

Acts 27:1–44

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[0 : 00] Well, our time in the book of Acts is winding down. We began this journey last September and aimed to conclude it in a few weeks.

Today, incidentally, is our 51st sermon from the book of Acts. Our hope as a pastoral team is that it has been informative to your mind, yet more importantly, transformative to your soul and tangible to apply.

We are students of the Bible, and we are only good students if we are better imitators of Jesus. Well, we come to the final two chapters of Luke's two-volume history of Jesus and the early church. For the past month or so, we have found Paul, God's human messenger or agent, being passed around between governing officials. He's testifying and attesting to Jesus while apologetically defending the brand new Christian faith.

The Jewish religious elite despised him and wanted him dead. The Romans have found him innocent and want him acquitted.

[1 : 16] The early church embraced him and desired for him to continue his teaching ministry. However, Paul himself had different plans. He actually had travel plans.

Namely, to set foot in the city of Rome, the center and the heart of the entire empire. Luke had already established that as his purpose of writing. Namely, to demonstrate when Jesus, before he left earth, his final words were that the apostles would be his witnesses.

Beginning in Jerusalem, in all Judea, Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth. Rome, though the capital of the empire, to the Jew, it represented the end of the world.

And Paul, God's witness, had to get there. And that's where we find ourselves this morning. As a historian, Luke could have simply told the reader, Paul made it to Rome safely.

It could have taken a few sentences. Probably even one if he tried. Yet instead we find that the next chapter and a half are devoted to how Paul got to Rome.

[2 : 34] Some have even said that this chapter and a half, this chapter, which was read for us this morning by Hannah, is one of the best historical accounts which illuminate the nautical experience in the first century.

As we read it together, I'm sure you've caught some of the terminology and the foreign vocabulary. It's unusual to us who travel by plane, train, and automobile.

And I want to submit to you this morning that this passage is one of comfort. You may find it strange, for a large portion of the text is filled with great distress.

But I hope that in our time together, you will come to see why. If I were to give it a title, it would be something along the lines of this, saved through storm and shipwreck, or delivered through despair and difficulty.

My thesis is this, the Christian's comfort is established upon the promises that proceed from God. The Christian's comfort is established upon the promises that proceed from God.

[3 : 51] This story is not how Paul is saved from the storm, or the storm being calmed for whatever reason.

Instead, we find a story of the helpless, the hopeless being comforted, primarily from the promises of God.

The narrative is one of progression. It's building. It's increasing. It grows. It builds. It heightens. In my lifetime, there has been this torturous invention.

It's known as adaptive testing. Adaptive testing. Particular standardized tests embrace this. And this is how the test goes.

Well, it starts off and it feeds you some easy softball questions. Easy ones. And as you get them correct, because all standardized tests are computerized now, the computer says, oh, oh, I see

what you're doing there.

[4 : 56] It increases in difficulty. And it grows and it compounds. So if you're bright, what will happen is, it just gets, well, actually, if you're bright, it's probably easy.

But if you're not bright, what you eventually find out is, I have no clue what this question is even asking. What is this all about? The questions increase in difficulty.

And that's exactly what we'll find in the narrative. It actually grows harder and harder and harder. More difficult.

More desperate. How do I know this? Well, Luke does what he can, does what he can to slow down the narrative for us.

He tries to do, he does this literary effect to bring things into slow motion. It begins, since your Bibles are open, it begins as they set sail.

[5 : 58] And he denotes time in verse 9, 27 verse 9. He says, much time has passed. He doesn't give us specifically how much time. He just says a lot of time has passed.

And then you fast forward to 27, verse 27. And he says, no, no, no, now 14 days have passed on this second ship. And finally, beginning in verse 33 and reinforcing 39, he slows down to a single day.

So it could have been a few months. Begins with this long journey. He zooms in on two weeks. And then he slows down and he says, let me tell you about that day.

Well, the narrative intensifies and it progresses to a climax that ends with the refrain that you see in verse 44. And so it was, all were brought safely to land.

So I'll use these three breaks this morning because that's the best I could come up with. Three breaks marked this way. A word in difficulty.

[7 : 06] A word in difficulty. A word in difficulty. A word to the despairing. Verses 13 to 26. And finally, a word about deliverance.

Verses 27 to the end. A word in difficulty. Luke sets the scene with immense detail. He includes the passenger manifest.

The ports of dock. The names of the boats themselves. The geographic bearings of the voyage.

And the details are a few things that we must note in our time together. Firstly, Paul is not alone.

He's accompanied by fellow Christians. Namely, Aristarchus, who we see in verse 2. And then also, Aristarchus, who we see in verse 2.

But also Luke himself. Luke himself. The text all of a sudden changes in the sense that it begins to use the first person plural pronoun we.

[8 : 08] Verse 1. We should set sail. So presumably, Paul's not by himself. There's Paul. There's a traveling companion who's no stranger to Paul's journeys.

Aristarchus. And there's Luke himself. They're able to board the ship for probably two possible reasons. One, they could have said that I am a servant of Paul and I'm accompanying him on the journey.

Or secondly, they could have simply secured a financial... They made some financial contribution to secure a space in a private vessel. We need to remember that in these days, there are no cruise liners.

There are no passenger boats. They are largely commercial boats that would take passengers as they were able. Of course, with financial compensation. They initially boarded Adramidium, which sounds like an element from the periodic table.

I was like, hey, is that it? No, it's not. Only to transfer to a commercial ship, a grain ship named Alexandria. Paul is not alone.

[9 : 14] Secondly, Paul is given unusual favor, according to Luke. We've been told the centurion, namely Julius, treated Paul kindly.

So much so that when they docked, that he allowed Paul to go see friends who ministered to his needs. We're not unsure why Paul received favor.

Possibly because he shared Roman citizenship with Julius the centurion. But the text doesn't make it clear. But we do know this. He treated Paul kindly.

Most crucially, though, if you follow the text closely, we cannot miss the difficulty with which they journeyed. Verse 4.

They put out to sea, and they sail under the lee of Cyprus. I have no sailing experience whatsoever. So I had to read a lot, and I had to sit down with people who did sail.

[10:14] But they tell me this is what a lee is. A lee is simply a refuge, a coastal refuge for a ship. So if a wind, so we're set in Chicago. Let's say a wind is headed eastbound, from the west.

It clears the city, and it starts to hit the water. If you're close to the water, the wind would actually probably just go right over you, because the city serves as a refuge.

However, if you decided to sail on the Michigan side, the wind would have churned up all the lake water. And the effects of it would be a lot more turbulent.

That's what a lee is. So they're traveling with great difficulty. It's described as difficult. The winds are against them in verse 4.

They sail slowly in verse 7. And they coast along with difficulty. It's an opposed trip. It's not easy.

[11:11] As a result, according to verse 9, a lot of time has passed. And sailing in the Mediterranean was no longer safe, according to the calendar. It denotes some type of year, probably late October, where the Mediterranean was just not sailable.

You don't venture into the Mediterranean. It's quite dangerous. And it appears that our text hints at, well, so the centurion, the boat owner, the pilot, get everyone together and say, hey, let's take a vote.

What do you think? What do you think? What do you think? What do you think? Paul says, no way. Don't do it. If you go, there's great difficulty.

We're going to be injured. There's going to be much loss. And our lives will be jeopardized. Of course, Paul's advice was refused.

Why in the world would a Roman centurion, a seasoned sailor, a wealthy ship owner, listen to a religious fanatic anyway? Paul, you majored in religion.

[12:18] Leave the sailing to us. Ironically, someone has done a major study. And he said up to this point, one historian notes that summing up all of Paul's sea travels, he's been on 11 voyages in the Mediterranean, totaling over 3,500 miles.

He is no rookie. But they don't know that. His advice is refused. So the journey up to this point is already difficult. And their decision would bring forward the concern Luke expresses in verse 9.

That their decision to proceed would now be dangerous, endangering the cargo, the ship, and the lives who were on board. So into danger they go.

A word in difficulty. It's followed by a word for the despairing. Well, as we transition to beginning to verse 13, what begins favorably turns quickly.

A tempestuous wind emerges from the land. What was formerly a barrier from the wind now becomes the source of it. The wind is so overwhelming that the large ship is now at her mercy.

[13:34] They are simply, the text records, driven along. When there is a bit of calm provided by the refuge of a small island, they begin to do what they can to secure the boat.

So the first thing they do that you see in verse 16 is they secure the ship's boat. And what in the world does that mean? Well, in those days, you have the large vessel.

But behind it, they would tow a small vessel. Whether it be a lifeboat or a smaller boat that could just enter into port or dock with greater ease. And you can just imagine.

It's a huge storm. What was thought to be the lifeboat will become a liability. Because as that lifeboat begins crashing upon the main boat, it becomes a weapon.

Whether it's taking on water or beating against the boat, what they do is they secure it. They secure it. And it's followed by... They continue.

[14:36] They secure it because... They secure not only the lifeboat, but they begin to secure the vessel itself. The text gives us clues that they possibly ran ropes underneath the boat.

So you drop a rope from one side and maybe somehow pull it up from the other side to just stabilize the frame. They possibly ran ropes across the decks as well. Anything to provide tension to hold the boat together.

They begin taking these radical safety measures. But the storm is merciless. It's merciless. So much so that they began to get rid of things that they needed.

Beginning the next day, they started to throw away cargo to lighten the ship. Because the waves, presumably, were so high that they were taking in water.

So the only way to get less water in the boat is to raise the ship. Throw things out we don't need.

They throw away... They jettison the cargo. And then additionally, they throw the ship's tackle overboard.

[15 : 46] This is probably heavy ropes. Large beams needed so that the boat could function at full capacity.

All that to no avail. Verse 20 When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was abandoned.

It's not merely a strong wind carrying them. It's to convey that they are completely out of control. They are being violently tossed.

This is not for the faint-hearted or those who experience seasickness. This is desperation. And you may think, oh, it's just primitive technology.

It doesn't happen today. They just couldn't figure it out. Well, I pulled up an article. Chicago Tribune. Dated October 26, 2007.

[16 : 54] And I'm going to skip some of the scene setting, but it reads this. There's a commodore named Gary Hooper. And on this day, he's sitting at the yacht club.

And he notices a sailboat going out onto Lake Michigan in the choppy waters. He already notices the crew is struggling to raise its sails. On that day, the winds are blowing as much as 35 knots.

I looked it up. It's about 40 miles per hour, I think. And the waves are more than nine feet high. It's definitely not a safe trip. It's one that's not recommended.

And this commodore, Hooper, noted that with relief that the boat was returning to harbor about 6.45 p.m. Oh, good, he thought.

But less than two hours later, the boat disintegrated in a crash of waves against the brake wall near 95th Street, killing three of the four passengers.

[17 : 55] The article goes on to describe that 10-foot waves slammed the boat into the cement and rock brake wall, throwing everyone overboard and smashing the boat to pieces.

All four men were wearing life jackets. They had been in the water for only 45 minutes. Three had perished. Even happens today.

And I read that to give you a sense of the desperation. Even seasoned sailors with modern technology, when nine to ten foot waves rise up in our lake, put out distress calls.

This was desperation. Well, in verse 21, in desperation, Paul speaks. Paul speaks. Into this despair, Paul speaks.

It's worth rereading verse 21. Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up to them and said, Men, you should have listened to me, and not have set sail from Crete, and incurred this injury and loss.

[19 : 08] Yet now I urge you to take heart. For there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night, there stood before me an angel of God to whom I belong and whom I worship.

And he said, Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.

So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on some island.

It's a word of comfort brought by an angel of God. They are twice exhorted to take heart, to be encouraged. Can you imagine that? I mean, the waves are crashing up against the boat.

And there you are. Paul said, Hey, don't worry about it. It's going to be okay. An angel came to me and told me that, hey, we're going to shipwreck this thing, but we're all going to live.

[20 : 12] Imagine that. At the end of all human innovation, at the end of all human ability, all the passengers found themselves in the same condition.

It no longer mattered who was a Roman citizen. It no longer mattered if you were the sword-wielding soldier or the anchor-wielding sailor. It did not matter if you were slave or free, prisoner or powerful, if you sat in the captain's seat, or you were huddled in the servant's quarters. All were under the same sentence of death. All were destined to die. All were at the mercy of the sea. And here comes a word from the Lord.

Well, what you need to know is this was not a new promise. It was already given to him in chapter 23.

Paul had just escaped the hands of an angry mob. He's in prison now for his safety. And an angel comes to him and says, Hey, don't... Well, I'll pray.

[21 : 22] Take courage. For you must also testify in Rome. What Paul received that night was the same promise.

What Paul understood and grasped was this. God's word of promise is true whether his two feet were firmly planted on the seashore or whether his two feet were damp from the water inside the boat.

Whether the days are difficult or the days are easy, the promises of God remain true. Paul didn't need a new promise. God already gave him the promise.

And it's important for us to recognize this, isn't it? God's promises are never more true or less true. They are not contextual.

They are not more true overseas than they are here in the United States of America. God's promises are always sure and steadfast, founded upon his unchanging word.

[22 : 30] That is why we're so obsessed with the Bible here at Holy Trinity. Because it's in this word that we find his promises that are sure and true and timeless.

Difficult circumstances do not require new promises. You do not need new promises when you are rich or impoverished. You do not need new promises in health or when you are facing and confronting a dreadful diagnosis.

You do not need new promises. You have all the promises in the word of God. Yes, you may need a word of encouragement here or there.

You may have forgotten a promise. Sometimes you need to be reminded of a biblical truth. But you don't need to go seeking new visions, new promises, new situations.

You need what has already been given. His word is sure. His promise is steadfast.

[23 : 36] Paul had what he needed. The assurance out of divine necessity that he would get to Rome. See, the great comfort for you and I is that God's promises hold true in every circumstance.

God's promises are not more true in the storm. They're not less true when the winds are still.

Whether you're at ease or in disarray, the promises of God hold true.

This is how a man like Paul could stand up and look at dying men and assure them of life. He was fully convinced of what God promised.

He was fully convinced of what God had promised. And finally, well, Luke takes us to the final day of this horrific experience beginning in verse 27.

The sailors were suspecting land nearby and after their tests, they confirmed their suspicions. It is dark. Visibility is zero. The sailors resort to desperate prayers for survival through the night.

[24 : 50] Well, they decide to try and make an escape by pretending to drop anchors down the back of the boat, but instead they drop the lifeboat hoping to take it to shore.

And Paul catches wind of this and tells the centurion that they must all stay together. They must remain in the ship. Well, the centurion and the soldiers act and hastily cut away the ropes and there goes their lifeboat.

So they're all in. All together. And as morning break, Paul gets up again and he delivers another word. Take some food.

Urging them to take some food. For 14 days, it appears that they had not eaten at least substantially. And Paul urges them to take in food.

And he does what God did with him. Let me remind you of the promise. In the same way Paul needed to be reminded, he now reminds the people.

[25 : 53] They don't need a different word. They were already given the word. And with thanksgiving, they all begin to eat. As a result, all 276 were encouraged.

When they had eaten enough, they emptied the rest of the boat, throwing the wheat into the sea. Well, day has come and they notice a bay. So they aggressively cut the anchors and naturally, and they raise a front sail.

Naturally, the boat would shoot forward. And of course, how things would unfold. The bow of the ship gets lodged in the reef.

And now the boat is immovable. The back of the ship is being torn up by the waves. And apparently, the soldiers had already devised a plan to kill all the prisoners. The plan was most likely attributed to a Roman law sentencing soldiers to the fate of their prisoners if they had somehow escaped.

Yet Julius comes to the rescue. the centurion who was kind to Paul. Desiring to save his life, the Bible reads, he kept them from carrying out their plan.

[27 : 01] He told, he ordered those who could swim to jump overboard and make for the land. The rest, grab a plank, grab broken pieces, and do your best to get there.

The text ends with verse 44. And so it was that all were brought safely to land. The New King James reads, and so it was that they all escaped safely to land.

One translation reads this, and so it came true that everyone reached the shore in safety. All were delivered as promised.

The manifest was fully accounted for. 276 souls on board were now safely on the beach. They were spared from the storm.

They survived this shipwreck. Some even avoided the sword, namely Paul himself. They were delivered safely as promised.

[28 : 05] neither storm, nor soldier, nor sailor, nor even Satan himself would thwart the purposes that God had for Paul.

This is what history teaches us. In Paul, it shows us examples of patience and constancy and teaches us that the infallible truth of God's promises.

For although all the things in the world seem to go wrong with Paul and to hinder him from coming to Rome, the truth of God, which had been promised, must be brought before Caesar and it would burst through every impediment.

Paul would not die prematurely. Paul could not die prematurely. Why? Because God's man had to stand before the man who thought he was God, namely Nero, and to testify to Jesus.

Paul's greatest comfort came from God's promises. It not only provided comfort, but provided him confidence to bear witness to all the passengers. It would be presumptuous to say that, oh, the entire ship came to saving faith.

[29 : 29] But I don't think it would be far-fetched to presume this. It was one of the most memorable days of their lives. There is an underlying hint that the passengers who are Gentiles are warming up to the gospel message.

Did you sense it as the narrative progressed? Oh, I'm not going to listen to Paul. Oh, no, no, no. He doesn't know what he's talking about. Stay here. Harbor here in the winter. But soon, you begin to see he's favorably...

Though they rejected his first word of caution, the centurions and the soldiers begin to say, whoa, whoa. He has something. Wait, wait, wait.

They can't take the lifeboat? Okay, then we better listen to him. And again, in verse 35, after Paul gives thanks to God in his circumstances, the text goes to great lengths to read this.

They were all encouraged. They were all encouraged. That all took in food. All listened to Paul.

[30 : 46] See, the gospel is gaining favor with the unbelievers. Well, some have drawn comparisons between this account and the account of Jonah.

Though there are many similarities given the storm scene, the most obvious difference is this. That both Jonah and Paul are commissioned to go to a city, but they end up there in different ways.

Jonah disobediently runs and as a result jeopardizes the lives of those in the ship that he boarded. Paul, on the other hand, willingly and obediently sets his face to Rome and as a result preserves the lives of those on the ship he boarded.

Paul is kind of an anti-Jonah in some sense. His staggering thought to think that the fate of all the passengers was actually bound up in the fate of Paul.

They made it because Paul made it. The salvation is God's, one writer writes, but Paul is the agent on whose behalf God acts and through whom God mediates his salvation.

[32 : 00] The passengers, their fate was bound up with the fate of Paul. They recognized, or they would come to recognize, that it would be to their benefit to stay near Paul.

To stay near Paul. And here is the reality of the Christian life. That it is to our benefit, whether believer or unbeliever, to stay near to God's messenger, God's agent, God's servant.

Because in so doing, you may preserve your very life. And I'm not speaking of, oh, stay near your pastor, though that may be helpful to some.

But I speak of staying near to God's greatest messenger, God's greatest agent, God's greatest servant. That it is far better for you to be near Jesus in poverty than to be distant from Him in your pleasure.

It is far better to be near Jesus in your pain than distant from Him in your comfort. It is like we read at the beginning of the service, salvation belongs to God.

[33 : 38] it is for your very preservation to stay near to Jesus. Because in so doing, you will be brought safely to land.

Well, let me close with this. There are lots of summaries of the Christian faith. And some of them come in question and answer form known as catechisms.

And there was one crafted in Germany, the Heidelberg Catechism crafted in the 16th century. And I'm just going to read the first question and the answer. And it reads this.

The question is this. What is your only comfort in life and death? and the answer is this.

And with this I'll close. That I am not my own. But I belong with body and soul both in life and in death to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

[34 : 42] He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood and has set me free from all the power of the devil. and He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my Heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head.

Indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by His Holy Spirit He also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for Him.

Please Please