

Shipwreck

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Date: 06 July 2025

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[0:00] Amen. I don't know if you've noticed in life, but there's no shortage of sort of nautical sayings, sayings from like being on a ship. So here's a few for you. All hands on deck, teamwork, let's all work together to get the job done. All hands on deck.

Or perhaps you might say in the same boat, if somebody's experiencing something similar that you're going through. Or learn the ropes.

Maybe start a new job and someone's like, you're going to learn the ropes today. Plane sailing. Life's going pretty well. Things are plane sailing for us.

The way ahead feels calm at the moment. And opposite to that, batten down the hatches. A storm is coming. Stormy weather or stormy situation of one kind or another.

[1:28] We're going to batten down the hatches. Get prepared. Keep ourselves safe. Or perhaps we might be left high and dry. A tricky situation to get out of when a ship is stuck on dry land.

Not at sea. Or maybe at times you feel, oh, let's see. Confused. Not sure what's going on. Well, this morning, I give them to you because we need to be prepared for some shipping metaphors.

Some nautical sayings. As we read that passage, I wonder what you made of it. It's exciting, isn't it? An exciting, dramatic tale.

Dr. Luke writes it brilliantly. He is there here. He says, we. That means Luke was there. He was aboard this ship. So he's got first-hand experience of it.

But this passage could also leave us feeling a bit all at sea. A bit confused. Why is this here? Why is this passage going to help me tomorrow morning?

[2:35] I'm not going to be on a ship. I'm not going to be on a shipwreck tomorrow. It's not likely a hurricane is going to come to Brighton tomorrow. So what's this got to do with me?

How's this going to help me as I live the Christian life this week? Well, this morning, we really do need to have all hands on deck. Have the passage open in front of you.

And the Holy Spirit will be with us and help us to understand how it does speak to us. This is God's word for us this morning. How have we got to this situation?

Just to fill you in, in case you've missed the last few weeks. From chapter 21, we've been following the Apostle Paul on his journey to Rome.

He's not there yet. He's heading there. And he's heading there because he found himself imprisoned and on trial. And as we've seen over recent weeks, the big issue as he's on trial, as people oppose him, doesn't so much seem to be with his behavior, but to do with what he believes.

[3:48] He believes in the resurrection. He believes in the gospel, that Jesus died and rose again. And those who trust in him will themselves be raised from the dead. During Paul's trials, he pleads to be a Roman citizen, which is why here he's embarking a ship on the way to Rome to plead his cause before Caesar.

The destination might be clear for Paul. He's going to Rome. But as we've seen and as we'll continue to see this week, the journey's not particularly easy.

At first, in this chapter, as they aboard the ship, things seem okay. They set sail. They get going. They make pretty good progress. Here's a map of the whole journey of this chapter. They make good progress. They leave from Caesarea and they head up past sort of Turkey area and then approach towards Crete.

But then things get a little bit tricky. Things begin to slow down. Have a look there in verse 7. A little bit of drama there.

[5:27] They end up landing in Crete at a place called Fairhavens, we're told. A little bit of drama, but nothing sort of Hollywood movie type thing.

But then Paul warns them, don't go on. Don't keep sailing because this is not going to be a good time of year to sail.

Do you see verse 10 where Paul warns 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. Okay, so Paul's concern is that it is around sort of Day of Atonement time.

It's mid-October. We're getting into autumn-winter territory. Storms will be around. This is not a good time. This is wisdom of Paul's years.

[6:33] He's been on various ships. According to a passage in Corinthians, he's been in three shipwrecks, including this one. I don't know where it falls in the three. He's a seasoned traveler.

So his wisdom says, don't carry on. They choose to ignore that and they continue. And verse 13 feels like it was a good choice to continue.

When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity. So they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. But that verse is very much the calm before the storm.

See what happens in verse 14. Here's where the storm arrives. Before very long, a wind of hurricane force called the Northeaster swept down from the islands.

We're in stormy territory here. We're in hurricane territory here. This is getting dramatic. This is the stuff that Hollywood would love.

[7:39] And notice as we go through the next verses, the drama continues. Verse 16. They couldn't hold their lifeboat secure, so they hoisted it on board.

That's surely not a good thing. In verse 18, you'd read the ship takes such a violent battering. They end up throwing cargo away, which for the owner of the ship is not good.

It must be desperate because that cargo is going to give him precious money, precious income from the sailing. And then in verse 20, we're told the storm did not give in for so long that it hadn't seen the stars in the sky or the sun shining.

It was dark. It was hard. And at the end of the storm. And at the end of the verse 20, we read, we finally gave up all hope of being saved. There's no hope for them here.

No hope in this storm. It's dramatic. And verse 21 even tells us they hadn't eaten for a very long time.

[8:49] How's this, though? In the wonderful drama that it is, how's this going to help us tomorrow?

Well, this morning, some of us may feel a little bit like we're in a situation like this. Not literally on a stormy boat and hurricane winds, but we might feel we're in a stormy trial.

We might feel like we're looking ahead at the rest of today and tomorrow and just feeling like things feel so dark. It doesn't feel like there's any hope for me in the situation that I'm in right now.

Some of us will be going through stormy trials as we meet together in this way this morning. For others of us, that's not where we're at at the moment.

But if your life is like mine, at some point it will happen. The Bible doesn't say we're going to live a life of ease and luxury here.

[9:56] We're to expect stormy trials. And so, in this passage, I think we find an anchor in the storm.

Even though they said we have no hope, we do find there is hope in the storm. Let that be an encouragement for us this morning as we go through.

If that's where we're at at the moment, let that help us and prepare us for when stormy trials come in the future if we're not there yet. There is literally real anchors here in this passage.

There is in verse 17. I don't know if you spotted it. They passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together because they were afraid they would run aground.

They lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. There's an anchor there. And then we read of four anchors later on in the passage. There are literal anchors.

[11:07] But as we'll see, these anchors don't stop this ship from shipwreck. So where do we find a solid, firm, secure anchor in the storm that's going to keep us safe?

That's going to keep us holding on as we walk the Christian life? Well, I think we see it as Paul speaks from verse 22.

Let's read what he says. Verse 22. 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 the God to whom I belong and to 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 ye.

So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. The anchor in the storm for Paul is that he has faith in his great God.

[12:23] In the one who himself has made the seas, who is sovereign over the weather. And his God says to him, Do not be afraid, Paul.

You and all on the ship will be safe. The ship won't. That's not going to be safe, but the lives on the ship will be. You and all 275 others.

And I think these verses help us for our own stormy trials.

Three things. Three things as we find our anchor in the Lord. Hold on to God's promises. Hold on to God's promises. That's what Paul was doing here.

The Lord had come to him and said, Do not be afraid. You will be kept safe. He promised to graciously keep him and the lives on this ship. And when we're in the storms of life, although we might not have the Lord come to us directly and say wonderful promises to us, we have his word and in his word he does share wonderful promises to us.

[13:43] Promises that we can hold on to in the midst of the storm. So in two places at least in the Bible, in Deuteronomy 31 and in Hebrews 13, we're told by the Lord, Never will I leave you nor forsake you.

That's a wonderful promise to hold on to. A promise that God gave to both his old covenant people and his new covenant people. He won't abandon them.

Even when it feels like you're in such a dark storm where it feels like there's no end in sight, like the people on this ship felt. When you've lost all hope and wonder, where is God in this?

Be assured, he is not far away. Never will I leave you nor forsake you, he says. Have faith like Paul does in this God who has created the world and everything in it.

The one who, as we heard earlier, knows all things, knows about how tomorrow will go. Knows the beginning of your stormy trial to the end of your stormy trial.

[14:53] And he promises to keep all those that are his children safe and secure in his hands.

So at the end of the service this morning, we'll read those, pray those words from Jude together. To the God who will keep us from stumbling. Paul himself wrote in Philippians chapter 1 and verse 6, He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

And so when we're all at sea, wondering where God is, he has promised that he will complete the work that he has done in you.

He has called you to be his and he will see that work through to completion. And one day you will stand with him and his people in glory.

And the work will be complete. And you will live with him forever. Precious promises of God. And Paul, in some others of his writings, says that all God's promises find their yes and amen in Christ Jesus.

[16:18] In Jesus himself who has proven God's steadfast love for us. As he himself faced his own stormy trial at the cross.

As he faced insult after insult, beating after beating. Hours of agony. Hours of agony. Felt abandoned by his father.

Felt the full force of God's wrath on our sin. Jesus faced that stormy trial for you. For his children.

So be assured that God's love for us is indeed great. Hold on to those precious promises of God in his word.

Which are proven true by the Lord Jesus Christ. Who shows us that he won't leave or forsake us in our sins. He's done something about it to rescue us from our sins.

[17:25] And he himself completed that work on the cross. He didn't once say, I've had enough of this suffering.

I'm just going to leave you all to it. He completed that work. Completed that suffering for us at the cross. And so he will complete the work he's done in you, dear friends.

And so there is light in the darkest trouble. There is certain hope grounded firm in our God. Who has precious promises for us.

In the stormy trials. Hold on to God's promises. Secondly, keep our faith in God. That's what Paul says in verse 24 to these fellow travelers.

God has graciously. Do not be afraid, Paul. God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you. He was told. So verse 25. Keep up your courage, men.

[18:23] For I have faith in God. That it will happen just as he told you. He has faith in his God. In Hebrews 11 verse 1 we're told that faith is confidence in what we hope for.

And assurance of what we do not see. And right now, perhaps even Paul struggled to see how on earth they would get out of this situation.

And yet he had faith. Not in what he looked at. But in his God. The unseen God. And the rest of them, they had given up faith.

They had given up all hope. And you can understand as they looked around at that situation.

Because what follows from what Paul says still doesn't seem very hopeful.

So in verse 27, we're told 14 days had passed when they were still being driven along by the sea.

Still being driven along by the winds. Verse 29.

[19:28] There were fears of being dashed against the rocks. In verse 30. Some of the sailors tried to plot an escape route.

But Paul points out to the centurion. If they escape, none of us will escape. And so they end up taking drastic measures and cutting the lifeboat away.

In verse 33, we're told about 14 days without food. And they're just in constant suspense. Perhaps constantly wondering, are we going to die? There's no hope, is there?

Unless you keep your faith in God. Unless you know Paul's God.

Paul's God who can work great miracles. Remember what he did for the Israelites in the Old Testament when they were held in slavery in Egypt.

[20:33] And perhaps they thought there was no end to their suffering there. Moses went and asked Pharaoh, let my people go.

And God sent these disastrous plagues on the land of Egypt on Pharaoh and his people. One after another after another. When finally after, is it, ten plagues, Pharaoh relented and said, you can go. But then changed his mind and realized what he'd done and was chasing after them. And his people probably thought, well, there's no end to this suffering.

There's no end. And they got to the Red Sea and the Pharaoh and his army weren't far behind them. And they thought, well, how are we going to get through this?

There's a sea in the way. We're stuck. We're going to die. And yet, oh, God has mighty power. Over the sea. And he used Moses to make a pass through the sea in order for his people to escape.

[21:43] Oh, God is a God of miracles. We can keep our faith in him. He has proven it time and time again in the Bible. And I'm sure many of us can share testimonies of how he's proven it in our own lives.

And in the Lord Jesus Christ, we see how our God is full of miracles.

We see our God's power to heal the sick, to walk on water, to feed thousands with just two loaves and a few fishes. We see his power to raise the dead, to raise the dead, to raise the dead, to raise the dead and calm the storm.

Our God has great power. Miraculous power. We can hold on to him. We can keep our faith in him. He has power to even do what is impossible.

So what happens? Verse 39. Verse 39.

[22:48] Have a look. 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 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 boat struck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding surf.

Shipwreck. But then, have a look. Halfway down, verse 43. The centurion 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 safely. We looked at those verses beforehand, and they looked completely hopeless, and then there was shipwreck.

And yet, you read at the end, everyone got to land safely. God had provided. You can have your faith in God.

[23:58] The journey was not easy, but they landed safely. And that's the Christian life. The journey here is not easy, but we will land safely.

Let's keep our faith in God and trust his promises. And finally, see God's provisions. See God's provisions.

During a stormy trial, it may just be hard to see anything around us that's good and positive. And yet, here, even in the midst of this horrible storm, there's all sorts of things we can see where we're like, wow, God's got it.

God's hand on this is brilliant. We can praise him. We can thank him. Perhaps that wasn't really seen until Luke and Paul and others reflected on it afterwards, but we do see it here.

And it's good to recognize God's provisions for us, even through those stormy trials when things seem dark. And it feels like there is no good to be seen.

[25:07] And so we see it in the centurion in this passage. We see it in the centurion. Verse 3.

Have a look at what the centurion allows for Paul. The next day, we landed at Sidon, and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so that they might provide for his needs.

Julius, the centurion provides for Paul, lets him go and spend time in that place with his friends, his probably Christian friends, to provide for his needs.

And later on, the centurion, even though he ignored Paul's advice initially of not carrying on, in verse 31, he very much listens to Paul.

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 and held the lifeboat and let it drift away.

[26:13] The centurion listened to what Paul had to say. Listen to this prisoner. Clearly finding something good about Paul.

And further on than that, the centurion saves Paul's life. Verse 42.

The soldiers plan to kill the prisoners. Paul's a prisoner. To prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life.

And so in order to spare Paul's life, he kept them from carrying out their plan to execute the prisoners. The centurion was used by God to keep Paul safe in this situation.

To keep Paul alive. And so God proves in the provision of this centurion to keep his promise to Paul that all will be well.

[27:14] God said, do not be afraid. You will be safe. You and everyone on this ship. And indeed, that was the case.

I'm sure many of us can testify to how we look back at difficult situations and see God has provided for us. I was thinking about a time in my own life a few years ago.

When I came to the end of studying three years at Bible College, during my three years there, I assumed I would end up in church ministry like this.

But the Lord had other ideas. I moved back home. Back home to where I grew up. My dad wasn't there.

He was in hospital. He was in hospital for some months, it turned out. Had no job. My brother had moved into my bedroom, which I was not happy about, so I had the small room.

[28:14] And I was just like, God, why have you put me back here? What am I going to do? Have I wasted these three years studying at Bible College? But the following Sunday at an evening church service, words from Matthew 6 were read out.

Words, you'll know them well. Well, do not worry. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own, but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

And in that moment, I felt the extraordinary peace of God's as those precious words were read. Precious promises of God were read.

A few weeks later, I got a job at Tesco. That's not how I thought God would provide for me, and that's not how I wanted him to provide.

But he did provide. Do not worry about tomorrow. Your heavenly father knows what you need. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.

[29:30] He will provide for you. And Paul and the people in this ship could testify to that. Do you see that? In verse 33. Just before dawn, Paul urged them all to eat.

For the last 14 days, he said, you've 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. Do not worry, he says to them. Perhaps remembering the words of the Lord Jesus that we just shared.

You won't lose a single hair from your head. You can eat. You need the strength. And you know what? Verse 35 may even remind us of another meal in the Bible.

[30:28] He took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. Now I don't think this was a communion service.

Don't mishear me. But in Luke's writing, I wonder whether Luke wants us to recall the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper that we've got laid before us today to share together.

As the Lord Jesus, to a group of 12 disciples, took bread and shared it amongst them. Shared it amongst one who was going to betray him.

One who was going to deny him. And the rest who would desert him as Jesus was going to the cross. And he shared that bread knowing this bread represented his own body which would suffer for them.

And he would suffer for them because, like the people on this ship, they had no hope of being saved by themselves. And so he shares this meal saying, I'm going to save you.

[31:31] I'm going to rescue you. I'm going to die for you. I'm going to shed my blood for you so your sins can be forgiven. And so you can know in me an anchor that holds you firm and secure in my love that I am demonstrating for you as I go to the cross and die for you.

In Hebrews 6, we read these words. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain where our forerunner Jesus has entered on our behalf.

And the Lord Jesus Christ, who takes the bread and the wine and says, this is my body, my blood given for you. In that, we have in him a firm anchor.

He is our hope in life and death. And so we can trust that as we go through stormy trials of various kinds, the journey ahead may be dark and difficult. The road ahead may be rocky and dangerous, but we can know our Savior's love for us.

And that will help us even in the darkest and difficult days to know we have the bright hope of landing safely on the other side.

[32:51] As the journey may be difficult, but we will land safely because of our Savior's love for us. And so on the way, we must keep holding onto our God, our anchor and his precious promises to us.

Keep our faith in him and trust that he will provide every need along the way. Amen.