

# A Very Stormy Voyage

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[ 0 : 00 ] Welcome here for this Sunday, November 9th. My name is Kent Dixon and it's my joy to be the pastor here. A couple of quick pastoral announcements. So you're finally getting rid of us, but only for a couple of days.

Michelle and I are headed to the pastor and spouses retreat for a denomination in Banff this week and we're driving tomorrow. So please pray for safety. It looks like it'll be warm and dry and all those things, but I'm a crazy driver.

No, I'm not a crazy. Well, don't judge, but we would really appreciate your prayers. It's intended to be a time of connecting and reconnecting.

So it's a bit like work, but not all of it. It's more about being fed than feeding, which is nice. It's about having a time to reflect and recharge ourselves and even our marriage as we continue in this ministry life.

So please contact Vern Castle and you can't contact him today because he ain't here. But contact Vern during this week if there are urgent needs while we're away.

[ 1 : 09 ] And we'll be back with you next Sunday. So while we won't be in person with you for the church prayer night this Tuesday, we're obviously away. It's hard to be two places at once.

We will be joining you. This is my promise to you that we'll be joining with you in prayer from afar. That's the cool part about prayer. It's like Zoom, only so much better.

We can join together in prayer. So I encourage you to come out this Tuesday night here at the church at 645. We're going to be joining together in prayer for our church and our community, and everyone is welcome.

This is not an exclusive group by any means. I'm grateful to Calvin Enochson and Joanne Kinoshita for leading that on behalf of our church. That's it.

The end. Everybody go home. This morning we're continuing in our ongoing sermon series, Acts to All the Worlds. We're continuing to dig into the history of the church together to see what we can learn from the people, places, and events that we read about.

[ 2 : 15 ] So here we are again. I'm jumping ahead a little bit. We've only got a few weeks left, so I need to maximize our time. So we're jumping a bit ahead this morning, and we're going to skip over Acts 25 and Acts 26, those two chapters.

But, fear not, I'm going to summarize those a bit for you right now, briefly, before we continue. So first, a brief summary of Acts chapter 25, and you can turn to it if you want.

Portius Festus was a new proconsul that we learned about briefly last week. So he arrives in Jerusalem, and he's met with the demands of Jewish leaders to bring Paul, the apostle Paul, to trial. So, and then we also learned that they hope to ambush and kill Paul as he's being transported. So when Festus suggests that Paul be moved to Jerusalem, Paul, aware of his rights as a Roman citizen, he appeals directly to Caesar.

So he's appealing to the highest possible authority for his case to be heard. So King Herod Agrippa II and his sister Bernice, so interesting contrast there, right?

[ 3 : 28 ] Agrippa and Bernice. It's kind of funny. I had to chuckle when I read it. So Agrippa II and his sister Bernice arrive in Caesarea, and Festus discusses his dilemma with them, right?

He's got the situation he's dealing with. So he admits that Paul's case revolves around religious disputes and Jesus' resurrection. These are the main issues.

And so this is something, these are things that he's not too sure about, so he confesses that. Festus then introduces Paul to King Agrippa and Bernice and local dignitaries.

So he gathers everybody together and brings Paul in. Festus expresses his hope that Agrippa might help frame charges against Paul that could then be sent to Caesar.

So that chapter then ends on a bit of a cliffhanger because we wait then for Paul's defense before King Agrippa. So Acts 25 actually sees Paul facing new trials and tribulations.

[ 4 : 32 ] He stands before Festus and then King Agrippa, and we witness his unwavering commitment to both truth and justice. So this chapter reveals how God can use even the intricacies of legal and political systems to ensure the spread of the gospel.

It's very, very interesting. Then in Acts 26, Paul is given permission by King Agrippa to share his personal testimony. So Paul shares from his background as a Pharisee to his dramatic encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus.

Paul speaks of his calling to preach to the Gentiles, his obedience to that calling, and then his message of repentance and conversion and faith in Christ.

Paul boldly asserts that his preaching is consistent with the promises of God that were made to their Jewish ancestors. And then in response to Paul's message, Festus accuses him of madness. He says, you are crazy. So Paul asserts his sanity. He appeals to Agrippa's knowledge of the events. So he goes around Festus to Agrippa.

[ 5 : 50 ] Agrippa acknowledges Paul's persuasive speech. And in the chapter, if you read it, Agrippa is almost convinced to become a Christian himself, which is very interesting.

And then Paul expresses his wish that all who hear him would become like he is, except for his chains, of course. That's the part he doesn't wish on anyone.

So in Acts 26, the Apostle Paul seizes this opportunity to share his dramatic testimony, present the gospel to King Agrippa and the court.

It's such a powerful example of the transformative work of Christ. How believers can, in every situation, even in trials and tribulations, use those situations as platforms and opportunities to share the good news.

Our passage for this morning is found in Acts 27, verses 1 to 44. And you're pretty much there as I hear people leafing in pages. Acts 27, 1 to 44.

[ 6 : 58 ] If you want to turn in your Bible or grab a Bible from the pew in front of you, and I'll read it for us as well. When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the imperial regiment.

We boarded a ship from Adrametium, about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us.

The next day we landed at Sidon, and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they may provide for his needs. From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us.

When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board.

We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving at Sidness. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete opposite Salmone.

[ 8 : 08 ] We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fairhavens near the town of Lassia. Much time had been lost and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Day of Atonement.

So Paul warned them, Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to the ship and cargo and to our own lives also.

But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there.

This was a harbor in Crete facing both southwest and northwest. When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity, so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. 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.

[ 9 : 12 ] As we passed to the lee of a small island of Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure, so the men hoisted it aboard. Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together.

Because they were afraid, they would run along a ground on the sandbars of Sirtis. They lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. We took such a violent battering from the storm

that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard.

On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said, Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete. Then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss.

But now, I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost. Only the ship will be destroyed. Last night, an angel of God, to whom I belong, to the God of whom I belong and whom I serve, stood beside me and said, Do not be afraid, Paul.

[10:25] You must stand trial before Caesar. And God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you. So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.

Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island. On the 14th night, we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea when, about midnight, the sailors sensed they were approaching land.

They took soundings and found that the water was 120 feet deep. A short time later, they took soundings again and found that it was 90 feet deep.

Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow.

Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved. So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it drift away.

[11:29] Just before dawn, Paul urged them all to eat. For the last 14 days, he said, you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food. You haven't eaten anything.

Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head. After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all.

Then he broke it and began to eat. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves.

Altogether, there were 276 of us on board. When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.

When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders.

Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.

[12:40] The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan.

He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. The rest were to get there on planks or on other pieces of the ship. In this way, everyone reached land safely.

That's quite a story. Our sermon this morning is titled, ironically, A Very Stormy Voyage. We're going to explore some of these really dramatic events together this morning.

So after Paul had defended himself before King Agrippa with Festus and his sister, who's King Agrippa's sister again? Bernice. Perfect.

They agreed that Paul hadn't done anything that would warrant either imprisonment or death, which these people that were against Paul, they wanted some or both of those things.

[13:45] But because Paul had appealed to Caesar himself, he was kept in custody, and then he needed to be sent to Rome. Caesar is not going to come to Paul.

Paul needed to be brought to him. So Luke, the author of this book, of course, he goes into a lot of detail about the sea voyage to Rome.

Perhaps you caught it as I read it. It's highlighted by a shipwreck, which was something Paul had previously experienced. So if you're someone who has taken a plane that had some turbulence, maybe you would think, I'm not going to fly anymore.

But Paul had been in rough waters on boats before. And so it's not like they had a lot of transportation options, right? He couldn't take the Concorde. So he just was willing to do what

needed to be done.

So the central theme of Luke's account in this chapter, I believe, is God's providence. God's providence. Especially in preserving and protecting Paul for his Roman testimony.

[14:51] God had a plan for Paul, and he was going to make it happen. So let's begin to unpack some of these events, and we'll see what we can learn together.

So from Caesarea to Sidon, that was the first leg of this journey. Paul was delivered, we read, to a centurion named Julius. Also kind of a fun name for a centurion.

Maybe he wore orange, then he would have been... Thank you. So Paul was delivered to this centurion named Julius, along with other prisoners, we read.

And we can tell also that Luke was along for the ride. How can we tell that? The use of the word... Anyone? We.

So you hear this in this account. It's being narrated, and we hear the word *we*, which means Luke was along for the ride. So we can tell that from *we*.

[15:52] So they set sail from a place called Adrametium. If you see that in the text, I had to write it phonetically in my notes because I wanted to make sure I pronounced it right. Adrametium.

So it's a seaport on the western coast of modern-day Turkey. So that gives you some geographical context. And we read that a Macedonian man from Thessalonica named Aristarchus was also with them.

I don't know why. Luke includes that, because Aristarchus is not mentioned again. But the next day, they stop at Sidon. And Sidon was a Phoenician seaport that was 22 miles south of another city that's prominent in Scripture called Tyre.

So we often hear Tyre and Sidon mentioned together as a pair. So Julius, Orange Julius the Centurion, was overseeing Paul. He was kind to him, right?

Again, here's a Roman acting un-Roman to a prisoner. So he was kind to Paul. He allowed him to see his friends so that they could care for him and meet his needs.

[16:56] There's care and grace at work there. So the next leg of this voyage, they set sail again from Sidon. And since the wind really wasn't cooperating, the passage tells us, they passed by the island of Cyprus on the sheltered side.

So they were trying to escape the wind. Then they sailed across the open sea, which is really dangerous in rough seas, sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia.

And remember, Paul had been born in a place called Tarsus of Cilicia. So this was Paul's home stomping grounds they were in. And then they passed to Pamphylia before eventually arriving at Myra of Licia, the passage tells us.

So then at Myra, we read that they transferred to an Alexandrian. And if that doesn't mean anything to you, try Egyptian, right? So an Egyptian ship headed for Italy.

And this probably would have been, it's easy to make this assumption, a larger vessel that was intended for open water, right? So they had been in a smaller vessel and they came to transfer to this larger one.

[18:09] So strong winds continued to hamper their progress, we read. It forced them to sail slowly over many days before they arrived with difficulty off the coast of the peninsula city of Nidus.

And that's modern day southwestern Turkey. So we're in this area around Turkey. So they were fighting the wind again and they passed by the sheltered side, again, of the Greek island of Crete. And so if you know that area, you may know of the island of Crete. And they landed in a place called Fair Havens, the scripture tells us. And this was an open bay near the city of Lacia on the southern coast of Crete.

So again, a geographical reference point. I think we can all agree, can't we, so far, that this was not an easy trip, right? Does that sound right?

Heavy winds had forced them to sail on the sheltered side of Cyprus. And then difficult winds again forced them towards Crete. And all of this intensity, all of this adversity, the worst was yet to come, my friends.

[19:26] So Paul advised against, you heard this in the passage, against sailing further at the time that they arrived. Because Paul said the conditions were dangerous.

He warned the group that continuing on would end in disaster. He spelled it out. He said that they would lose cargo and their ship and even their lives.

And so instead of listening to Paul, I would have listened to Paul, instead of listening to him, the centurion followed the advice of the ship's pilot. So that's the helmsman, right? And the owner of the ship. And then we read that since they couldn't just stay in the port for the winter, a majority of the group decided they should just continue on to a place called Phoenix, which was a harbor on the island of Crete.

So we read that a gentle south wind picked up. So they really saw it as their chance to head out along the shore of Crete. But then again, it wasn't long before a hurricane force wind blew in and caught the ship.

[ 20 : 36 ] So then rather than battling the wind, I don't know if there are any sailors in the group. I took very basic sailboat lessons as a young person. And boy, if there is no wind, you're dead in the water.

If there's lots of wind, you're terrified. Because you'll get flipped, you'll get tossed, all kinds of things. So they just gave up, right? They just said, okay, these winds are intense.

We're not going to win fighting. We're just going to let them carry us along. So they passed by the sheltered side of an island called Kada. And then we read that they couldn't secure their lifeboat, right?

Whether it was banging against the side of the ship or what it was doing, they brought it on board. And the seas were so rough, we also read, that men passed ropes under the ship and presumably wrapped the ship in ropes to literally hold the ship together in the storm.

That is terrifying. So fearing they might run aground on the sandbars of Sirtis, this is a sandy shoal off the African coast of a place called Cyrene, they lowered the sails and the sea anchor.

[ 21 : 46 ] So a sea anchor is dropped. It's not necessarily the regular way you'd view an anchor. Sea anchor is to stabilize the ship and still allow it to move. So they let the storm drive the ship, right?

Again, scary. So the storm, we read, continued into the next day and it was beating the ship up so badly that they first started throwing cargo overboard to lighten the ship, right?

That was the goal. Then we read that they threw the ship's tackle, it says in lots of translations.

That's the ship's ropes and other equipment, right? So they're now getting to the point where, I don't think we need the barcalounger, we'll throw that over.

We might need these ropes for the sails, but we might also die, so let's just be lighter, right?

Throwing stuff overboard. And we read that the storm raged for many days.

The cloud cover was so bad that it obscured both the sun during the day and the stars at night. It seemed as though all hope was lost.

[ 22 : 55 ] So after the crew had gone a long time without food, Paul got up and essentially said, well, told you so. We don't read that anyone tried to choke Paul, but you can imagine they were pretty annoyed.

So he says that if only you had listened to me and stayed put, we could have avoided all this stuff, right? Again, not a great way to make friends.

But then we learn right away that after the scolding, Paul then began to encourage them. He assured them then that no one would die, none of them would die, but that the ship would be destroyed.

Paul then says that he had a vision and that an angel from God, Paul takes the opportunity right away to get some gospel in there, the God to whom Paul belonged, the God to whom Paul served, that angel, a messenger from his God, told him not to be afraid because he would be spared for his meeting, his appointment with Caesar.

And in fact, fortunately, by association, God was protecting all of Paul's companions as well. Great to be under God's umbrella protection, right?

[ 24 : 12 ] Stand next to Paul. Paul said there that they could have confidence in this vision that God had given them, but that they would need to run aground on a certain island.

So right away, you don't think, sailors don't necessarily go, yeah, let's crash. That'd be a great idea, right? But I think at this point, they're thinking, listen to the God vision guy because he seems to know what he's talking about.

So after 14 nights in the Adriatic Sea, we read that the sailors took depth soundings. So these are measurements off the side of the ship. They lower probably a weight attached to a rope.

They drop back up, figure out how far it went down to be able to tell how deep the ship, how deep the ocean is beneath the ship. So we read that they took these depth soundings after midnight that helped them determine that they were close to land.

They were getting close to land. But then they were afraid of running aground on the rocks. So they dropped four anchors from the stern of the ship and just prayed for day to come.

[ 25 : 19 ] Have you ever been there in a situation of tension? I used to work many years ago, feels like a lifetime ago now, for Alberta Environment. So I was in the communications team and a bunch of us went up to Fort Mac with a bunch of science people.

So we all knew each other well. Very small, twin engine plane. Very stormy over Fort Mac. So we fly from Edmonton up to Fort McMurray.

We get close and the wings are starting to move and everyone's starting to look pale. Some were shades of green. I think I turned plaid.

We're scared, very scared. And so the pilot came on and said, well, folks, I don't have to tell you this, but it's super rough over Fort Mac. I don't know if I can land.

But he said, I'm going to do my best. And he said, we may just have to turn back. So he said, get ready, basically. So we could feel that he circled around, back over to where he needed to begin the descent.

[ 26 : 27 ] And it was really rough. And then the plane plummeted, dove almost straight down, banked around super tight, and came into the runway.

We were all very quiet. As we walked down the steps of that plane and towards the arrival area, I sidled up to one of my colleagues, one of the science people, and I said, do you think you were going to die?

And he said, yep, I totally did. And over the course of a day or so, we learned that most of us thought we were done. So it was terrifying. So maybe you've been in a situation like that.

I hope not. But they were clinging to themselves and one another just praying for day to come, praying that this would all be over. So the sailors then, we read, pretended to be lowering a lifeboat for a different reason.

You know, maybe we're going to put some anchors over the side of this lifeboat. But they were actually planning to bail, to leave, to get out of there. And then Paul sees this happening, and he alerts the centurion and the soldiers to the plan that they're trying to get away.

[ 27 : 47 ] He warns them that unless everyone stays with the ship, they cannot be saved. It's pretty important information. The soldiers, we read, cut the ropes of the lifeboat and let it drift away.

Right? So you can imagine the people that thought the lifeboat was their best chance were now very concerned. Then we read that they'd all been fasting for 14 days.

Now, I don't know if you're a nervous eater. I'm not particularly. So you can understand, if you think you're going to die, maybe you're not looking for a snack. But Paul recognizes and begins to beg them to eat because morning is coming soon.

Paul was clear to them that they needed to eat to survive. Need to eat to survive. Fellas, connect the dots. Then we read, Paul took some bread, he gave thanks to God, he broke it, and began to eat.

The rest of the men, 276 of them, were encouraged by Paul's actions, his words, and they ate too. And when everyone was well fed, then we read that they threw the grain from making the bread overboard to lighten the ship.

[ 29 : 05 ] Right? Everybody full? Good. Get rid of that stuff. So with land nearby, people's spirits seemed to be lifted by Paul's words.

He had reassured them. Their bodies had been nourished and energized with food. So the 276 people on the ship were ready to face what the next day would bring.

They didn't recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a beach. Land ho, right? It turned out to be the island of Malta, which is located south of Sicily.

Planning to run the ship onto the beach, we read they cast off anchors, loosened the rudder ropes, hoisted the mainsail to the wind, right?

Presumably to drive them well onto the shore, and they headed in. We read they struck a sandbar, not amazing. The bow became stuck there and immovable, and that the stern was beginning to be chewed up by violent waves.

[ 30 : 12 ] Rather than let them all escape, the soldiers intended to kill the prisoners. The centurion stopped them. He remembered what Paul had said.

He remembered Paul's words and his warning that came from God, and he wanted to save Paul. The centurion, we read, ordered everyone who could swim to jump overboard first and to get to land.

If you can swim, go. For everyone else, he encouraged them to use boards, other parts of the ship, whatever they needed, to float, to help get them safely there.

And our passage concludes with the words, in this way, everyone arrive to land safely. Crazy story. Crazy. Crazy acts, right? Book of Acts is crazy. So who stands out? One character that stands out in this story, I think, is Julius the centurion.

[ 31 : 18 ] He treated Paul kindly. He didn't have to. He gave him freedom to see his friends and receive care. Paul was a prisoner and could have been treated, frankly, however he saw fit, but he showed him care and grace.

Well, he didn't listen to Paul when Paul first advised, bad idea, let's not do this. He eventually listened to Paul when the sailors tried to sneak off the ship, right?

He came around to Paul's message. He saved Paul and the other prisoners when his own men wanted to kill them. Maybe obvious, but who else stands out?

The apostle Paul gave advice to stay at Fair Havens. Do you think everyone should have listened? Probably. Paul's visitation by an angel of God let Paul know all that would happen.

Paul was faithful in communicating that message. Ultimately, his advice to the sailors helped save everyone on board. He urged everyone to eat and his gratitude to God encouraged everyone on board as well.

[ 32 : 34 ] God's providence, I think, my friends, is seen in how he is a good soldier to provide for a faithful apostle. How he used a storm and a shipwreck to demonstrate the value of a person's faith in God, to bless many souls.

So many things we can take away from this passage today, but mainly I want you to consider this. Who or what are you listening to in your life?

Who are the people whose voices and opinions influence and direct you? Are those godly voices? Are the people you listen to directed and influenced by the Holy Spirit?

Or are they listening to the wrong voices themselves? My friends, sinful, selfish, or prideful motives can often arrive to us looking like a person's best intentions.

But even someone's purest motives can lead to disaster when they are not aligned with God. Listen to the truth of Scripture as you dig into God's Word as we've done this morning.

[ 34 : 00 ] God's words will never steer you wrong. If you don't have godly people in your life whose intentions and motives are aligned with God's, find some.

Because then you will truly be receiving godly counsel. Above all, ask God to direct your steps and lead you in the direction He wants you to go.

Amen.