

LISTEN UP THERE'S STORMS AHEAD

=====
Acts 27:9-44

Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, 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." Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul. 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. When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete. But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon. So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let her drive. And running under the shelter of an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty. 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. And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next day they lightened the ship. On the third day we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands. 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.

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." Now when the fourteenth night had come, as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land. And they took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found it to be fifteen fathoms. Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come. 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.

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. And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship. So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea. 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. And they let go the anchors and left them in the sea, meanwhile loosing the rudder ropes; and they hoisted the mainsail to the wind and made for shore. 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. And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape. 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, and the rest, some on boards and some on parts of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land.

=====

This is a long passage of Scripture but there's a lot in this story that we can learn from as God has given us this message in His Word and sometimes, really all the time, it is important to understand His Word in the context of what God is telling us through the writer. It is the last adventure of the Apostle Paul's before he was imprisoned in Rome. There's a couple of key elements to this story that can always be applicable to anybody in their life. One is that there will always be storms ahead. You may even be in a storm at the present. The other important aspect to this story is that not all storms are our own making, although some of them can be, and it can most certainly determine the outcome to our getting safely through the storm, by our listening to God and obeying Him. One more thing that we can get from this harrowing and somewhat tragic story, tragic at least for the one who owned the ship and all of the cargo anyways, is that God may lift you up out of the storm or He may calm the storm and diffuse it instantly, but many, many times, probably more than not, He takes us through the storm. Just as Paul said elsewhere, that we are to "glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." (**Romans 5:3-5**) That's easy for him to say, right? The definition of tribulation is simply put, "severe trial or suffering." Yet in our trials, or severe

trials and suffering we can not fall to disappointment or despair IF we turn to God, lean on Him, so that, "the love of God [is] poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

As was mentioned last week, a false representation of what it means to live as a Christian tries to worm its way into the Christian believer's thoughts and understanding of the ways of God. Yet we know who the father of all lies is-Satan. The enemy of our souls, that is, the spiritual host of wickedness that is unseen but is clearly at work, will say all kinds of things to try and discourage and condemn the child of God. But God's Word tells us, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." (**Romans 8:1**) The lie that is sold to God's people is that we are supposed to be living an abundant life full of the great blessings of God and that suffering, sorrow, and troubles are reserved for the obstinate and rebellious ones. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord." (**Isaiah 55:8**) Nor is God's ways the same as the ways of the world, nor is the wisdom of this world the same as the wisdom of God.

It is also important for us to realize that it is not intended for us, nor is it possible for us to save ourselves, spiritually speaking, and there are many times where we are tested so to speak, in whether we will rely upon God and listen to Him, and obey His instructions, or whether we will just go our own way, or the ways of the world. It seems to be natural for the average human being to try and circle around a storm that we see ahead of us. That goes for things we see ahead that may be uncomfortable and not pleasant to us. The story of Jonah speaks to that but it is in contrast to our story today in that Jonah disobeyed God and instead of going and preaching repentance to the people east of him, in Nineveh, as he saw the people of Nineveh as a bunch of despicable and vile sinners, so he hopped on a ship and went due west. What happened then? They encountered a massive storm, likely what we call a tropical storm or hurricane. It was found out by the crew that the cause of the storm was due to Jonah's rebellion against God and subsequently Jonah had put a whole ship full of people's lives at stake. Fortunately for the folks on the ship Jonah confessed his sin and had them throw him overboard. After they threw Jonah overboard, the storm subsided, so the people on the ship were saved and Jonah was swallowed up by a huge fish and after 3 days he was coughed up on the shore. Jonah got the message and repented to God and went to Nineveh, to where there was a nationwide call to repentance and the city was saved from God's wrath. One act of obedience saved a whole city. Wow!

Our story in **Acts 27:9-44** starts with the Apostle Paul and a group of other prisoners were being taken from Sidon, which is off the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, and they were eventually to end up in

Rome, Italy. They made it as far as the island of Crete with it already getting to be bad sailing conditions. Then as fate would have it, Paul and some of the others had been fasting and praying due to it being the Day of Atonement, or what is also today called Yom Kippur. "Jews today still celebrate the annual Day of Atonement, which falls on different days each year in September-October, traditionally observing this holy day with a 25-hour period of fasting and intensive prayer. Jews also often spend most of the day in synagogue services. [It was a solemn ceremony and time where the High Priest would go into the Holy of Holies and perform the sacrifices necessary for the propitiation and expiation of sin for the people of Israel.] Propitiation is the act of appeasing the wrath of God, while expiation is the act of atoning for sin and removing it from the sinner. [For us now] both together are achieved eternally by Christ. When He sacrificed Himself on the cross, He appeased God's wrath against sin, taking that wrath upon Himself: "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" (**Romans 5:9**)." And Jesus paid the price once and for all when He gave Himself up as the perfect sacrifice. (**Hebrews 7:27**)

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." (**John 3:16-17**) "But as many as received Him [that is, the Holy Spirit leads us to repentance and He then gives us His Holy Spirit], to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (**John 1:12-13**)

So now we have the Paul, who had believed on Christ and received Him and he had been fasting and praying as he and other believer's were seriously taking time to recognize the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, just as we do when we partake in Communion, and he was getting a Word from the Lord that they better not sail at that time due to the foul weather. Paul warns the centurion that was in charge of the prisoners but the centurion, who apparently had the authority to tell the ship's crew to go or stay, listened to the ones sailing the ship and so they pressed on. You ever get a warning from someone else and instead of heeding their warning you continued on? I have. I had a Christian brother stand in front of me and begged me not to continue in living in rebellion against God. I pushed him out of the way and basically just said, "yeah, yeah." Praise the Lord that God is "longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (**2 Peter 3:9**) But at some point the offer becomes no longer available. Praise the Lord also that the goodness of God leads us to repentance. (**Romans 2:4**) None of us are guaranteed tomorrow. Tomorrow may be too late. With our story today,

our true story, the story of the Apostle Paul and the other prisoners, that was recorded by Luke in the book of Acts, the leaders of the voyage were warned by God through the Apostle Paul not to continue but they chose to continue anyways. Instead of heeding the warning, the crew first unloaded the cargo on the ship, so they lost all of that. Some of the crew members were going to take the small boat that was hanging on the side of the ship and try and make it to shore but Paul warned them and everyone on board that the only way to not perish in the storm was to ride out the storm until the only thing left to do is to grab onto something such as a broken boards of the ship or anything that would float.

Another interesting part of this story is that the soldiers that were under the authority of the centurion that was in charge of the prisoners, including Paul, they wanted to kill all of the prisoners so that none of them could escape. Fortunately for Paul and the others, they spared their lives. Just think though of how we have the enemy of our souls, the father of all lies, and "the thief [who comes to] steal, and to kill, and to destroy. [But Jesus says,] I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." (**John 10:10**) The analogy of this story for us is in the warning from God, God saying hang on the storms are coming, but hang on to Jesus, He will get you safely to the safety and peace on the shore. "There is coming a day, when no heart aches shall come, no more clouds in the sky, no more tears to dim the eye, all is peace forever more, on that happy golden shore, what a day, glorious day that will be!" A side note is, the song "What a Day That Will Be" was written by a man named Jim Hill, in 1955, and was sung by his weekend singing group called the Golden Keys and it is still blessing many people even today. We may not ever write a wonderful song like he did, but the ways in which we can impact other people in a positive way, only the Lord knows what fruit will come from our lives. We are being called to by God, just as were the Israelites, to "cling to Him for He is Your life." We are to keep "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (**Hebrews 12:2**) Through the storms, then, character matters. We may never know fully how our trusting God in this lifetime is making a positive impact on others.

One more important aspect of this story that is worth noting, the Apostle Paul, the great Apostle Paul, who at times would go into towns and all of the sick would be healed, "so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them." (**Acts 19:12**) The Apostle Paul, who had a personal divine encounter with Jesus Himself on his way to Damascus. Paul was also confident enough in His place in Christ that He said to follow his example (**Philippians 3:17**) and even referred to his teachings as "his

gospel." (**Romans 2:16**) Elsewhere he did refer to it as "Christ's gospel". (**2 Corinthians 2:12**) But here we have the Apostle Paul on a ship that encounters a great storm, to the point where they tossed out all the cargo, thought of killing all of the prisoners, and then had to cling to anything that floated to try and save their lives yet Paul didn't stand up on the stern of the ship in glorious fashion and rebuke the wind and the waves like Jesus did. In fact in **2 Corinthians 11:24-31**, Paul tells the folks at Corinthians all that he had to go through in trials, persecutions, and suffering. "From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 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; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying." In all his tribulations Paul's final word is "Blessed be the Lord!" What the Apostle Paul understood, as we are too as well, that as God spoke to Abraham, He is telling us, "Do not be afraid." "I AM your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

At the outset of this message I commented how the way Christianity is presented in many circles is quite contrary to the Word of God. It is true that God wants to bless us and have a life to the fullest, a life abundantly but our hope is not on the things of this world. "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever." (**1 John 2:15-17**) We're called as children of God to be looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who IS our ETERNAL HOPE. Our obedience does determine what storms at times will rise up against us, so nevertheless, as there are storms ahead, we have to cling to Jesus FOR HE IS YOUR LIFE! There are certain to be times that you won't know the whys or the whats to the circumstances before you, that's ok God's got this. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ paid an incredible price to get us to where we are reconciled to God and are forgiven of our sins. It is then in Christ we can have the confidence to say as King David did, "I will love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon

the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies. The pangs of death surrounded me, and the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; The snares of death confronted me." (**Psalms 18:1-5**)

You ever feel like darkness and even death are surrounding you? I do. Frequently. "Help me Lord Jesus!" "And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the Lord Shall be saved." (**Acts 2:21**) But in all things that come against us, "For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." (**Romans 14:8**) We are God's children, we are His. He knows the very moment each of us will be taken home to be with Him. But as Paul said, "for to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (**Philippians 1:21**) We certainly don't want to accelerate our demise by disobedience or foolishness but when we truly let go and let God, as the saying goes, and trust Him, that He has us, the experiences of going through the storms may not necessarily be pleasant at the time we're going through them but we can still have that peace that surpasses all understanding in knowing that God is sovereign, He is in control, nothing escapes His notice, and He will get us to the other side, whether that is on the other side of the storm or whether He takes us home to be in His eternal glory, either way we will overcome in Christ Jesus! A passage of Scripture that I am reminded of constantly, as I tend to try and figure everything out, asking the "what's it all mean" questions, the "why is this happening" questions, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." (**Proverbs 3:5-6**)

In the end with our story in the book of Acts, not one person perished in the storm and I'm sure with many people that had been on that ship, Paul had a greater respect from them. And if they hadn't accepted the character of Paul quite yet, the story goes on to say that Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake to which the locals watched as they were sure Paul was going to soon die. Yet Paul shook off the snake from his hand into the fire and he ended up being just fine, all to their amazement. There are storms ahead. We live in a world with evil abounding and many people around us are not looking to Jesus and are not interested in the will or ways of God. But God does have the perfect plan and way for us to get us to where He is leading us. As Paul said, God will render to each person according to their deeds, which hopefully means for everyone here, "eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality." (**Romans 2:7**)

Heavenly Father,
I confess that I have sinned against You.
I ask that You forgive me of my sins.
I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sins,
I confess with my mouth that Jesus is my Lord,
and I believe in my heart that You raised Jesus from the dead,
so that I can have forgiveness of sins,
and be reconciled to You, God, My Father.
I now commit to You, that I will repent of my sins,
and live in the newness of life,
being led by Your Holy Spirit,
all this I pray, in Christ Jesus,
my Savior and Lord. Thank You Lord!

"Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."
(Matthew 6:9-13)