



44 | ACTS 27

GOD'S PROVIDENCE IN OUR SHIPWRECKS

Because of God's loving guidance and providence over our lives, we do not need to fear the day of adversity. God is in control of the storms of our lives for our good and his glory.

Outline

- 1. THE PLAN OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE (27:1-8)**
The Wonder of God's Plan
The Welfare of God's Plan
The Winds of God's Plan
- 2. OUR PERSEVERANCE IN GOD'S PROVIDENCE (27:9-12)**
An Important Warning
An Ignored Warning
- 3. GOD'S PRESENCE IN HIS PROVIDENCE (27:13-24)**
God is Present in Danger
God is Present in Despair
God is Present to Deliver
- 4. THE PARADOX OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE (27:25-44)**
The Faithfulness of God
The Fickleness of Man
The Fortitude of Leaders
The Fortification of the Lord

Call to Worship

Oh give thanks to the Lord; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples! ²Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works! ³Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice!

—Psalm 105:1-3

Songs

Living Hope

Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah

Jesus Strong and Kind

Cornerstone

Blessed be Your Name

Announcements

WELCOME: We are glad you are here! Be sure to grab a Welcome Packet if you are visiting with us.

Introduction

We have two more sermons left in our Acts series, and then we are going to do a brief Jonah series. This Jonah series is important, because like Jonah, we get all too calloused and self-righteous about the lost. We become insulated. We are asleep to their plight, which was once our plight. Wake up church! The redeemed should have the heart of God for sinners! He loves them. He wants them saved.

But this morning we are looking at God's providence in our shipwrecks. Sometimes there are such trials, traumas, tragedies, and evils, that we can't make sense of them in this life. **How do we make sense of pain in the Christian life?** Charles Spurgeon, the most popular preacher of nineteenth-century London, battled depression throughout his life. He said,

If God is in control, if his name is hallowed, then that means he is in control of my depression. Fate is blind; providence has eyes.

God in his providence was using Spurgeon's depression to humble him and make him like Christ. John Flavel says it even more clearly and poetically.

The providence of God is like a Hebrew word – it can only be read backwards.

That means that God works all things, the good, the bad, and the ugly, for our good and his glory. But we can only see how it works out on the other side. It's backwards. Only when we see Jesus face to face will we understand. This is why Paul can say that **our future glory outweighs our present suffering!**

Romans 8:18 | I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Consider this child of God, **God's providence** means that **nothing truly eternally bad** can happen to us. All the bad on this earth is temporary, and it works to our eternal good to conform us to Jesus Christ. Do you believe that? You ought to. Your entire happiness depends on it. **No matter what your eyes see, or what your heart feels,** you must believe that God is working it out for your good.

I think of an **unusual story of Joan Murray**. When her plane leveled off at 14,500 feet, she took a deep breath and jumped out the door. The bank executive from Charlotte, North Carolina, was enjoying her free fall through the air until she pulled the ripcord for her parachute, and nothing happened. Just about then she had an extreme rush of adrenaline.

But she didn't panic – she knew she had a **backup parachute**. She was falling 120 miles per hour when she released the reserve chute. It opened just fine, but she lost her bearings and, in her struggle to right herself, she deflated the chute. While the chute briefly slowed her descent, she continued to fall at 80 miles per hour.

She struck the earth with a violent blow **shattering her right side** and jarring the fillings from her teeth. She was barely conscious, and her **heart was failing**. Just when it seemed things could not get much worse, she realized she had **fallen into a mound**

of fire ants that didn't appreciate her disturbing their solitude. All told they stung her about 200 times before the paramedics arrived.¹

But things are not always as they seem. The doctors that treated Joan believe that **the ants actually saved her life.** They credit the stings of the ants that shocked her heart enough to keep it beating!

The apostle Paul had many opportunities to learn about God's providence himself. Satan means it for evil but God uses all things for his glory and our good (Gen 50:20). Our great God makes "all things beautiful in its time" (Ecc 3:11).

Acts 27 is the tale of one of the most famous shipwrecks in history—that of the Apostle Paul on his way to Rome, and how God used it for good. It is also one of the best-told, most-detailed shipwreck accounts in ancient history—and certainly the most profitable to the hearer.²

What we learn from Paul's shipwreck, and all the shipwrecks in the Christian life is that **God is in control. Whatever happens is for our good and for God's glory.** We call that **God's providence.**

This doctrine of God's providence helps us trust the Lord in every circumstance. It may not answer every question, but at least it provides the only possible foundation for understanding: **God is bigger than your problems.** He's **working it out for his glorious purposes.**

MEANING OF PROVIDENCE

In English the word "providence" has two parts. It's "pro" (before) and "video" (to see). Put them together, and you have: "**to see before.**" God is outside of time, sees all things at once, and works them for good.

Though the word providence is not found in most modern translations of the Bible, the concept is certainly biblical. It refers to "God's **gracious oversight of the universe.**" Oversight means that he directs the course of affairs. "He works all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph 1:11). The word universe tells us that God not only knows the big picture, **he created it and also concerns himself with the tiniest details.** Here are five statements that unfold the meaning of God's providence in more detail.

GOD'S PROVIDENCE MEANS...

He upholds all things.

He governs all events.

He directs everything to its appointed end.

He does this all the time and in every circumstance.

He does it always for his own glory and for your good.

The doctrine of God's providence magnifies his compassion toward his people.

First, **God cares about the tiniest details of life.** Nothing escapes his notice for he is **concerned about the small** as well as the big. In fact, with God there is no big or small. He knows when a sparrow falls, and **he numbers the hairs on your head.** He keeps track of the **stars in the skies and the rivers** that flow to the oceans. He sets the

¹ Editors of People Magazine, *Amazing Stories of Survival*. New York: Liberty Street Publishing House, 2006), 15.

² Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, 331.

day of your birth, the day of your death, and he ordains everything that comes to pass in between. He managed the rings of Saturn before you even ate breakfast! He can handle your life.

Second, he **uses everything and wastes nothing**. There are no accidents with God, only incidents. This includes events that seem to us to be senseless tragedies.

Third, God's **ultimate purpose is to shape his children into the image of Jesus Christ** (Rom 8:29). He often uses difficult moments and human tragedies to accomplish that purpose.³ God is omniscient or all-knowing, not only aware of the future, but active in shaping every event for his glory and our good (Eph 1:10, 2:10, Pro 16:9).

Key Thought: Because of God's loving guidance and providence over our lives, we do not need to fear the day of adversity. God is in control of the storms of our lives for our good and his glory.

It's one thing to **believe in God's providence theoretically**, or to learn about it for an exam, but what if you are called on to trust God in **the hardest of circumstances**? That's where believing in God's good plan and omnipotent power to guide our lives is essential. Without a firm belief in God's providence, you will enter into the unbelief of bitterness and anger. Paul wasn't like that. He knew it was all working toward a larger plan.

1. THE PLAN OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE (27:1-8)

How difficult it is to be under the control or authority of another, yet God is the one in ultimate control of our steps. How can we trust God in his plan for our lives? Let's **look at how Paul trusted God**. He's under the control now of a **pagan government and court system**. How can he be at peace? But he is!

THE WONDER OF GOD'S PLAN

Paul was truly amazed at the wonder of God's plan. Everything God said, he was faithful to do for Paul. God said Paul would preach in Rome, and finally, Paul got on a ship that set sail for Rome, Italy.

Acts 27:1 | 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.

Festus handed Paul to a centurion named Julius serving with the imperial guard (Augustan cohort), whose officers and men traveled throughout the empire **escorting people where they needed to go**. Julius commanded a detail of likely about a dozen soldiers: Paul was the only prisoner of rank, permitted to take **two friends who were listed as his personal attendants: Aristarchus and Luke the physician** (vs 2-3). The other prisoners would be convicts on their grim way to "make a Roman holiday," either as **lion fodder** at the games or, if burly enough, for **training as gladiators**. These would all be chained to timbers below decks. Paul, a Roman citizen, and his

³ Ray Pritchard, "The Invisible Hand: Coming to Grips With God's Providence" (Keep on Believing Ministries, Sermon from February 2, 1997), Genesis 50:20.

attendants could move about freely, though he must always wear a **loose chain as a symbol of his status**.⁴

Paul wasn't so concerned about the chains he was wearing. He was on his way to a **new mission field that he had long prayed for**. How he had dreamed of preaching. He had long ago given up any specific expectations. He was God's slave. But God had called him to preach in Rome, so he knew, however he got there, he would most certainly get there. The wonder of God's plan is that it's predetermined before the foundation of the world.

Ephesians 2:10 | We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

We as God's workmanship, his masterpiece, are in awe that he would prepare all the good plans he has for us beforehand, guiding our lives, that we should walk in them. God said he'd give grace, and Paul said, "His grace is sufficient" (2 Cor 12:9). God said, "I'll never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb 13:5), and Paul could testify, "Nothing can separate me from the love of Christ" (Rom 8:39). **God was working everything according to plan.**

THE WELFARE OF GOD'S PLAN

Even though Paul was gifted as a **great apostle with the power to do miracles**, who had **visions** of the Lord directly and **wrote thirteen inspired books of the Bible**, he still needed to be attached to the body of Christ. Even Paul could not live the Christian life alone. All who come to Christ in faith become intensely aware of **our need for the fellowship and encouragement of other believers**. For Paul he had his physician **Luke** and **Aristarchus** from the church at Thessalonica. Even **Julius**, the high-ranking officer in charge of Paul was a great encouragement.

Acts 27:2-3 | 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.

Being a Roman citizen and an obvious gentleman, Paul was allowed to take along his companions **Dr. Luke and Aristarchus**, a devoted Christian brother from Thessalonica. Paul was treated so well that the next day, when they landed at Sidon, he was allowed to disembark and **visit his friends there**.⁵

It wouldn't be at all surprising **if Paul had pointed Julius to saving faith in Christ**. The point is, we must be connected to the body of Christ to grow up into the headship and lordship of Jesus Christ. The Lord requires Holy Spirit empowered obedience, with a life of grace infused good works. It is **not possible to grow up** into maturity without being **connected** to the body. Paul makes this clear in his letter to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 4:15-16 | We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint

⁴ Pollock, *The Apostle*, 265.

⁵ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, 331-332.

with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Even at a time when Paul has no control over his life for the most part, God ensures that Paul has sufficient support, fellowship, and encouragement from fellow believers. God will also provide for the absolute necessity of fellowship in your life. Choosing to be unaccountable will cause you to go astray in your life. **Stop abusing the grace of God and yield to the relationships in Christ he has for you.** Our salvation and relationship with God is a covenant. We are no different than **Abraham** or **those in Deuteronomy** heading into the promised land from the plains of Moab. We have a covenant with God like marriage. He says, "I will be your God, and you will be my people" Exo 29:45; Zech 8:8; 2 Cor 6:16; Heb 8:10; Jer 32:38; Eze 11:20; Rev 21:3; Psa 81:19; Isa 41:10). That means **we remain intimately connected to him and to his people.**

Perhaps you are **afraid of deep friendship** because of your **sin**. You've broken covenant with God. Don't be afraid. You may break your covenant, but God will never break his. He'll **never leave you** or forsake you. We have to drag our sin into the light together and hate it so we can walk in the light and have fellowship together (cf 1 Jn 1:7-9). What a comfort to know that even when we are at our weakest, **God has encouragers for us.** In that sense, we might say **Christians are "Jesus with skin on."**

THE WINDS OF GOD'S PLAN

Paul was on a ship that was forced to hug the coast of Cyprus because the winds were bad. They finally made it to the open sea and then to the coast of Asia

Acts 27:4-8 | And putting out to sea from there we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. ⁵And 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. ⁷We 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. ⁸Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.

In this passage, there is a lot of talk of how **hard and heavy the winds of the sea are.** They have to hug the coasts of Cyprus and then Crete, but they are finally on their way to Italy—the focus of his ministry dreams. The centurion "finds" a ship for Paul and the other prisoners. Understand that all of this is the hand of God.

Sometimes the winds of life can be tempestuous. It can feel like you are about to go off course. **Remember that God is in charge of the winds and waves,** not only of the sea, but he's got you when you are in the storms of life. **God had a destination for Paul: to preach the word in Italy.** But even that destination was secondary. Paul was very clear that his ultimate destination was to be **conformed into the image of Jesus Christ** (Rom 8:29) and then to be able to know him and one day see him face to face.

Perhaps you are facing some heavy winds of change in your life. Things seem unsettled or uncertain. What good does it do to worry? Will it add another second to your life span? Will worry make you an inch taller? The opposite of worry is worship. Instead of worrying,

embrace the winds of change in your life. Your earthly dreams may at times be shattered, but “laying up treasure on earth” has never been a wise endeavor. Paul’s treasures could not be affected by earthly storms.

2. OUR PERSEVERANCE IN GOD’S PROVIDENCE (27:9-12)

Apparently, there is a meeting at Fair Havens, and Paul, of all people is consulted. He relays an important warning. We are going to see that during all of this, Paul is at peace. He’s persevering under God’s mighty hand. Fear or frustration do not take hold of the apostle.

AN IMPORTANT WARNING

Acts 27:9-10 | 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.”

Sailing season was coming to a close. For the Jews, that meant they stopped sailing around the time of the Fast, or the Day of Atonement (fall season).

Subsequent events proved that **Paul’s advice was sound:** they should have remained at Fair Havens. The season for **sea travel was coming to a close.** Calculated by the phases of the moon, the Day of Atonement fell always in late September or early October. For ancient travel on the Mediterranean, mid-September to early November was considered a dangerous time for traveling the open sea. After early November such travel ceased altogether and **generally was not resumed until the beginning of February at the earliest.** Paul’s advice was based on this well-known fact. It was well into the dangerous season. Any travel now would be risky business. They had already encountered bad winds. **Paul had been in peril at sea before.** He knew the danger. Paul himself says, **“Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea” (2 Cor 11:25).** Whether his advice was truly prophetic or merely based on his opinion is at this point unclear. He warned that there could be loss both of cargo and of life. **As it turned out, the ship and cargo would indeed be lost, but there was no loss of life.** The important thing is that his apprehensions proved true. When he later gave his opinion, it was taken seriously by Julius (vs 31). At this point it was not, and that proved nearly disastrous.⁶

AN IGNORED WARNING

Julius the centurion ignores Paul’s warning and heads into what will soon become the tempestuous sea.

Acts 27:11-12 | 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

⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, 518–519.

there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

As fair as Fair Havens might have been, **the majority out ruled Paul**, with the centurion Julius likely being in charge. How difficult is it to submit to those in authority over us. We are going to see that while Julius makes a very dangerous decision, God uses it for Paul's good and his own divine glory.

We can read between the lines here and see that Paul is not panicked or angry when his sound advice is not taken. He knows his life is in the hands of God. **Neither should any of God's children panic but be at peace** in the control of the one who controls the winds and the waves. **Paul persevered in peace even when he could see disaster coming!**

What do you do when you are ignored? Are you able to persevere in peace? What do you do when you see disaster coming and you have no control? Are you able to yield to the control of God who has you? Trust his good heart and his mighty hand!

I think of the story of Corrie Ten Boom. She and her sister were imprisoned for hiding Jewish people from the Nazis in World War II. The concentration camp building they were in was crawling with fleas, and they prayed that they could endure. They didn't know why after all the inhumane things they endured, they had to endure the fleas too. They did have one Bible, and they would take a page of the Bible at a time and distribute it to each of the inmate ladies so they could learn the word of God. But **the fleas were just unbearable at times!** Yet, later, when Corrie was free, she found out that the fleas were what kept the guards away from their building. This is why they were so free to read the Bible in that Nazi concentration camp! God's gracious providence he was using the fleas to protect them!

3. GOD'S PRESENCE IN HIS PROVIDENCE (27:13-24)

Now as Paul, trusting God, enters the ship, knowing he could die, we are taught by Paul's example that God will **deliver us out of danger and despair**. God is with us and will never leave us, but we desperately need to experience God's manifest presence by the Holy Spirit in all circumstances. Let him speak his word into your heart. Listen to his still, small voice, and **don't be distracted by the noise of the storm!**

GOD IS PRESENT IN DANGER

No one likes to consider **the possibilities of danger and difficulty in the Christian life**, yet the Lord calls us to be prepared for trials and dangers on our journey to Christlike maturity. We are not only to expect trials, **but to "count it all joy" when we fall into "trials of various kinds" (Jas 1:2)**. Why? Because our perseverance in difficulties and dangers grows us to a place of "perfection and **maturity**" where we are "lacking in nothing" (Jas 1:3). Paul boards the ship, and things start out as well as could be expected, but things quickly turn for the worst. And that's ok, because **God is in control**.

Acts 27:13-19 | 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.

Things were going from bad to worse. First, they girded the ship with supports, then they were violently tossed by the storm, and on the second day **they had to change their mission from sales to survival**. The ship had to be lightened as much as possible. First the **bulk of the grain cargo** was thrown overboard and then the movable baggage and all the spare gear.⁷ Luke's details of the ancient way of ship faring are remarkably accurate, albeit in laymen's terms.

Now if the apostles were put into storms and difficulties beyond their control and certainly far beyond their comfort zone, it is clear **all Christians must be ready for danger** to at times envelop our lives. We have no control over so much that happens in life, but we know the one who does. Listen to what God told Isaiah.

Isaiah 49:7 | I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things.

God is never in heaven wringing his hands. He is working "all things together for good" for your predestined conformity to Christ (Rom 8:29; Ecc 3:11).

GOD IS PRESENT IN DESPAIR

Sometimes a situation can be so bleak that you can **despair even of your life**. The storm was so fierce on Paul's journey to Rome that they did not see the sun or the moon for many days.

Acts 27:20 | 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.

This ship had various parties on board: **prisoners, merchants, and sailors**. The merchants had already lost their cargo, and now all on board were wondering if they'd even make it to Italy with their lives intact.

Dear saints, even in the most intense and difficult circumstances we may out of pain long for heaven, but we **must never be faithless or hopeless**. The Christian life is not at all absent from sorrow and grief. Jesus was "a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief" (Isa 53:3). Hebrews tells us our Lord wept many tears with "loud cries."

Hebrews 5:7 | In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.

There are times of deep grief, but depression and self-focused despair are sinful. We are always to remember the deep roots of our faith and joy and hope must

⁷ Bruce, *Acts: Bible Study Commentary*, Ac 27:13–32.

never come from our circumstances, but from the promises of God. Even in our grief we can say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit... blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted" (Mt 5:3-4).

Perhaps you are struggling with despair. **Despair is caused by doubt.** "God could change my situation, but he won't." There is some truth in this, but in despair we charge God with negligence and even hardness of heart to us, and it couldn't be farther from the truth. He's loved you with an everlasting love (Jer 31:3). His main goal is not your comfort and earthly happiness but your eternal holiness and conformity to Jesus Christ. He cannot ever forget or neglect you since he's "graven you" on the palms of his hands (Isa 49:16). Most of all, God's given you his one and only Son.

Romans 8:32 | He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

God wants to bless you with perfect peace in all your storms. In all of our anguish, God anguishes, dear child of God. When a dear mother or father sees their child suffer, the parent suffers too. So it is with God. When he sees his children suffer in Jeremiah he says:

Jeremiah 4:19 | My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh the walls of my heart!

God's people are on their way to captivity, and God has not forsaken them. They need discipline, and **it inflicts the heart of God with pain** to see his children suffer!

GOD IS PRESENT TO DELIVER

Yet even in the storm, Paul knew he wasn't abandoned.

Acts 27:21-24 | 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. ²²Yet now I urge you **to take heart**, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. ²³For this very night **there stood before me an angel of the God** to whom I belong and whom I worship, ²⁴and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.'

Paul was not being petty and saying, "I told you so." Rather, he wanted to make sure they would hear him when he gives glory to God for their rescue. He has **a prophecy** that's he's received from the Lord. The Lord says, "You'll lose the ship but not your lives." Paul wants to **introduce them to "the God to whom I belong and whom I worship"** (27:23).

God himself had sent an angel to Paul to let him know that Paul need not be afraid. All will survive since Paul has an appointment to preach the gospel in Rome.

Remember God directs all things for your good and his glory. He is not the author of sin, nor does he force men to do anything. Yet his plan is not at all hindered by the evil choices of man. He raises up kings and puts them down. He creates tempests and calms the storms. He causes wars to cease. He's the almighty God and "all things happen after the counsel and decree of his own will" (Eph 1:11).

God goes **one giant leap further for the Christian** in all our troubles. He works "all things for good" for his own family (Rom 8:28). You belong to him dear saint! What's

the worst that could happen? You could die and go directly into the presence of the Lord. This earth is the most hell the child of God will ever experience.

4. THE PARADOX OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE (27:25-44)

Sometimes the **ways of the Lord can be mysterious**. This life is like a **tapestry**—we only see the **dangling and knotted ends** of the yarns going in every direction, but God sees the perfect tapestry of the other side.

His providence is most often a paradox to us mainly because we are creatures **addicted to ease**. We think if we do good for God, then the Lord promises to always prosper us. There is truth to that. **Live life the way God designed, and most often you will indeed prosper**. But this does not mean your life is absolved and protected from shipwrecks and trials. God stretches our faith and grows our heart through hardship and trials.

Grace means no matter how bad my circumstances are, I'm experiencing infinitely less than I deserve. My hardest, most brutal day is heaven compared to what I ought to get, which is eternity in hell, experiencing the Lord's everlasting judgment. Nonetheless, **when we do what is right** and we **receive hardship and harshness** in life, there can be a **feeling of paradox**, even tempting us to doubt the goodness of God.

THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

Despite the storms and shipwrecks, God is faithful! Paul was not tossed about the storm like the others. His faith in the Lord was his anchor. He was able to encourage the sailors, merchants, and prisoners. "Take heart!"

Acts 27:25-26 | 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."

Is your anchor in the faithfulness of God or in the constantly changing circumstances in life? The key to peace is not to stop the shipwrecks, but to put your focus on God and "take heart" in him and in his salvation (*cf* Psa 13, e.g.).

THE FICKLENESS OF MAN

Don't depend on yourself or on other human beings for peace. Our hearts are fickle. "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord" (Jer 17:5). Get your eyes off of self and others and turn your eyes on Jesus!

Acts 27:27-32 | 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.

Paul warned that **the passengers risked death** if they got on the spare boats. They had to stay on the sinking ship to be saved.

Paul had just told the crew of sailors to “take heart” and trust in the Lord with him, but faith in the Lord had not yet taken hold of them. They lowered the smaller boat on the pretext of using it to drop anchors, but Paul knew their plan. He had been through three previous shipwrecks, so he knew all the tricks and how people would behave. They couldn't afford to let any of the crew abandon ship; **the other passengers didn't have the sailing experience required to guide the vessel close to land without crashing.**⁸

Don't be so dishearten that sinners act like sinners. Don't take it personally. You can warn them as Paul did, and sometimes they will respond. But don't take it personally. **Keep your eyes on Christ, not on the fickleness of lost sinners or confused saints.**

THE FORTITUDE OF LEADERS

Paul was never a dominating, demanding leader. He was truly gentle and respectful. He waited on God. **When his advice wasn't headed, he let God vindicate him.** As a leader he didn't have to **demand or fuss or pout.** That's the sign of an **abusive leader.** If that's you dear brother, you need to stop it and repent and treat those under your care with **gentleness.** Notice when **Paul's advice was clearly demonstrating great wisdom**, the crew started listening to him.

Acts 27:33-38 | 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.

Paul says, “Not one hair on any of our heads will be harmed. This is our last day at sea, so **get something to eat! Celebrate!**” After all they had endured, **Paul emerged as the clear leader of the group.** The sound of surf and the soundings confirmed they were close to land, so the next few hours would be physically demanding for everyone, especially the crew. Paul spoke with divine authority to reassure each person he or she would survive the grounding. Because most of the people aboard had not eaten in the past several days, Paul led them in a meal (27:33–36). He used the opportunity to thank God for their continued safety.⁹

⁸ Swindoll, *Acts*, 502.

⁹ Charles R. Swindoll, *Acts*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2016), 502.

Everyone followed Paul's lead. After a really good meal, they got to work. They wouldn't need the wheat anymore. They used it as a ballast during the storm but as they neared land, they knew they wouldn't need it, so they threw that overboard.

THE FORTIFICATION OF THE LORD

After saving everyone on board and securing the ships, all looked way better than could be expected. Suddenly, the ship got stuck on the reef and the strong waters ripped the stern to pieces. Julius, the centurion heard of the **soldiers' plan to kill all the prisoners**. **Julius might at this time have become a believer, and he valiantly saves everyone on board.**

Acts 27:39-44 | 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.

Those who could swim made their way to the land, and those who couldn't were afforded planks and pieces of the ship that was now torn and unsailable. Regardless of the shipwreck, God was moving his plan to bring the gospel to Rome. **God was moving the gospel around the world**, so that this shipwreck has an impact on us here today for the glory of God.

Whatever you are going through, as a child of God, **the Lord is using it for his magnificent purposes in Christ**. Your life is crowning Christ as King of kings. You are in covenant with God, and for better or worse, you are bringing glory to God. Through obedient suffering or suffering by chastening, you are going to bring glory to God as a child of God. Your shipwrecks are moving toward the enthronement of Jesus Christ over the cosmos.

Conclusion

What do we learn from this story? As my dear wife says, "**Boring is good.**" We enjoy life when it's peaceful and calm. But often we have no control over the intense trials we are called to walk through. God promises his children that **he will walk with us through the fire and through the flood**. Indeed, he will carry us!

When 276 people boarded the grain ship to leave Fair Havens, they expected to sail no more than 40 miles down the coast of Crete to Phoenix, a more suitable harbor for spending the winter. But, as often happens, nature turned their simple plan into a terrifying ordeal. A half-day jaunt became two weeks at sea, forcing them to fight for survival through a long series of life-threatening events. As their situation worsened, each leader aboard grew silent and faded from the narrative, leaving Paul as the standout

leader. While the crew threw out anchors to regain control of the ship, Paul cast the spiritual anchor of faith in God's presence and plan to help the people cling to hope.¹⁰

Remember in Peter's storm, he and the disciples could see through the mist of the storm and the terror of the waves that Jesus was there. Peter said, "**Lord, if it's you, bid me to walk on the water with you.**" He did that. People are sometimes down on Peter, but he was the only one who had the faith to even walk on water in the entire Bible. Jesus says, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind and waves obeyed him. Can you imagine Peter and Jesus going back to the boat after Peter had fallen under the water? I can imagine them walking arm and arm on the water. Dear saint, God says to you in your storm: "Be still and know that I am God."

Whatever way the storm is blowing, God knows it has a certain outcome. It's like the Mississippi River. Ask any school aged child, "**Which way does the Mississippi River flow?**" He will say, "From north to south." If you have flown over the Mississippi, there are times and places where the **Mississippi River will flow north**. There are times and places where the Mississippi River will **flow due west**, but it **ultimately and finally flows south**. This is what we learn from Paul this morning—that the elective purpose of God in Christ Jesus may seem to be frustrated, turned, and twisted, but it is God's purpose of the ages that the reign and kingdom shall belong to his dear Son, King of kings and Lord of lords. Whatever is happening in your life, it is leading to the enthronement of Jesus over all creation.¹¹ Hallelujah!

¹⁰ Ibid., 503.

¹¹ W.A. Criswell, "The Eternal Purpose of God," sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, September 27, 1970.