World Wide Witness: Faith Mission

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[0:00] Follow along in your Bibles. When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some of the other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment.

We boarded a ship from Adramitim, about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. A 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 might 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'd 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 off Cindus. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete opposite Salmon.
[1:20] We moved along the coast with difficulty, and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lycia. Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous, because by now it was after the fast.

So Paul warned them, Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous, and bring great loss to 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 the owner of the ship.
Since the harbour was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbour in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest.
When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had obtained what they wanted. So they weighed anchor, and sailed along the shore of Crete. Before very long, a wind of hurricane force called a northeaster, swept down from the island.
The ship was caught by the storm, and we could not head into the wind, so we gave way to it, and were driven along. As we passed to the lee of a small island, called Cowda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure.
[2:42] When the men had hoisted it aboard, they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Fearing that they would run aground on the sandbars of Cyrus, 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 the men 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.
[3:44] Last night, an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, Do not be afraid, Paul. 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 it was 90 feet deep. Feeling that we would be dashed against the rocks,

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they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight.
In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors left 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 fall away. Just before dawn, Paul urged them all to eat. For the last 14 days, he says, you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food.
[5:10] 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. All together, 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 struck fast and would not move. And the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf. 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.
[6:29] He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. The rest were to get there on planks or on pieces of the ship. In this way, everyone reached land.

In safety. What an incredible journey. But why has Luke, who was on board the boat, we see that from verse 1 when he says, it was decided that we should set sail.
So this is an eyewitness account. He was present with them. Why does he give such a detailed account? Why does he go through giving us every port and harbour?
Why does he go into all the details of the conditions of the seas and the wind patterns and the northeaster coming down off the island? Why all the detail of throwing cargo and tackle overboard? Why could he not simply write, and we sailed from Caesarea and arrived in Rome? We'd still get the same point.
[7:36] What's the big deal? Well, as we partner God in his mission, it's never going to be plain sailing.

As we venture out with God, we will face many difficulties and disappointments in life. And the big question that we want to ask as we come to the text is what's going to keep our heads above water when everything seems out of control and we are surrounded by chaos?
What's going to keep us and what's going to sustain us as God's people who are committed to his mission in his world? Well, Luke writes in such detail to show us that when storms come, it is faith in God's word that will keep his servants.
That's what I want us to remember. When storms come in life, it is faith in God's word that is going to keep his servants.
the anchor that we need in our lives when all else is being tossed about and thrown about, the anchor that we need is the rock-solid certainty of God's word.
[9:05] This is where our faith should rest and this is where our focus should be. Now, I think there are three big themes that splash out from this text to us.

First, the assuring comfort of God's word. These are our, if you like, three anchors that we need in our life.
First, the assuring comfort of God's word. Look back quickly to what God had said to Paul in chapter 23 verse 11. 23 verse 11.
This is following Paul's time in Jerusalem. He's already faced three threats to his life and in the midst of it all we read this 23 verse 11.
The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, spoke his word to Paul, take courage as you have testified about me in Jerusalem so you must also testify in Rome.
[10:14] So God has spoken so clearly to Paul you are going to get to Rome. But once they start the journey on the sea chapter 27 verse 9 we read that much time had been lost and sailing had

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already become dangerous because by now it was after the fast.

Sailing was usually abandoned between the months of November and March because of winter storms people didn't sail. It's now at the end of October we know that because it was after the fast that was the fast of the atonement Yom Kippur and Paul being an experienced traveller could tell what was ahead.
Look at the rest of verse 9 so Paul warned them men I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo and to our own lives also.
Now I don't think it's speculation to say that Paul along with all the rest of the crew are fearing for their lives. God may have said to him you will go to Rome but the sea has become so dangerous that he is now fearing for his life.
In fact Paul's assessment of the weather proves to be right verse 14 before very long a wind of hurricane force called the northeaster swept down from the island.
[11:48] So strong was this wind that they were caught up they couldn't go against it they were just taken along by the wind way out into the sea just off the coast of north africa. They passed verse 16 an island called Kauda we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure and when the men had hoisted aboard they had to pass ropes underneath the ship itself to hold it together.

Yes Paul knew what God had said but the frightening and terrifying conditions around him are telling a completely different story. fear has swamped him and it's taken over his thinking verse 20 when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging we finally gave up all hope of being saved.
They think they are going to die it seems God's word counts for absolutely nothing. Now thankfully none of us I hope will never have to endure a hurricane on the sea but life can sometimes feel like a hurricane.
As we go through life we find it delivers all kinds of disappointments and difficulty we feel battered and bruised and we begin to doubt what God's word has actually said and rather than God being with us maybe we feel God has abandoned us completely and we give up all hope.
God knows the situation and he brings comfort to Paul's life and he speaks comfort into our life by confirming his word.
[13:53] Verse 23 Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said do not be afraid Paul you must stand trial before Caesar and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.

You see as the boat rocks and as the wind blows and the waves begin to come over how comforting and reassuring is God's word in the midst of this storm.
Do not be afraid you must stand trial before Caesar. You will get through this and you will get to Rome.
There's no doubts no questions no ifs no buts just the clear calm and comforting truth that God will do what he said he would do and nothing is going to interfere with it.
And so as we go on our mission with God as we've taken up the call to follow him as we journey through life as God's people we need to know that God is completely in sovereign control over our individual lives over the church that we are in and in the world in which we live and what God wills for us he will do and nothing and no one will be able to stand in its way not even the greatest hurricane force winds don't be afraid you will get to Rome God will preserve and God will keep his servants for the task that he has called them to and he will preserve this church and he will keep this church and nothing and no one will stand in the way of the mission that God has called us to so we need the assuring comfort of God's words speaking into our lives the second anchor that we need is the sustaining reminder of God's word to prove
[16:28] God's control and sovereignty over his creation God steps in and he stops the storm look at verse 26 and God spoke and the seas calmed and he stirred up a wind from the east and they sailed safely onto Rome is that what your Bible says it doesn't say that in mine either don't worry let's read what verse 26 says nevertheless we must run aground on some island don't worry guys we're going to get shipwrecked in fact the storm is only going to get worse the threat of sand banks and rocks is going to become a reality the force of this storm is going to smash the boats to pieces and we're going to be thrown up onto the beach like a drowned rat God doesn't always calm the storm but he's always our comfort in the storm he could have stopped the waves at any moment he did it before we've read it in the gospels he could have proved his authority over the wind but through his word he reminds us that he will sustain us on our mission on our journey with

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God when everything else is chaos all around us he will sustain his people you know five times in Acts Paul receives a direct word from God and by that I mean he hears an audible voice from God but it's never about who he's going to marry and it's not about what church he should join the five things he hears the first two voices that from God comes are clear directions about his mission his call to be a witness for Jesus and the last three times he hears a voice from God are words that will sustain him in his mission so back in chapter 18 I think it is verse 9 where Paul has just faced difficulty after difficulty prison and beating God comes to him and speaks to him in an audible voice and he says do not be afraid

I have many people in this city then when he is being threatened with his own life in Jerusalem which we read just now God comes to him and he speaks to him in an audible voice take courage you will testify about me in Rome and then the third occasion when he's in the middle of the storm God says do not be afraid you must stand trial before Caesar you see as we partner God in his mission as we go through our life with him there are times we just think it's all doomed to failure what's the point I've witnessed I've taught I've spoken I've tried and nothing's happened there's nothing to show for it and we need to be reminded of God's sustaining word don't be afraid take courage

I will accomplish my mission the church will grow I will save my people keep witnessing keep being faithful and I will sustain you in your lives so that's the second anchor the sustaining reminder of God's word the third anchor is the saving hope of God's word you see God's word is not just spoken to Paul here it's a word spoken to Paul which is to be spoken to everybody on board the boat God speaks comfort to Paul he sustains Paul but now Paul speaks this saving hope to everybody else who's with him verse 22 he says now I urge you to keep up your courage because not one of you will be lost not one of you will be lost only the ship will be destroyed well how could he give such a promise as that because of what God had said verse 24 you must stand trial before Caesar and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you this is the saving hope of God's word rescue and safety is what they're all wanting and God through his word promises to do just that in fact when they're all tempted to doubt

God's word Paul reminds them of what God had already said in verse 34 he says I urge you to take some food you need it to survive not one of you will lose a single hair from his head in other words you're all going to be preserved and even when people began to choose to ignore what God's word had said God still delivers on his promise nothing will stop his word taking effect so verse 42 the soldiers planned to kill the prisoners and 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 pieces of the ship in this way everyone everyone reached land in safety life belts and life boats were of little use in this situation they needed something or someone that would rescue them someone who would save them and God in his grace enables everyone on board that ship 276 of them to be saved everything else in the story suggests that they're going to die to be saved but God's word is their saving hope now I understand that this salvation was primarily physical and temporal it saved their physical lives from the storm and it saved them in that particular storm there's no suggestion or evidence that any of the people on board became followers of [23:43] Christ I don't think revival broke out maybe they did we don't know well what I do think we can say is that the application here is this that God's word is a saving and a redemptive word his word is always a saving word because that's the kind of God that he is as he speaks he speaks to save people to rescue people in fact we know as we follow through acts that as people spoke God's word people came to experience salvation in a deeper and in a greater way his word saves us spiritually and eternally yes he saved them through the storm here and he brought them through the hurricane but ultimately it is God's word that is going to save us from the storm of God's wrath and it's his word that is going to save us through life and bring us to our eternal home

God will do that he speaks to give people hope and that's what we have in the midst of the storm God speaking his saving hope to the people helpless and hopeless as we may be that's the power of God's word so there we have three anchors to hold on to in the midst of the storm in which we're in but the question I come to here and what we can ask ourselves now is how does this become a reality for me how do we experience what Paul experienced not in the sense of how do I manage to get into a storm but how can God's word affect me and change me as it did to Paul and those who were with him well it comes simply through faith in what

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God says faith in what God says look at verse 25 he says keep up your courage men for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me it will happen just as he told me this isn't wishful thinking this is based on the sure and certain truth that God will do what he said he will do God is always faithful to his word he cannot contradict his word he cannot forget his word he will always deliver on the things that he says what he says he will do and therefore we can trust him with our lives but how do we do that well I think this is a wonderful little parable it's true to the story but I think it's also like a parable showing us how we can experience this same things we've got to act on his word look at verse 30 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 you see
God had spoken his word of promise hadn't he he had spoken it that God had graciously given to Paul everybody who was with them and that they would all be kept safe but the only way that they could experience that safety the only way to make that a reality in their lives was to put God's word to the test it was only by having faith in what God said he would do so you put yourselves in that situation the storm going lifeboat God's word on the other side saying stay in the boat you'll be kept safe lifeboat what am I going to do verse 20 verse 32 so the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it drift away you see true faith holds on to what God says it acts on what God has promised it steps out when everything else is saying no it allows us to take these massive steps of so called risk but it's not risk it's trust in what
God has said letting go of all of our securities and all the things that we want to hold on to and trusting in the very word of God that's how we experience his assuring comfort and his sustaining reminder and saving hope in faith we act on what God has said you see Luke could have easily have written and we sailed from Caesarea to Rome and we travelled up to meet Caesar but he didn't he wrote this an amazing account this detailed account an adventure but it's there to remind us that when the storms come as threats come to the mission of God when obstacles are thrown in front of us in our life it is faith in God's word that will keep and sustain his servants the anchor that we need in our lives when all else is being tossed and thrown about is the rock solid certainty of God's word this is where our face should rest and this is where our eyes should be focused let's pray together our father
[30:36] God in a time when so many words fail us when the words of others whether it be the government and promises that they make words that just fail and do not stand up even our own words fail we thank you for the reminder this morning that your word is the anchor it's what we hold on to because it is sure and it is certain it will always accomplish what you say it to do so father this morning we come to you afresh forgive us for not trusting you forgive us for holding on to our own little securities help us even in that picture there to cut those securities to cut the ropes that tie us to other things and to other people and to trust completely in the word of

God help us to do that sustain us and keep us as we journey through life whatever storm may come and thank you that you will do that as you have promised in jesus name amen we're going to

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