

Of Shipwrecks and Sovereignty

Acts of the Apostles

Acts 27:1-44

January 7, 2018

And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius. ² And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica. ³ The next day we put in at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for. ⁴ And putting out to sea from there we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. ⁵ And when we had sailed across the open sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia. ⁶ There the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy and put us on board. ⁷ We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, and as the wind did not allow us to go farther, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone. ⁸ Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.

⁹ Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, ¹⁰ saying, "Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives." ¹¹ But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to

what Paul said. ¹² And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

The Storm at Sea

¹³ Now when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to the shore. ¹⁴ But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land. ¹⁵ And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along.

¹⁶ Running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the ship's boat. ¹⁷ After hoisting it up, they used supports to undergird the ship. Then, fearing that they would run aground on the Syrtis, they lowered the gear, and thus they were driven along. ¹⁸ Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. ¹⁹ And on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. ²⁰ When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.

²¹ Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. ²² Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the

ship. ²³ For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, ²⁴ and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.' ²⁵ So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. ²⁶ But we must run aground on some island."

²⁷ When the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. ²⁸ So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms. A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms. ²⁹ And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. ³⁰ And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, 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 ship's boat and let it go.

³³ As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing. ³⁴ Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you." ³⁵ And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to

eat. ³⁶ Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves.

³⁷ (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.) ³⁸ And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.

The Shipwreck

³⁹ Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned if possible to run the ship ashore. ⁴⁰ So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that tied the rudders. Then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach. ⁴¹ But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf. ⁴² The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape. ⁴³ But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, ⁴⁴ and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

The Provision of God in the Circumstances of Life

- Julius, the centurion who loved Paul.
- A ship and good weather to encourage them to leave
- A perfect connection in Myra

The Graciousness of God In the Midst Of Bad Decisions

- God shows Paul the right way
- The decision goes to the experts, the ones who know these things
- Economics dictated the decision, but God still protected them
- The provision of an island on which to crash land

The Trustworthiness of God in Spite of What Seems Certain

- All hope of salvation is abandoned
- No one ate or slept for 14 days
- Yet, Paul says “take heart” there will be no loss of life
- 276 will be saved... but you must cut loose the life boat
- Justus risks his life by not killing the prisoners
- All are saved... every single one. But the ship was a total loss

The Analogy in Luke 27

I am not one to draw analogies from scripture. I believe it is a very dangerous way to interpret scripture. With that said, I see such a clear analogy in this passage that I am going to point it out and use it to form my application for Chapter 27. Just as Bunyan uses analogy and metaphor so effectively in Pilgrim’s Progress, I believe Luke is using it here in Chap. 27.

1. God is in the details of life – he orders everything

This is a clear picture of our lives. This chapter is a metaphor for all of life. Paul was a prisoner. He was in chains and headed to Rome for trial. His life was not his own. Yet God was so gracious that he gave Paul a kind,

considerate, trusting centurion. You do realize that this is not possible outside the sovereign plan of God. Roman centurions by definition were duty bound, hardened soldiers who had no mercy or humility. Paul's treatment is miraculous. Yet, God has plans for him in Rome, so he will not allow him to be set free. Sovereign and gracious in the midst of trial and imprisonment. That is a picture of our lives. We live the same way.

2. God uses our sinful ways to accomplish his purposes. Our ways lead to his outcomes, even when we sin.

The decision to sail out of the Fair Havens harbor was wrong. It was foolish and destined for failure. Yet what motivated that decision? Selfish motives. Self-serving greed. The owner of the ship and the captain had great financial motives for getting that cargo of wheat to market. It is winter. Crops are scarce. Prices are likely at an annual peak. The market is primed for big profits. No risk, no reward! Isn't that what we say? So the decision is made... go for it. God warned them through Paul, but the experts said go... so they went.

Have you ever done something that God had warned you not to do ahead of time? Have you ever let your desire for money or things or relationship color your decision-making process? Of course you have. We all have.

3. God's sovereign promises are the only hope we have. In this world, the only thing that will survive is us. Think about it. Not one thing that you own, not one thing you have ever seen or touched, not one dime of value that currently exists will survive the judgment fires of God. It will

all perish. The only thing that won't be destroyed when God reclaims this world is our lives. That is God's promise. Our world is shipwrecked. Our lives are shipwrecked. Without Christ and the promises of God, we have no hope. Yet, God has promised that not one soul that is His will be lost. Think of the parable of the sheep. An owner has 100 sheep. One gets lost. The shepherd leaves the flock alone and goes out to find the one lost lamb. That is God's promise to us.

In this story, we have 296 people on a sailing ship that is doomed to crash and sink. That is a lot of people, that is a large ship. As the storm worsens, everything is thrown overboard in an attempt to somehow save the lives of those on board. Ultimately, all is lost, all is sacrificed, all is given to the sea in an attempt to survive. Even the precious wheat that hit a new high on the commodity exchange the day before is jettisoned. Yet, none of it is successful. The storm rages, the ship flounders and all hope of being saved is lost.

It is then that God's promise is brought back into view. He has promised that IF they will obey, if they will trust him, if they will do the one thing that makes absolutely no sense whatsoever... cut loose the life boat, then he will not allow one single person to die. He has chosen them for survival. But also notice that his promise is conditioned... it requires obedience.

May I say this clearly. Some of us have come to believe that the benefits of a relationship with God are something that he has guaranteed, no

strings attached. We presume upon God and do not realize that nearly every promise of God, other than the promises that related to his plan of redemption, has a very clear condition... our obedience to his teaching. That is a key point in Acts 27. God's promise, delivered through Paul, would be withdrawn if the sailors did not cut the lines to the life boat. Do you see that in the story?

That same truth must be applied to our lives. The benefits of a relationship with God are enormous and incredible. They are conditioned on our obedient response to his commands. We cannot hang on the lifeboat and survive. Cut the cords of sin or die. Live by what scripture says, not just some of scripture but all of it, or die. It is just that simple, or it is just that difficult. Simple to understand, hard to do. But that is why Romans 8:1 and 1 John 1:9 are so important. There is forgiveness, there is restoration, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

But make no mistake... do not make this mistake, God will not pour his blessing out on you if you are not obedient in your heart. If you must have your way, if you decide that you will not conform to the clear teaching of scripture... your life will not experience the joy, peace and satisfaction that God promises those who are his children. This is a certainty. If you are struggling with constant strife and chaos, if you have unresolved conflict... stop looking for the source outside of

yourself. Let the Holy Spirit show you what's wrong and then confess, repent and be restored to the joy of Jesus.

Here is the amazing good news of Luke 27. 276 people were destined to die, it was a certainty. But none died that day off Malta. They were all saved, while the ship was a total loss.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength... he will hold you fast.

Endnotes: