeast—one of the most feared on the Mediterranean.] 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. [This was a little boat that was in tow that was used for landing if needed] 17 When they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship [a technique called frapping where they tied ropes around the bottom of the hull to help hold the ship together]; and fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis Sands, they struck sail and so were driven.

Struck sail is literally *lowered the instrument* and may mean that they used a drift anchor to slow their speed.

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.” 27 Now when the fourteenth night had come, as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea [what we would call the Mediterranean Sea today], about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land. 28 And they took soundings and found *it* to be twenty fathoms [about 120 feet]; and when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found *it* to be fifteen fathoms [90 feet]. 29 Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come.

30 And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow, 31 Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.” 32 Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off. 33 And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored *them* all to take food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing.

[He does not mean nothing at all, but no regular meals at all] 34 Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you.” 35 And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken *it* he began to eat. 36 Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves. 37 And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on May the Lord bless to us the reading of His holy Word.

the ship. 38 So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea. 39 When it was day, they did not recognize the land; but they observed a bay with a beach, onto which they planned to run the ship if possible. 40 And they let go the anchors and left *them* in the sea, meanwhile loosing the rudder ropes; and they hoisted the mainsail [or perhaps the front sail] to the wind and made for shore. 41 But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves. 42 And the soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape. 43 But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from *their* purpose, and commanded that those who could swim should jump *overboard* first and get to land, 44 and the rest, some on boards and some on *parts* of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land.

What a remarkable account this is!

- It provides the vividness of an eyewitness account, and serves to show us all the more that the Lord was with Paul, working wonders to preserve him.

I. This account brings to mind the words of James recorded in Acts 15 at the Jerusalem Council: “Known to God from eternity are all His works.”

A. There are two purposes of God that are threatened with failure in this account:

A.1. The first is the one that we have been tracking for a long time that I spoke about in the introduction:

- God’s revealed purpose to bring Paul to Rome to testify of Him.
- In this dramatic account, it looks as if Paul will never make it to Rome more than once!
 - But in the end, everyone on board is saved on account of him.

A.2. The second purpose of God is one that is revealed in this account itself...

- the purpose that Paul boldly announces in verse 23-25...
 - right in the middle of the storm...
 - **Acts 27:23-25: For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.**
 - This was an amazing thing to say under the circumstances!
 - Everyone had lost hope and Paul makes it known to them that God Almighty has revealed that it is His purpose to save every last one of them...276 persons in all!

A.3. God has often been pleased to declare remarkable things that He is going to do through His faithful prophets and apostles like Paul.

- When it is something so extraordinary as this, it has a way not only of proving that the prophet truly does speak for God...

- but also of showing everyone that God is the One whose plans and purposes will be done...
- As the Lord says in Isaiah 42:7-8:
 - **Isa 42:8-9: “I am the LORD, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.”**
- It was in this way that God showed that He was LORD through Moses when Moses announced each of the plagues,
 - telling the remarkable things that the LORD was going to do.
- So it is here that we have these two purposes of God revealed in advance...
 - That Paul will make it safely to Rome...
 - That the lives of all 276 men on board this ship will be saved!

B. Consider how this applies to us.

- Instead of waiting to tell you how this applies to us at the end of the sermon (as we preachers often do), I want to tell you how it applies now...

B.1. First, God’s unstoppable purpose to bring Paul to Rome to preach the gospel there ought to encourage us of God’s greater promise to bring that gospel to all nations.

- We read about this purpose this morning in our Old Testament Scripture reading in Isaiah 66.
 - We need to know and be assured that God is with the church today as we seek to carry the gospel to the nations.
 - We don’t have a specific personal promise like Paul that this or that individual will succeed in getting to a certain city to preach,
 - But we labour together under the great promise to the whole church that our corporate labour will not be in vain...
 - That means that even if we die on the way to preach the gospel, God will use that for His glory to advance the work of the whole church.
 - Think of how much the Lord has used a man like Jim Elliot who was martyred carrying the gospel to the Hu-aor-ani people of Ecuador.
 - So many people, including his wife, have been greatly encouraged in the work of the gospel as a result of his death.
 - We can be sure that as the church moves forward with the gospel,
 - God will see to it that she is successful.
 - We can be strengthened in this hope when we see how He overcame every obstacle to bring Paul to minister at Rome.
 - The same power that did that is at work today to spread His word to the nations.
 - The work is unstoppable. It cannot fail.

B.2. Second, God’s unstoppable purpose to save all who were on the ship with Paul shows us how nothing can stop God from saving all those whom He has appointed to salvation.

- Despite many obstacles, His purpose to save those He has chosen to save beforehand will prevail.
 - Although the promise, in the case of those on Paul’s ship, was only for the saving of their lives in this incident,
 - what is revealed in this account gives us a clear example of how God works to accomplish His purposes in both spiritual and worldly matters.

- It gives us confidence that His purposes will not fail—either in bringing eternal salvation to His elect,
 - or in bringing temporal salvation to those He wishes to save.
 - We learn how He uses means and how He overcomes obstacles in His manner of working.
- We can be confident that Jesus’ promises to save His elect and to keep them to the end will never fail to be accomplished.
 - When He said that He would lose none of those that the Father had given Him, He meant it...
 - And likewise, when He said that anyone who comes to Him will not be cast out but will be raised up at the last day, we can be sure that it will be so.
 - Promises that seem impossible are not impossible for Him!

C. This passage also shows us a pattern of the interesting way that the Lord often works in the world...

C.1. In order to display His mighty arm in saving us,

- He often brings many obstacles along our path that must be overcome if His saving purpose is to be accomplished.
 - When we get to heaven, we will be able to look back and see how remarkable it was that we made it!
- There is dramatic tension in the course of our Christian walk as we must labour and pray and cry out for deliverance by His hand.
 - And very often, it gets worse before it gets better until we are in despair.
 - If it bothers you that God works like this, you need to get used to it.
 - You can’t change it.
 - But know that He is loving and wise—very loving, very wise, and very good and He knows what He is doing.
 - He *wants* the obstacles to be there and He *wants* you to feel helpless so that you know that He is the one who saves.
 - He uses all this so that you will learn to trust Him.

C.2. This is really very similar to what we looked at in Psalm 107 last week—

C.2.a. You will remember the stages...

- God causes us to feel the curse—
- We see how helpless we are and how we cannot save ourselves...
- Then we cry out to Him and He delivers us...
- And then we praise Him and give Him the glory that we should have been giving Him all along.

C.2.b. The whole process is necessary to re-teach us how dependent we really are on our Maker.

- Without it, we would never come to know Him in the way that we should.
- Once in heaven, we will know that He is sustaining us and providing for us constantly, and we will be so thankful.
 - but until then,
 - we must continue to learn through our various struggles that He is Lord and that there is no blessing unless He bestows it.

TRANS> God has a plan and He knows just what to do... “Known to God from eternity are all His works.”

- Now let's look at the account of Paul's adventures on the ship in Acts 27 that we may better understand how He works in our lives...

II. See how the obstacles that threatened the promises of God were overcome by the hand of the LORD that you might learn to trust Him more.

A. The first threat is the threat of imprudence.

- Other peoples' imprudence can threaten your life...

A.1. I refer to the imprudent decision to sail on just a little bit farther when it was not safe to do so!

- In verse 9-12, we are told how the ship's council met and decided to try to go on from Fair Havens to Phoenix despite the likely event of a storm.
 - It was true, the voyage was only about 65 kilometers and they would be able hug the coast as they went along...
 - But there were high mountains (about 2500 meters) along the coast of Crete,
 - and by October, it was very common for fierce winds to suddenly sweep over them and blow a ship out to sea.
 - It would be rather like sailing from Florida to Africa during hurricane season—just not a good idea.
 - True, it was only a short trek for them, but they did not have the weather channel to help them hear a forecast.
 - Such a storm could come up with very little warning...
 - and of course that is just what happened!

A.2. Remember that the Lord had purposed that Paul would preach the gospel in Rome and had promised the same to Paul...

- but now Paul found himself under the custody of imprudent men.
- Being a very well-travelled man by this time, Paul was very aware of the dangers involved and earnestly advised against the plan...
 - But the owner of the ship and the helmsman convinced the centurion that it would be fine and the decision was made to go for it.
- This was a threat to Paul's safety over which he had no control.
 - So onward they went, foolishly and recklessly.
 - The imprudence of others can put us in harm's way today and threaten to cut us off from our service to God...
 - A careless driver who has no regard for life, a drunken driver, a careless medical practitioner...
 - But as God's servants we should not ourselves be reckless with life and imprudent, for that is to tempt God.

A.3. It is perhaps surprising to see how those who trust God are often the most prudent.

A.3.a. A good part of this is that those who know God have a high regard for life.

- The Lord teaches us to love our neighbour
 - He instructs us to do things like putting up a fence around a deck that people will use so they won't fall off and get hurt.

- Because of the influence of God's word in our society over many generations, this is something that we have inherited in Canada—and it is good.
- Of course there are those who are just paranoid and overreact—
 - and there is the nanny state that sometimes comes up with rigid and even zany rules to try to keep us safe,
 - but those who trust God ought to be **prudent**—
 - neither obsessive or careless the way those who don't trust God are, but **prudent**—
 - and such was the case with Paul.

A.3.b. You might think that because he believed in the sovereignty of God, he would figure he had nothing to worry about.

A.3.b.1) The Lord had promised that he would get to Rome one way or another, and Paul knew that,

- but Paul loved his neighbours and respected their property!
- It appears from Paul's vision later on that he had been praying for the safety of all who were on this ship—
 - because the Lord tells him that He has given him all that are on the ship...

TRANS> And the sovereignty of God also helped Paul to be prudent in another way...

A.3.b.2) Because he trusted the sovereignty of God, he also knew that it was the Lord who had impeded their progress so that they had only made it to Fair Havens during the season when it was reasonable to sail...

- He was okay with that and was prepared to stay in a less commodious place for the winter—it was of the Lord.
- But the others could not be content and insisted on pressing on—putting Paul and themselves in useless danger!
 - Paul, of course, knew that this too was from the Lord and having spoken his mind, left the matter in God's hands.
 - But the imprudence of these men threatened God's promise to bring Paul safely to Rome that he might preach there.
 - They were tempting God by taking this action.

➤ And that brings us to the main threat against the promise!

- The primary threat!

B. The primary threat in this chapter is obviously the storm at sea!

B.1. Luke describes how the dreaded Euroclydan—what we would call a nor'easter—came sweeping upon them and how it drove them far from Crete.

- They had to let the wind take them, as it would only destroy the ship for them to try to fight it in any way.
- As we saw in the reading of the text, they made every effort to safeguard the ship...
 - tying cables around it to hold it together as it was battered by wind and wave...
 - tossing over equipment and cargo that was not essential to lighten the load...
 - Verse 19 say they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands...

- This likely refers to the main yard for the main sail—which would have been about as long at the ship!

B.2. It is hard to imagine what it must have been like for these desperate men out in the middle of the wide tempestuous sea...

B.2.a. The storm continued for two weeks and it was really quite miraculous that the boat held together at all...

- The men were surely battered from being thrown around and showered with rain and salt-spray.
- They would have had to do repairs as much as they could, to bail water, and just try to survive.

B.2.b. Because they were not able to see the sun or the stars and had no compass in those days,

- they didn't even know where they were...
- All they knew was that if they went too far south, they would run into the shallows where they would be broken to pieces by the waves.

B.2.c. They were tired and achy and, as Psalm 107 puts it, at their wits end after 14 days of all this.

- Acts 27:20 summarizes their state of mind quite well when it says,
- **Acts 27:20: 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.**

B.3. My brothers and sisters, *without hope* is a terrible, wonderful, place to be found...

B.3.a. It is **terrible**, of course, because there is nothing worse than to realize that you are *without hope*...

- To realize that there is absolutely nothing you can do to save yourself.
- All you can do is wait for dreaded destruction to come upon you.
- The only prospect you have is misery and there is nothing you can do about it!

B.3.b. But this is a **wonderful** place to be because it is here that you are in the best place of all to receive God's promises!

- As long as you suppose that you can save yourself—or at least contribute to your salvation—you are completely deluded!
- When God works in you to draw you to salvation,
- He brings home to you what the Bible says about you—you come to see that even your righteousnesses are all filthy rags...
 - You see that you are dead in trespasses and sins...
 - You see that there is nothing you can do to save yourself.
 - **ONLY GOD CAN SAVE YOU!**

B.3.c. And that is exactly when the promise—the gracious promise of God—comes to you.

B.3.c.1) You won't hear anything of Jesus dying in your place as long as you continue to entertain hopes of saving yourself...

- The message of the cross is offensive to you—
 - You don't mind Jesus dying as an example for a cause—but to have Him die as the one who paid the penalty of your sin...
 - That is just a bit too far for you—until you have lost all hope of saving yourself.
 - Until you see clearly your hopeless condition!

➤ And then it becomes welcome news!

B.3.c.2) And that is exactly when the promise came to these men in the peril on the sea.

- The Lord waited for 14 days when they had lost all hope...
- And then He sent His promise of salvation through Paul...
 - The promise is given in verses 21-26:
 - **Acts 27:21-26: 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. And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. However, we must run aground on a certain island.”**
- Before, Paul had spoken to them with wisdom and prudence and they did not listen...
- But now he is speaking to them an oracle of God—a direct promise that assures them, remarkably,
 - that even though the ship will be lost, not one of them will perish—out of all 276 of them!

B.3.c.3) Now is that not like God’s great promise to the church?

- We are in the storm of this sin-cursed world where we are tossed about by sin and temptation...
 - But the Lord promises that if we have come to Christ—if we are in Him by faith—
 - not one of us will perish!
 - The Gospel will still get to Rome—and to every place God has appointed for it!
 - If you know anything about your condition, you know that you could not survive in the sea of this world for a single hour—
 - And neither could the whole church for that matter!
 - Not apart from God’s keeping grace!
 - But He has promised that not a one of us will perish if we are in Christ!
 - We, who have no hope in ourselves, have a sure hope in Christ that will not be disappointed!

C. But this great promise is threatened by many other things—besides the sea.

- There are four things that are brought out here...

C.1. First, there is the threat of those who are appointed to care for us and don’t...

- Yes, the very pastors and overseers of the church can be a threat to it when they abandon their post!

C.1.a. This was something that threatened the lives of some on the ship...

C.1.a.1) The sailors whose task it was to maintain and run the ship decided it was time for them to save their own skins...

- They knew that only a few could fit on the little skiff, and they decided that those few would be them!
- They would run for safety and leave the sheep to fend for themselves (to use the analogy of Jesus about unfaithful shepherds.)

C.1.a.2) In verse 30 their treacherous designs are described...but so is God’s intervention described...it says...

- **Acts 27:30-32: And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.” Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off.**
- The Lord would not let them abandon their post!

C.1.b. Now my brothers and sisters, there is no denying that there has been much apostasy in the church over the centuries...

- And much of this has been caused by unfaithful shepherds who care only about themselves.
- God has ordained this to judge His people for their ingratitude...
 - Many of His baptised people are not really His people—so He gives them false shepherds to give them the false teaching they want.
 - These shepherds care only for themselves and they do not lead the sheep to the harbor.
- But the Lord is the one who keeps true shepherds for the sake of His sheep—
 - It is true—if these shepherds were to abandon the ship, the sheep could not be saved—
 - How shall they hear without a preacher? Who would preach the gospel?
 - But the Lord will not let them abandon the sheep...
 - He always brings those who preach the gospel to His true sheep and they hear the voice of Christ and they believe.
 - And so He continues to send those who preach and to preserve them.
- Paul’s statement was true—
 - “that unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved...”
 - But God’s promise that everyone would be saved was still just as true as ever...
 - It was a real contingency—a real condition...
 - But God saw to it that the condition was met—they did stay on the ship so that everyone would be saved...
 - God is the one who sends preachers so that His elect can hear the gospel and be saved.

C.2. Second, there is our own neglect of the means that the Lord has appointed to keep us strong that threatens our salvation.

C.2.a. Indeed, if we will not eat, we will have no strength to endure.

- God’s promise to keep us as His people is not a promise to keep us apart from the means of grace, but through the means of grace...
 - If God promises to keep you in the desert, it ordinarily means that He will provide water for you while you are there!
 - If you don’t drink it, you will perish!
 - And if God has promised to keep you, He will see to it that you both have the water and that you drink it.

C.2.b. Now you can see here that the Lord, through Paul, urges those He has appointed to be saved to eat that they might have strength to endure...

- Look at verse 33-36:
 - **Acts 27:33-36: And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored them all to take food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing. Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall**

from the head of any of you.” And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken it he began to eat. Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves.

- These men never could have survived what follows if they had not taken some food.

C.2.c. And neither can believers survive unless they nourish themselves with the means of grace that God has appointed—

- The word, sacraments, and prayer!
 - You may be able to limp along for a time in your weakened state, but you will not be prepared to swim when the time comes.
- Many professing Christians fall away due to weakness because they do not pray and do not read God’s word.
 - When they go out from us and perish in the sea, they show that they were never really in Christ.
 - If they had been, He would have kept them in the means of grace.
 - Christ’s real sheep hear His voice and follow Him.

C.3. Third, there is danger of devouring one another that threatens our salvation.

C.3.a. Once the poor ship came near the land, it got stuck on something like a sandbar and began to be torn to pieces.

- This is when the Roman soldiers become the threat to God’s promise that all will be saved...
 - Verse 42 explains what they did:
 - **Acts 27:42: And the soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape.**
 - They knew that if any prisoners got away, they would be held accountable and might even be executed.
 - Rather than risk that possibility, they decided to go ahead and kill all the prisoners.
 - But if that had happened, God’s promise would not have been fulfilled!
 - Verse 43 shows how again, it did not happen...
 - **Acts 27:43: But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose...**

C.3.b. But such selfishness is at times seen in the church, threatening it!

- Paul exhorts the Galatians in Galatians 5:14 to “love your neighbour as yourself...”
 - And then in verse 15, he warns:
 - **Gal 5:15: But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!**
- As members of the body of Christ, we are to love one another and serve one another...
 - But what happens if we become envious of each other—we can drive one another out of the church!
 - We can, as Paul says, bite and devour one another and be consumed by each other!
 - The place of nurture can become the place of destruction!
 - There are people who have been driven away from Christ by such behaviour...
 - Of course those who are driven away were never really in Christ, and it was God’s judgement upon them,

- But often, neither were those selfish professing church members who drove them out truly in Christ!
- John says that anyone who claims to know Christ but does not love his brother is a liar!
- But God will not let that happen with His elect...
 - They will continue in the love of Christ, and they will uphold and support one another so that none will perish.

➤ Now let's look at the fourth threat to the promise...

C.4. Fourth, there is that threat of drowning.

C.4.a. Believers are sometimes cast out into the sea of the world and they must be able to survive without going under...

- There are temptations and there are trials...
- In the parable of the sower, Jesus shows how many are destroyed by one or the other of these...
 - They are driven away from Jesus by persecution...
 - they refuse to endure the ridicule or the mocking of the world or from their family that comes from following Christ so they abandon Him.
 - or they are choked out by the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches or lusts for other things...
 - They forget God for riches or for success or for pursuing lusts.
- But those who belong to Christ in truth have the promise—they will not be drowned by the world!
 - The Lord will preserve their lives in the sea!

C.4.b. You see how the LORD kept His promise against all human odds to preserve all 276 people on Paul's ship when they were cast into the sea.

- We are told in verse 43 and 44 that the centurion...
 - **Acts 27:43-44: commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, and the rest, some on boards and some on parts of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land.**
- Just think of it, not one of the swimmers lost his strength and was unable to make it in...
 - And all of the rest—every one without exception—was able to find broken pieces of the ship to float in on!

TRANS> This was the last great threat against God's promise, but like all the others, it utterly failed...

- In this way, the Lord showed that it is not of our doing, but of His grace that we do not perish!

Conclusion: And so I urge you everyone...

Be sure that you are on the boat with those that God has chosen to save!

- You do that simply by coming to Jesus Christ to save you from your sins.
 - Humble yourself and face your need of His salvation...
 - You are a sinner and He is the only saviour of sinners.
 - Admit that your sins have made you obnoxious to God and come to Christ who died for sinners to be pardoned.

- He was crucified to bear the shame and guilt and full punishment for His peoples' sins...
- And you are one of His people if only you are trusting in Him.
- And if you are in Him, then know and be certain that your salvation is sure!
 - Like the people on the boat whose lives God had promised to save, so He has promised to save all who are in Christ.
 - You will find that He is strong enough and gracious enough to overcome every obstacle for you!
- The obstacles and threats will be there to be sure and you will have to feel their strength and you will have to fight them and at times you will become very tired...
 - But they will not be able to keep the Lord from His purpose to save you!
 - If you get a warning, it is His way of keeping you—of steering you away from behaviour that will destroy you
 - He will preserve us all until we all reach the harbor safely.
 - And He will bring us safely to Rome or to whatever place to do the work that He has given us to do in this world for His kingdom.