

Introduction: Jonah and Paul

It is easy to see a number of parallels between Jonah and Paul –
though quite frankly, the parallels are seen more in the contrast between them.

Practically the only thing that they have in common is that
both of them were told to take God’s message to the Gentiles,
and both of them encountered a storm at sea.

What is most striking is the contrast between them:
when Jonah hears the call to go to Ninevah,
he runs away to sea;
when Paul hears the call to go to Rome,
he eagerly goes to sea.
Jonah is the occasion for God to send the storm, bringing trouble to the sailors;
but Paul is the occasion for God to rescue the sailors from the storm.

Because, after all, the story of Paul is a continuation of the story of Jesus.
Because the story of the apostles is in fact what Jesus continued to do and to teach
by the power of the Holy Spirit.
And indeed, all of church history – your own life included –
is the story of what Jesus continues to do and to teach by the power of his Spirit.

We live in Acts 29 – the rest of the story!

As we go through chapter 27 today,
watch how the story of Jesus has become the story of Paul.
Remember Jesus on the sea of Galilee – stilling the storm –
and while Paul is not Jesus, yet Paul has the same confidence as Jesus,
because the voice of Jesus speaks through the lips of Paul!

In each section of our passage today we have Luke’s narration of the voyage,
and then Paul’s response.
And indeed, while each section begins with the captain and the centurion taking decisive action,
it is the word of Paul that drives the narrative.

Indeed, it is the word of the gospel that drives our narrative.
Remember that.
Your story is not driven by your boss, your spouse, your parents, or any other power—
including yourself!
God is NOT your co-pilot!

Rather, our Lord Jesus Christ governs the winds and waves of life as he has always done,
therefore, as Paul says in Colossians 3, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.
Not the Peace of Rome,

nor the Peace of America,
nor any other peace—
but the peace of Christ.

And so as we go through our passage today, listen to the voice of the Lord
as it comes to us from the apostle Paul through Luke the beloved physician.

1. Sailing from Caesarea to Fair Havens: Paul's Warning (27:1-12)

*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.
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.*

Once again Luke uses the “we”
which indicates that he joined Paul for this journey.
We are not sure what Luke had been doing for the last two years
(some have suggested that he spent time with other Christians in Judea,
learning the stories about Jesus that eventually went into his gospel account).

Luke gives us a detailed itinerary for the journey.
Like most sailors of the day they took the coastal route,
following the coast of Syria and modern day Turkey
in order to keep generally within sight of land.
As a trading ship, they would have many ports of call along the way
in order to conduct their business.

Verse 3 indicates that the centurion, Julius, had become favorably disposed toward Paul,
because in Sidon he “gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for.”
No doubt Julius sent a soldier along,
but Luke is once again showing us that Roman officials have respect for Paul,
and so they allow him to stay the night with friends in town.

(Just a note here: this is a good example of Christian hospitality.
We should welcome the opportunity to provide shelter for a fellow Christian
traveling through South Bend.
If you are ever traveling whether on business or for pleasure,
and would rather stay with Christians than in a hotel,
please call me.
It's not about “saving money” –
it's about demonstrating the unity of the body of Christ –
it's about the “communion of saints” that we confess every week!
I have contacts all over North America,
and I know a lot of people who would be delighted to have you stay with them.)

Well, when they came to Myra on the southwest coast of Turkey they changed ships,

taking a “ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy.”

All through this section Luke offers hints of what is to come:

verse 4, “the winds were against us”

verse 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...”

With this in view, Paul’s warning comes as no surprise:

*Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous
because even the Fast was already over,*

(The Fast refers to the Day of Atonement which was in the fall.
Winter travel was very dangerous in those days)

Paul advised them, 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.”*

Unlike Jonah, who waited until the storm struck before admitting that he was a prophet,
Paul here warns of what is coming.

He does not say, “Thus saith the LORD!”

Instead he offers a milder warning rooted in his own perception of the situation.

But they did not listen.

The pilot and the owner of the ship both thought that they could reach Phoenix,
on the west coast of Crete,
which would be a better place to spend the winter.

2. The Storm Strikes off the Coast of Crete: Paul’s Prophecy (27:13-26)

But if you do not listen to the Word of the LORD,
even couched in such a gentle warning as Paul gave,
you will regret it!

God sent a south wind –
precisely what they wanted.

Sometimes when we are set on rebelling,
God will give us precisely what we want
in order to show us the folly of our hearts!
Will you listen to his voice?
Or will you follow the inclinations of your own heart?

But no sooner are they out of the harbor, sailing along the shore of Crete,
then a northeaster struck,
and the ship was carried away – driven along helpless before the storm.

To lighten the ship they threw the cargo overboard –

even the ship's tackle (the equipment used to sail the ship),
because they no longer had hope of saving the ship.

*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. (verse 20)*

But it was at that point that Paul spoke again:

*Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete
and incurred this injury and loss.*

(You can imagine how well that went over –
“Great! He's rubbing it in!”)

But that is not Paul's point:

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

*For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God
to whom I belong and whom I worship,
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.

*So take heart, men, for I have faith in God
that it will be exactly as I have been told.*

But we must run aground on some island.

Notice the practical point at the end.

God uses means to accomplish his purposes.

God has promised that he will deliver all the people on the ship,
but that does not mean that they can sit back and watch.

Also did you notice why the ship's company will be saved?

It is because Paul must stand before Caesar
and preach the gospel.

They will be saved because of Paul and his mission.

God has granted their lives to Paul.

“God has granted *to you* all those who sail with you.”

Because God is pleased with Paul,

and because Paul is his chosen messenger to preach Christ to Caesar,
therefore this pagan crew will be saved.

“Saved”?

Does this mean “saved” from the storm?

Or “saved” from sin and death?

I think Luke uses this word with some ambiguity on purpose.

Salvation comes to this ship,

though it with all their earthly possessions will go down to the deep.

They will be saved through water,

as they pass through the waters of judgment.

But of course, this baptism will only benefit them if they believe Paul's message.

Do they believe?

Watch!

3. Driven Across the Adriatic Sea: Paul's Blessing (27:27-38)

While in modern parlance the "Adriatic Sea" refers to the sea in between Italy and the Balkans, in antiquity this name was sometimes given

to the whole central part of the Mediterranean.

But on the fourteenth night of the storm,

the sailors suspected that they were drawing near to land,
so they took soundings and noticed the sea getting shallower.

Afraid that the ship might run aground,

the sailors tried to let down the boat and escape,

but Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers,

Unless these men stay in the ship you cannot be saved.

And so the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat.

And as day was about to dawn, Paul said,

*Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food,
having taken nothing.*

Therefore I urge you to take some food.

It will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you.

Why does Paul say this?

What is more,

why does Luke record this?

Paul says this because it is true – as they are soon going to be swimming in cold water, it would be good for them to have some sustenance!

But Luke records it for us for quite a different reason.

Listen to what Luke says next:

*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.*

What do you think of when you hear this?

He took bread, gave thanks to God, broke it and began to eat?

It would make a blind rabbit think of the Lord's Supper!

Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves.

This does not mean that Paul was celebrating the Lord's Supper here,
but Luke tells the story in such a way as to make *you* think of the Lord's Supper.

In the midst of the storm –
when all around him appeared about to end in disaster,
Paul *took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all
he broke it and began to eat.*

In the face of death, Paul proclaims his confidence in Christ
by giving thanks to God and breaking bread in their midst.
And of course, as we saw back at the end of Luke's gospel,
it was through the breaking of bread that Christ was revealed to his disciples
after the resurrection (Luke 24).

Now the glory of Christ is revealed through the breaking of bread.
He alone is our sustenance – the bread of life!

*And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship,
throwing the wheat into the sea.*

If salvation come by faith –
and if faith is demonstrated by believing God's promises and acting accordingly,
then salvation has come to this ship.

They have believed God's promise proclaimed by Paul,
and they are relying entirely upon his word.
They now believe that the ship will be wrecked,
and that everything will be lost – only their lives will be saved.

4. The Shipwreck on Malta: Paul's Demonstration of the Power of the Gospel (27:39-28:10)

Verses 39-44 then recount how God's word came to pass.
The boat ran aground and as the boat was knocked to pieces,
the sailors, soldiers, and prisoners all made it safely to shore.

Only then did they learn that the island was called Malta –
and its population were "barbaroi" (meaning, they did not speak Greek).
The inhabitants showed kindness to these strangers and kindled a fire.
Paul, ever seeking how he could serve others,
gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire.

Ancient writers often told stories of the sea in which the gods hunt down their enemy
and wreck his ship sending him down to the depths of the sea.
Luke is playing off that genre,
showing us that the inhabitants of Malta were expecting this to be that sort of story –
Paul escaped the sea, but the "gods" are against him, so they sent a viper to kill him.

When I was in Eritrea I saw the effect of a viper.
One day as I served as the chaplain for the missionary hospital in Ghinda,
I saw the local “ambulance” arrive
(the ambulance consisted of six men running at top speed,
carrying their friend who had been bitten by a viper,
because they knew that he would die if he did not get the antidote
within seven minutes of the bite).
A missionary friend from Uganda tells of an even more deadly viper there:
you have only seconds before the poison kills you—
and so if you are bitten in the hand or the foot,
you have around two seconds
before you need to amputate that body part or die!

And so the islanders saw Paul with a viper hanging from his hand,
and they said to one another,
*No doubt this man is a murderer.
Though he has escaped the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live.*

So they waited for him to swell up and fall down dead.
After all, they had seen it happen many times before.
*But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him,
they changed their minds and said that he was a god.*

The chief man of the island, named Publius, showed them hospitality,
and when Paul discovered that his father was sick,
*he visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him healed him.
And when this had taken place,
the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured.*

Conclusion:

And so salvation came not only to the ship,
but now also to the island of Malta.

In response to God’s word, let us sing Psalm 107, verses 1-9 and 23-32.
Psalm 107 speaks of God’s faithfulness in various settings:
to those who wandered in the desert (verses 4-9),
to those who sat in darkness and the shadow of death (verses 10-16),
to those who suffered because of their own sins (verses 17-22),
and to those who were in trouble at sea (verses 23-32).

We’ll sing about the desert and the sea today –
giving thanks to God because he has given us a city to dwell in,
the heavenly Jerusalem;
and because he has brought us safely through the waters of judgment,
and he will bring us to our desired haven.

