

SOMETIMES THE SHIP SINKS

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Text: ACTS 27, Read vv. 39-44, NKJV

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 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.

INTRODUCTION

Wouldn't it be great if Jesus kept us out of every storm? Wouldn't it be wonderful that even when the economy tanks, we still have money? When everyone else is getting older, we still look and feel like a twenty-year-old? When the fires burn the neighborhood, our house is the one that is left standing? But we know it doesn't always work that way - sometimes the ship sinks. That's right ... sometimes the ship sinks, it goes down - the business closes and we get fired, our kids get into trouble and we don't know how to help them, we get sick or a loved one dies, our transmission goes out, our septic system backs up, we get sued, there is more month than money, because no one, not even people of faith, is immune to the effects of a fallen world. It rains on the just and the unjust.

Does anybody know what I'm talking about? In the Gospels we read about Jesus calming the storm. We read about Jesus walking on water and Peter trotting out to meet Him. We remember Jesus saying, "Oh ye of little faith, wherefore did you doubt?" Then He says, "Peace, be still," and the winds cease and the waves lay down like Rover at their Master's feet. Yet our text shows us that sometimes, even in the life of men of great faith, the ship sinks. But the text also shows us that we don't have to go down with ship.

In Acts chapter 27, Paul is headed to Rome to see the Caesar. He had been accused of

crimes in Jerusalem and found not guilty by Roman authorities. Yet because Paul was a Roman citizen, he appealed to Caesar and was guaranteed safe passage to Rome to make his appeal. This worked to Paul's advantage because the guards actually protected him from death threats made against him by certain Jews. It was Paul's desire to preach the gospel in Rome, and by appealing to Caesar he could actually give his testimony to the most powerful political figure in the world at that time, with all expenses paid by Rome.

Looking closely at Acts 27, we notice that the perspective of the writer changes from third person to first person. Many scholars believe that where you see Luke writing in the first person - using the words "we" and "us" rather than "them" and "they" - it indicates that Luke was actually present during the events he describes. Such is the case in our text today. When Luke writes in verse 1, "... it was decided 'we' would sail for Italy," Luke is writing as an eyewitness of the dramatic events he describes so vividly.

Paul was a seasoned traveler and he warned the centurion not to take the voyage at that time of year. We know that it was late October because in verse 9 Luke notes that the "Fast" was over, which is a reference to the fast associated with the Jewish Day of Atonement that ended in mid-October. Common sense born out of personal experience led Paul to elicit his warning, but his warning was unheeded and the crew forged ahead.

At first things looked favorable. There was a gentle wind blowing in their favor and for a short while it looked like they had made the right decision. We can imagine the self-satisfied look on the faces of the centurion and the captain as the winds carried the ship gently along toward their destination. But things were about to change.

It is my observation, that when people get themselves into trouble, it is often because they willfully ignored the common-sense God gave them and got involved in things they should have avoided. God often warns us through spiritual promptings and the proverbial red flags. He uses a sermon, or the words of a friend, the Bible, or the voice of the Spirit speaking into our heart, but too often we ignore the warning signs and press on anyhow. For example, the

Titanic, receive at least four warnings of icebergs ahead. One ship, some five miles ahead of the Titanic, sent a signal warning of “large bergs,” giving the crew of the Titanic plenty of time to adjust course. Two of those messages were delivered to Captain Smith, who had every opportunity to change course, but he did not. From all appearances, up until the moment the Titanic struck the iceberg, everything seemed to be going along smoothly on this new opulent luxury liner. But with the sickening sound of a large iceberg racking the side of the ship, the lives of everyone onboard changed, because the people guiding the ship ignored the warning signs.

Isn't that the way life sometimes goes? We ignore the warnings and then after the marriage is in trouble, after our health is in shambles, after the business fails, after the children are running wild, we look back with profound regret that we did not heed the warning signs. At first it looks all right and we think we are going to get away with it, but Satan loves to lure us out over our head and then whip up a storm. At first, we think we can handle this relationship, we think we can handle this debt, we think we can handle this habit, but then we find ourselves in the middle of a mess as a storm is rising on the horizon ahead of us.

The Word of God is the roadmap that discloses the dangers and warns us what to avoid. And God isn't coy about it; He isn't trying to trick us with obscure messages. For example, in Deuteronomy chapter 30, Moses gives this warning to the people Israel

¹¹ “For this commandment which I command you today *is not too* mysterious for you, nor *is it* far off. ¹² *It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’* ¹³ *Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’* ¹⁴ But the word *is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.*

¹⁵ “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, ¹⁶ in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong *your* days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. ¹⁹ I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; ²⁰ that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He *is* your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your

fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.”

God provides clear directions and instructions for life and blessings, but too often we run headlong and headstrong into the storm because we will not listen and we are not paying attention. But if we ignore the warnings of God’s Word, and if we quench the voice of the Holy Spirit in our heart, we do so to our own peril. In verses 14 and 15 Luke describes what happened next: “Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the ‘northeaster,’ swept down from the island. The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along.”

The captain ignored Paul and sailed into a storm. Notice that Paul had not done anything wrong but he was in the same storm as everyone else. The truth is that even when we’ve tried to follow God’s will and tried to live by His Word, we may still find ourselves in a hurricane wondering how or why God allowed this storm to arise in our life. After all, I go to church, I worship God, and I give tithes and offerings. Why me? Why this? Why now?

One day we feel great but next day the doctor uses the dreaded “c” word and suddenly the winds feel as though they have shifted and our life is turned upside down. In an instant, it seems the waves are contrary to our journey and we are totally disoriented. We thought we knew God. We thought we knew how God works; only now nothing is making sense. The winds of our spiritual life are swirling around us and we’re wondering what’s coming next. Why does God allow these storms in our life? Let me suggest four lessons we learn in the storms.

LESSON 1: THE STORMS HELP CLARIFY WHAT IS REALLY IMPORTANT

Look at verses 18 and 19

¹⁸We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. ¹⁹On the third day, they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands.

Sometimes we tenaciously cling to the very things that are dragging us down. We cling to the good ole days, or we cling to our position or that person, even when it is clear that these things are dragging us down. Sometimes we cling to a lifestyle or habit that is killing us. But trials and storm in life can help bring clarity about what is really important. Someone on the ship said, “What good is the cargo if we’re dead? Let’s toss this stuff,” and they did. Storms can motivate us to clear out some things we don’t need.

However, the other extreme is to start throwing out things we should hold on to. Luke says that on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard. They needed the tackle to sail and steer the ship, but they decided it was added weight so they threw it overboard as well. Sometimes in a storm, we start tossing out the things we are going to need to get us through the storm. We stop going to church, we don't pray like we used to, we don't take time to study God's Word, we ignore the messages from the preacher and silence the voice of the Holy Spirit in our heart. Instead, we start listening to unbelievers around who give advice that is the wisdom of man and not of God.

Sometimes we do need to clear out some things that are holding us back, but as my momma used to say, "Don't throw out the baby with the bathwater." The Bible repeatedly tells us that no matter what is happening around us, we need to hold on to the things that matter. For example, in [1 Thessalonians 5:21](#), Paul tells us to "Test all things; hold fast what is good." He tells Timothy, in [2 Timothy 1:13](#), "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus." Likewise, the writer of Hebrews says in chapter 3, verse 6, "but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end," and in chapter 4, verse 14, he writes, "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession." Then again in chapter 10, verse 23 he gives us this charge, "Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful." When we are in the storm, we need to know what to heave overboard and what to hold on to.

LESSON 2: WE OFTEN HEAR GOD MOST CLEARLY WHEN IT IS DARKEST

Another lesson we learn from this account is that sometimes it isn't until every other option has been eliminated that we hear the voice of God and submit to His will. As long as we can make it our own way, as long as we can figure it out on our own, or with the help of someone else, we don't really feel the need to hear from God. Verses 20 through 23 reveal that it was in the darkness, without seeing sun or stars for many days, that Paul heard from God and then shared with those on board what God showed him.

Verse 21 says that Paul stood up and said, "Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss." Not even Paul could resist the urge for a little, "I told you so", but Paul continued, saying,

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.

I’ve met people who thought that with their great job, their nice house, and their new car, they could get along just fine without God. They had friends and money and they thought that was all they needed. Even Jesus said in Matthew 19:23, “Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.” But when the job is gone, the house is gone, the car is gone, and the money is gone, some of these same people are suddenly motivated to hear from God. Because for some people, it isn’t until every other resource is gone and every other option has been eliminated that they are ready to pay attention to the signs, to hear from God, and to surrender to His will. Storms have a way of clarifying what is really important in life.

LESSON 3: WE CAN LEARN TO TRUST GOD BETTER IN THE STORMS

Not only are we motivated to hear God in the storm, but when everything else is stripped away in the storm, we learn to trust God. I’m reminded of the little boy who ignored the words and the warning of his mother not to venture out onto the thin ice. Earlier in the day he’d seen other boys playing on the pond, but now late in the afternoon, after the midday sun had been making the ice thinner, it was not safe. His mother understood this, but the boy did not. He didn’t listen to his mother’s advice, and he did not trust her assessment of the situation. Instead, he ventured out into the middle of the pond and the ice began to crack all around him. Every step toward the shore resulted in more cracks so he instinctively stopped moving and started screaming for his mother, who came out and told him to gently lay down on the ice, spread out and inchworm his way toward her. Now with the ice fracturing all around him, the boy was listening to his mother, and now he was trusting her to give him good advice. It shouldn’t have taken all that for him to simply hear his mother, trust his mother, and obey his mother before this crisis moment.

Yet many of us are just like that little boy when it comes to our relationship with God. There were the warning signs, He provided the wisdom of His Word, there was the sermon of the pastor, the nudging of the Holy Spirit, and yet we think we know better than God and we get out into the middle of the mess, and now we’re praying and calling out for help and rescue from the One we have ignored. Thankfully, like this loving mother, God will come to our rescue, and prayerfully, we learn a lesson in life before the tragedies strike and we sink beneath the weight of our own poor decisions and lack of faith.

Look at verse 25. In the King James Version, Paul says, “I believe God.” The challenge for the believer is to continue to believe God even when everything we see with our eyes is

telling us something else. God said, "The ship will sink, but you will be saved." In these times we tend cry out, "But God I need my ship, I need this thing, this position, this job, this person, this possession. Please God, don't sink my ship!"

God is saying, "I want to teach you that it's not the ship that ensures your safety, it's Me. Even when the safety net is pulled away, even when the job is gone, even when the news from the doctor is all bad, I am your peace, I am your rest, I am your help, **I Am** and I Am all you need."

It's hard for us sometimes to trust God while the bottom is dropping out from under us. It can be a test of faith to trust Him when we don't know what He's doing and what we are seeing with our natural eyes doesn't look good. But like Paul, we need to hear God's Word, and then we need to stand on that Word, no matter what happens, and say, "I believe God!

- I don't know how He's going to work it out, but He said He would, and I believe God!
- I don't understand what He's doing in my life at this point, but I believe God!
- The world around me may be telling me to give up and give in, but I believe God!
- I believed God in the good times and I'll believe Him in the hard times.
- I believed Him on the mountain and I'll believe Him in the valley.
- I believed Him in health, and I'll believe Him in sickness.
- I believed Him times of plenty, and I'll believe Him when the cupboard is bare!
- I believed Him when I got the job, and I'll believe Him if it is taken away!
- I believed Him when I was laughing, and I'll believe Him when I'm crying!
- You can believe what you want to, but I BELIEVE GOD!

Not one word of His promises has ever failed, He is not a man that He should lie, I believe God! The old chorus said, "I believe God, I believe God, I believe, I believe God." Live or die, sink or swim, rain or shine, I believe God!

Some people believe the news media, but the news has proven to be very unreliable. Some believe every conspiracy theory they read on their Facebook, but the real conspiracy is what Facebook is doing with our private information. Some believe the latest so-called scientific breakthroughs and medical miracle cures, but what has been proven to cure us one day is sometimes recalled later because of problems in production. Politicians make promises and some people believe the politicians, but more often than not they fail to deliver and they break the trust of their constituency.

So, what can we trust? You can do what you want, but I believe God. I believe the Bible is

the Word of God, I believe Jesus is the Son of God, and I believe in the anointing of the Spirit of God. I believe God is for me, not against me. I believe Jesus died on an old rugged cross for the forgiveness of my sins. I believe He came that I might have life, and that more abundant. I believe I am the head and not the tail. I believe I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. I believe that greater is He that is in me, than he that is in the world. I believe that Jesus is coming back for His Bride. I believe that one day the trumpet will sound, and the voice of the archangel will shout and the dead in Christ are going to get up out of the grave. I believe one day God will wipe away the last tear I'll ever shed as He says, "Well done, good and faithful servant." The world can believe what they want, but I believe God.

LESSON 4: WE NEED TO STAY TOGETHER IN THE STORMS

Often people in the storms of life drift apart. Some marriages can handle the good times, but they fall apart in the hard times. Some churches can hang together when God is blessing, but they fall apart when the storms are raging. I believe it is during the storms that we should hold on to one another the tightest. Hebrews 10:25 says, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as you see the day approaching."

In verse 31, "Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, 'Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved.'" The ship's crew was going to abandon the ship in the lifeboats and leave the rest to die. They were taking an "every man for himself" approach to this emergency. That must never be the approach of the church. It's true that we will each give an account, individually, for our works whether they be good or evil, but the church is the "Body of Christ," and the eye cannot say to the ear, "You're on your own. I don't need you." We are in this ship together, and we need to work together to support and encourage one another as we journey through the storms and struggles of this life. In essence, Paul said, "If we all stay together, we'll all survive together."

We need to cling more tightly to one another in the storms. Often teammates are friends, and they believe in one another when they are winning, but when they go through a tough time and start losing a few games, there is a tendency to point fingers at one another and start blaming one another for the team's problems. The team falls apart and the ends up in a downward spiral of defeat and failure. But God tells the church that when things get rough, that's when we really need stick together and lift one another up.

If we stick together, we don't have to go down with the ship. We need to take God at His Word and believe that even if the financial ship sinks, God will keep our family intact. Even

if the health ship sinks, God will keep our marriage together. Even if the political ship sinks, God will keep our church together. Even if there is a storm, our community can rise from the rubble and rebuild the lives we once had, as long as we all pull together and do what must be done to get through the storm.

CONCLUSION

Eventually the day dawned and they saw that they were near a sandy beach. They attempted to run the ship onto the beach but hit a sandbar while still some distance from the shore. With the ship stuck in the sand the waves proceeded to beat the ship to pieces. One by one the people were being tossed into the sea and the soldiers planned to kill the prisoners so that they could not escape. But because the centurion wanted to save Paul's life, he kept the soldiers from killing any of the prisoners and every person on the ship eventually made it to the island.

The other prisoners on this ship probably never knew that it was because of Paul they were saved. The people you work with may never acknowledge that it was your prayers that saved the company and preserved their jobs, but God knows who was praying. Your spouse may not know that it was your faith that saved the marriage. The people on our prayer list may never know the hours you've spent praying for them, but they are blessed because you are in the ship - the relationship, the friendship, the kinship.

The bad news is that sometimes the ship sinks. But the good news is that we have a lifesaver named Jesus and He can bring us out of the storms with our family intact, our faith intact, and our church intact. The Bible says they were all saved. Everyone reached land safely.

You may be here today feeling like the bottom has just dropped out. You may be here feeling like the ship sank and you are floundering in the waves. But in those times, we need to cry out with the Psalmist, "Lead me to that Rock that is higher than I." Friends, Jesus is the Rock, and when you build your house on that Rock, the storms will come and go, but you will still be standing. If you need God to lift you up above the waves today, then meet me at this altar and let us hold one another up in prayer.

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