

Acts 27 "God's Promise in the Storm"

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[0 : 0 0] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian, checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless. I invite you just to bow your heads in prayer, please.

Father, some of us this morning who are gathered, or those who are online joining us live or online downstream, Father, some of us are having really good times. We're very healthy. Things are going very well for us.

And maybe our problem is lack of gratitude. And Father, you know that some who are here and some watching are going through very, very, very hard times. Maybe a season of profound sadness or sorrow, with bad news, not good news. And Father, here we come all together in different states of affairs to together hear your word. And so we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would bring your word to each of our hearts in our different situations and conditions, but that you would equally bring your word deep into our heart, that your heart may form us, and that we might live with godly hope in whatever situation we are in. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.

[2 : 23] Please be seated. It's a very common question for people to ask me. There's a Christian version of the question and a question asked by those who wouldn't consider themselves Christians. And that very common question is, why are these bad things happening to me? Why are these really bad things happening to me? Because I'm a good person. And I'm a good person and these bad things shouldn't be happening to me. And for people who are Christians, or maybe for those who do believe in a God, even if it's not the same God that Christians believe in, the form that we ask that question is, is why is God allowing this? I don't understand why God is allowing this. I'm a good person. I don't know why God is allowing something like this to happen to me. And it's usually asked not just because there's a very short-term hard thing that's happening, but because it's been something that's been happening to you for quite a while. So the text that we're going to look at today has very deep wisdom in this particular, how to answer this particular question, how to live in light of this particular question. And it's in the context of a story that a lot of us have our eyes glaze over because it's, you know, these unpronounceable names and all of that type of stuff. So we're going to walk towards it. We're going to look at Acts chapter 27. And one of the ways to help us to pause and actually dwell with Acts 27 so we can begin to hear how this speaks into this very profound human question about why are these bad things happening to a good person like me? I'm going to divide it up into scenes or episodes as if we were doing an Amazon or a Netflix series. And so if you turn in with your Bibles to me to Acts chapter 27, scene one or episode one is travel setback. Travel setback. And here's how the story goes.

And when it was decided that we should set sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan cohort named Julius. Now just sort of pause. What's just been happening is that Paul has spent over two years in criminal custody. He's innocent. Other than the fact that he has a group of people who want to have him murdered, the authorities know that he's innocent, but the authorities want to appease the murderous crowd. And so he's been forced to appeal to have his court, his case tried by the highest court, which is going to be in Italy. And that's now all been worked out. And so the authorities give him over. They're going to take him to Israel, to Italy. And when it says here some other prisoners, those all would be prisoners who by the laws of that day are, have been sentenced to death. Every single one of them would have been sentenced to death.

But their death sentence isn't going to be carried out like by, you know, being beheaded or hung. They're going to transport them to Rome so they can die in the arena, to be either like eaten by a lion or fight as a gladiator until they die. So that's how they're, to amuse the crowds in Rome, they're going to go and be eaten by lions or killed by in battle. Those are the other people that Paul's traveling with, like a really great travel group, right? Soldiers and these guys. But I remember I said, I'm calling this travel set, but what's the travel setback? Well, it comes up in what, in what isn't said here, but it comes up in verse two. So Paul is in Caesarea, it's a capital of a Roman province, and there are ships that do sail from Caesarea right up to Rome. But when they get there, they find out that all of the ships for Rome have left and that there's none expected. So they're stuck.

So to give you a sense of what's like involved with this, in 2017, I had the great privilege of being invited by the SIM Missionary Organization to speak to all of their missionaries in Angola at their week-long retreat and to also be able to do some other speaking while I was there.

And I really agonized over this. I recognized it as a great privilege. But just to be honest, if I was to pick the top 50 places I'd like to visit in the world, Angola would not be on that list.

[6 : 50] In fact, I don't know if it would be on the top 80 places that I'd want to go to. Over a half of Angola still has unexploded mines. They have boa constrictors and poisonous snakes. I have a snake phobia. It's a very, very poor country.

They don't speak English. Like they don't, don't, don't, don't, don't speak English, period. In fact, I really, I've had a profound, ever since I landed in Angola for the first time and the translator that was supposed to meet me was late, I now have a new sympathy for immigrants who come to this Canada, to this country, not speaking English. Because I, I come up to the officials and they speak to me.

I haven't a vaguest idea in the world what they just said to me. And I can't speak to them and they can't speak to me. And there's this feeling of powerlessness. Anyway, that's not the point of the story. My point of it is this. So eventually I say, and of course we all know that missionary agencies, how they deal with this is they say, well, just send our Learjet to Ottawa and we'll fly you directly to Lubongo. Because where I'm going in Angola is, is where no tourists go.

And then to my horror, I discover this is how I'm going to have to get to Lubongo. I've been to Africa before. And I thought, you know, it's not that, you know, if I flew from, you know, Ottawa to Amsterdam, Amsterdam to Nairobi, like it's not a big deal, right? Well, to go to Lubongo, I had to fly from Ottawa to Montreal, from Montreal to Frankfurt, from Frankfurt to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to Vinduk, Namibia. And then in Vinduk, Namibia, I had to leave the airport, travel to the complete other side of the city to get on a plane at a different airport, for which I would then fly to a small little outpost in Namibia, right beside the Angolan border.

And then I took another flight from there to Lubongo. I get tired just telling you that. So these guys, they think, thinking, okay, we're going to go to Rome. There's ships from Caesarea to Rome, all gone. Instead, what you're going to read now is a puddle jumper that goes along and makes like a hundred stops, because they're now going to try to end up, they found that there's a ship that's going to take a hundred, not a hundred stops, you know what I mean, like lots and lots of stops, including ones not named here, that will eventually get to a place where he's told there probably would be a ship that will go to Italy. So that's what's happening here in verse two, with all these complicated names. And embarking in a ship in Adramandium, which was about to sail to the ports, notice that, along the coast of Asia. And they're not going to name all of them, that would be too long.

[9 : 34] We put to sea accompanied by Aristarchus, so Macedonia from Thessalonica. So Paul will be traveling with Luke and with Aristarchus. And the next day we put in at Sidon, and Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for. And putting out to sea from there, we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. And when we had sailed across the open sea, along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia. Boom. They don't tell you how many days, this would have taken a while. They stopped at other ports, they don't mention them all, but they finally come to a significant port where ships that will go all the way to Italy can be found. And so there, and then there's travel relief. There is this really, really good news. What's the good news?

Look at verse six. Then the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing, sailing for Italy and putting us on, and put us on board. And you can just imagine Paul and the others going, oh yes, finally, no more of all these little stops. Off we go to Italy. But then, that's scene two. Scene three is new travel setbacks. It's like getting on a plane, and it's been delayed, and you get on the plane, and you sit down, and you sit, and you sit, and you sit, and then they say there's this worrisome light in the dashboard. We have to get it fixed. And you sit, and you sit, and you sit, and then they finally tell you after you've been sitting there for a long time that you all have to leave the plane, and a new one has to come. I don't know how many of you have traveled and had that type of a setback. That's the sort of thing which is about to happen here. Look what happens. There's going to be new travel setbacks.

Verses seven to eight. We sail slowly. Why do we sail slowly? Well, they tell us, we sail slowly for a number of days, and arrived with difficulty off Nidus. And the wind did not allow us to go further.

And we sailed under the lee of Crete off of Salome. Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lassia. So the wind just was against them. And it made that what should be a fairly simple bit of sailing take quite a bit of time. So another question is what they're going to do. They're still on a ship. That ship has to go to Italy. The centurion has to go to Italy. So does Paul. So they have a bit of a discussion about what they're going to do. Now, to understand this discussion, it's a discussion. If I'm going to entitle this, if you put it up there, the title of this scene is Optimism Reigns. And this is the sort of time when, you know, of course, North Americans, it's all about optimism. You know, it's a really funny thing.

I can't remember the movie I was watching. It's coming to me more. It had that wonderful actor, Kevin Bronach, in it, playing a Russian oligarch. And they make some type of comment about, you Americans believe in American stories, but we Russians believe in Russian stories.

[12 : 36] In other words, it's going to end with death or something like that. But optimism reigns. And here's why there's optimism. You have to know that they're going to mention a fast. And that fast is October, took place on October 5th, 59 AD. But there is common wisdom of the Roman Empire.

You know how the Roman Empire referred to the Mediterranean? Our lake. Because the Roman Empire completely surrounded the Mediterranean, completely surrounded it. They just viewed it as our lake. But it's a huge ocean, obviously. But they'd sailed it for so many years, they had some rules of thumb. And the rules of thumb is that from March 11th to September 14th, it was completely safe, as safe as sailing would be. But it was safe to sail the Mediterranean. From September 14th to November 10th, sailing was uncertain. You should beware. Because storms can arise. It can be deadly.

And you do no sailing from November 11th to March the 10th. Now, as you're going to hear in this next bit, Paul's going to remind them that October 5th has passed. Sometime in the future. We don't know whether it's two weeks ago, three weeks ago, four weeks ago. But we're coming to the end of October.

November 11th is coming very soon. So this, listen now, understanding this and why optimism reigns. And here it is, verse 9. Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous, because even the fast was already over. That's the October 5th Day of Atonement fast.

Paul advised them, saying, Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss. Paul is the realist, not the optimist. I could ask for a show of hands later, how many of you consider yourselves to be realists, and how many of you consider yourselves to be optimists? The realists know what's going to happen in the next scene, by the way. The optimists, well, the realists are going to be high-fiving other realists in their imagination. But Paul is the realist, verse 10, Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives. But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said, to the optimists. And because the harbour was not suitable to spend the winter in, suitable doesn't mean impossible, just not desirable. Okay? The majority decided to put out to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, about 40 miles away, a harbour of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there. So, the optimists win the argument, and off they go. Well, scene five is reality meets optimism, which is where the realists are high-fiving each other privately, while the optimists, well, I guess, I don't know. What do all the optimists do when they meet reality? I'm not an optimist, so maybe after the coffee time you can tell me how optimists meet. Verse 13, actually, I'm going to talk about how optimists think about it in a moment. Verse 13, where reality meets optimism. Now, verse 13, now when the south wind blew gently, supposing they had obtained their purpose, the optimists all cheer, let out loud hurrahs, and with energy start getting ready. They weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to the shore.

[16 : 03] And now the realists begin to smile. Verse 14, but soon a tempestuous wind called the northeaster struck down from the land, and when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. And pause there. Now, scholars, when they look at the book of Acts, one of the things they say about this chapter is it's quite a remarkable chapter in ancient literature because it describes very realistically what happens when a ship is in a storm and about to sink.

And the way the experts view Paul, Luke, who wrote this, is that Luke has two characteristics. One is he was probably pretty nerdy about getting the right terms. So he was probably one of those nerdy guys who went around and said, like, what do you call that? Like, what do you call that? Like, what do you call that? And he remembered it? He wrote it down. On the other hand, he doesn't approach the thing like a sailor does, but he approaches it with good observation. So he observes everything, sorry, and, but doesn't sort of, you know, it's not like a sailor talking about it. So he might not have realized how important that last little bit is in verse 15. And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. This is a moment of horror to all of the sailors. They would have sinking feelings. So the wind has come, they try to get the strip, the ship straightened so they can begin to tack back towards protection, and they're not able to do it. Now what happens next? Now, I haven't told this story in a long time, but I've had a weird thing happen to me before I was married. It's the only time in my life, neither before or after, where I experienced time in slow motion. And it was when I was with two buddies and we were barreling along the 401.

And I move into the fast lane and there's two school buses that I'm going to pass. And as I come up to the first school bus, in other words, the one that's second, as I'm up beside it, all of a sudden, the school bus jerks into my lane to pass. They didn't shoulder check. And all I know is this huge, huge wall all of a sudden coming and it comes within inches of me.

And this is when time slows down for me. I'm going, I don't know, it's 401, 125 kilometers an hour. Like what is the normal speed on the 401? I'm going that speed. The bus comes, it almost hits me. I remember everything that happened over the next two seconds. And it was literally as if it was in slow motion. I remember noticing in my rear view mirror that I had a car and thank being thankful it was close, but not tailgating me. I took my foot off the gas. I remembered not to brake because if you brake at that speed, you lose control of the car. I take my foot off of the gas and I move the car to the left to go over to the shoulder. But on the shoulder, there's gravel. And then I remember thinking to myself, if I'm not careful, we're going to keep going into the grass and into the ditch and car's going to flip. But then I noticed at this point in time, all of a sudden, the bus has jerked back to the side. So I'm now, I wrestle the car, still without my foot on the gas, to try to go back into the lane. And at this point in time, my car goes into an uncontrollable spin on the 401.

And here's where time slows down for me. I remember, I can still just with effortlessly, the complete and utter look of panic on the person sitting beside me. And I remember thinking that the guy in the back who was asleep was going to die without ever waking up.

[19 : 51] And as the car is spinning and you have this feeling of hopelessness, because there's nothing you can do in the spin, like you're spinning. And I wasn't sure if the car was going to flip over and I would die, or I kept also waiting for the crash of the cars behind me to hit me.

And after what seemed like a long time, because I'm experiencing this weird, I didn't have my life passed before my eyes, I just had time slow down. And it ends with me having a flat tire parked, blocking the complete 401. The bus is far gone. And as I look to my right, because I'm facing like, the traffic's this way, and I'm facing this way. And to my right, I see shocked, horrified drivers in cars that had stopped in time. Shaking, I get off the road. Anyway, we fix the tire, come home.

I mention that because that's what ends up happening. Keep that in the back of your mind as you reach, as you read this next scene, which is called, I called scene six, hopelessness. And it goes like this, begins at verse 15, sorry, verse 16. Hopelessness. Running under the lee of a small island called Kata. Remember, so it's as if, to put it for a moment, I realize when the car goes into the spin, that there's nothing I can do. Before that, I try to prevent it. But as soon as that bus had started to move out, I knew I was in deep trouble. And so that's the same thing. These guys all know that once they couldn't have to turn the ship around to face the wind, they were in deep, deep, deep, deep trouble. So verse 16 continues, we manage with difficulty to secure the ship's boat. In those days, the lifeboat was towed behind the ship to save room on the ship. But they bring it in. They don't want to get rid of the lifeboat, obviously. So they bring it on board the ship. Verse 17, and after hoisting it up, they use supports to undergird the ship. They fearing, in other words, they put extra ropes underneath the ship to try to hold the ship together while it's being battered by the waves. Then fearing that they would run aground on the Sirtus, a Sirtus. And that just shows, they lowered the gear and thus they were driven along. And that just shows you how they realized how doomed they were. The Sirtus was hundreds of, like hundreds of kilometers away. And it was a place where ships hit, you couldn't tell that there was something underneath the water. It looked fine, but you'd run aground and then you would die. And they knew that they were now going to be driven along for a long while. Verse 18, and since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. And on the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands.

And when, verse 20, neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, which means they have no idea where they are. You navigate by the sun and the stars. And no small tempest lay on us. All hope of our being saved was at last abandoned. That's mean when the car goes into the spin.

Nothing you can do but wait to be flipped or wait to have another car hit you. And that's the state that they're in. Now the next verses, I'm not going to say much about them right now, but we're going to circle back to them at the end because they're the heart of the text. And it's where we will, it's within the whole story, these words within the whole story, that we can begin to walk towards this fundamental human problem.

[23 : 34] Why is God allowing these bad things to happen to a good person like me? That human question that we ask. And so I've titled this, Scene 7, Peculiar Hope Hope and a Common Hopelessness. I'm using Peculiar in that old King James version. It's like this very angular hope. You know, one of the things I teach when I try to encourage people how to preach is that for the average person outside of the Christian church, they would have the... You know, there's that feminist line, a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle. And for many Canadians, they would say that I need the Christian hope like a fish needs a bicycle. So it's very peculiar. It's not where...

It's maybe changing a little bit in our culture, but it's not like a normal place that the average Canadian would go to for hope. So it's a peculiar hope and common hopelessness. It's verses 21 to 26.

Read along with me. Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said... Now, he would have been standing... I mean, the ship's being banged around, so he's probably having to hold on to a post.

He says, Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. Now, just sort of pause here before I go on further. You'll notice that Paul doesn't say...

If you look at the end of verse 26, you'll realize that what Paul is now saying contradicts partially what he said earlier. And the significance... I could talk about other things with it, but that take me away from the main point of the sermon.

[25 : 14] The main point is this. Paul is... Nobody should read this and say, Yeah, you know, I guess it's all right for me to tell people, Yeah, I told you so. No, that's not the lesson of the text. The text isn't saying, Go and tell people, I told you so, when you're right later.

That's not the meaning. There's only one hero in the Bible. And that's Jesus. Everybody else needs a savior. Paul is not the savior. Paul here is not at his finest.

Paul both is doing something he shouldn't. Told you so. He also is going to leave out, by the way, I was wrong. He's human. He needs a savior. We'll read this again, though.

Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only the ship.

For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship. And just sort of pause. Some translations of the Bible translate that worship as serve.

[26 : 25] And that's because both are equally good translations. One of the problems with saying, like that what Jono does at the beginning of the service is worship, is that's actually not what the Bible, and Jono knows this, that's not what the Bible teaches.

Worship is not just singing and having emotional highs from singing. It's worship involves also how you serve, how you live your life, how you serve God is your worship.

Anyway, so that's why some translations say serve rather than worship. I'll say it again from verse 23. For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, whom I serve.

And the angel said, do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you. Paul has been praying that God would save everybody on the ship.

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.

[27 : 26] Now just sort of pause. This is actually one of those turning points. We're going to come back to this in a moment, but this is where it's very helpful for us to pause and say, what type of story are we in? You know, as I said, I wish I could remember the name of the movie.

I should have written it down. You know, the American CIA agent and his wife talking like they're in an American story and the Russian talking like it's a Russian story. And at the end of the day, the movie was made by Americans, so it was an American story.

But there's different types of stories. And if you were a secular humanist, a certain type of secular person, the secular story would be that actually if you just follow my advice, you will never be in storms.

Because I will teach you how to manage your life and how to manage your relationships and how to manage your career so really bad things like this don't happen. And if they do happen because you forget my advice, I will show you how you can make money and triumph through it.

There's a whole pile of self-help speakers. That's how they would talk. That's the type of story they're in. If this was a Hollywood story, the Hollywood story will involve from the rest of the movie that Paul, of course, and his companions will all survive.

[28 : 37] And the mean guard will die. And Paul will be shown to be always correct. That's a Hollywood story. If you're listening to sort of a spiritual story, the spiritual story would say, this story shouldn't even be in your book because no good God would allow you to ever experience something like this.

So you should leave a religion that talks about things like that and come and follow my way of being spiritual because in my way of spiritual, God is only kind to you. That's another type of story.

I have to be careful. But there's certain types of Buddhism which might say, well, the point of this story from now on is that you need to learn to understand that at the end of the day, there is no difference between death and life and you need to lose all desire.

And as part of that, you need to learn mindfulness so you can step back from the flow and the terrible things that are happening, understand them that it's only terrible if you have desire and just sort of observe things.

And maybe if you are a certain type of versions of Hinduism, you would say it's all karma. It goes around, comes around.

[29 : 48] Obviously, Paul deserves something like this to happen. It's just catching up on him. Whether it's things that he's done wrong in his life before or something that's gone wrong before him, he's in a karmic story and he should die because that's just your karma.

In fact, that's actually underlying what is happening when people say, why am I experiencing this? Why is God allowing this? It says underlying that is some form of a belief in karma, that God is punishing you for some reason because of something that you've done that you deserve it and you complain against God because you don't know anything that you've done that would cause you to deserve this type of suffering.

If you're an atheist, you would say, sucks to be you story. The universe doesn't give a hoot and they would say something different than hoot as that last word. In Islam, they might say, this is a story that's teaching you just to accept the will of Allah and die.

And by the way, I don't know if you knew this, but one of the teachings of the Quran is that any area on the planet that Islam doesn't rule is an offense to Islam because Allah has promised Muslims to rule the entire world, every part of it.

So it might be that within that Muslim thing, they're saying, not only is it Allah's will, but really there should have been a Muslim in charge of the ship. Well, this is a Christian story.

[31 : 20] And so the Christian story is that Paul, who is innocent, and he's been held in criminal custody for over two years, is now experiencing this storm.

In the midst of the storm, he's been praying, and God shows up in the person of an angel and says they're going to be rescued. And I'm going to, at the end, address the issue as to whether the Bible is saying, therefore, that God will always rescue you from storms.

And I can tell you right now, at the beginning, he doesn't. And that's not the point of the story. Well, what happens next? The scene, eight, ominous sounds.

So you have this promise. The next scene is ominous sounds. Continuing on in verse 27. When the 14th night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight, the sailors suspected that they were nearing land.

They would have suspected that because they heard an ominous sound, and the ominous sound was the sound of waves crashing against rocks. I'm not much of a sailor, but I think I understand that you don't go towards where the water is crashing into rocks.

[32 : 34] That's not where you want to head, especially when the waves are over your head. So they suspect that they're nearing land. Verse 28. So they took a sounding and found that they were at 20 fathoms.

A little farther on, they took a sounding again and found 15 fathoms. And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come.

And they would have done that, listening to the ominous sounds of waves crashing against rocks. And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship's lifeboat into the sea under pretense, pretending, of laying out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.

Then the soldiers cut away the ropes into the ship's boat and let it go. Now, by the way, Paul didn't tell them to let the lifeboat go.

That's what the soldiers did. Paul probably was saying to himself, come on, guys. Like, why did he get rid of the lifeboat? You don't have to cut the lifeboat off. Just keep it down. It's going to be very helpful in a moment.

[33 : 40] Didn't I tell you that we're all going to be saved? Anyway, who knows what Paul was thinking. We're not told. But we come to the almost last scene, which is scene 9, which is called Remembering the Lord's Promises During a Crisis, verses 33 to 38.

Here's how it goes. As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, Today is the 14th day that you have continued in suspense without food, having taken nothing.

Therefore, I urge you to take some food, for it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you. When he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all, he broke it and began to eat.

Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. This, if you were doing this in a movie, this would be a solemn moment. It says here, we were in all 276 persons in the ship.

And that's sort of more of a moment. You know how in movies they'll have a moment where the people who are about to undergo a big thing, they all stand up and they sort of, you can see them by their faces and they look at each other and they say, we're ready for this last bit.

[34 : 48] It might be a little bit of a roll call. The soldiers want to know, the sailors want to know how many there are so that when they get to the land, if they get to the land from their point of view, they can count and see whether everybody's made it.

So there's a count, a roll call, a saying of names. Somebody records it. There's an engineer in the room who records the number of people. And then in verse 38, and when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.

And now we come to the final scene, scene 10, called the Storm's End. Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach on which they planned, if possible, to run the ship ashore.

So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea. At the same time, loosening the ropes that tied the rudders, they hosted the foresail to the wind.

They made a path for the beach, but striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. And the bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the turf. The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape.

[35 : 55] But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. And the centurion ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, and the rest on planks or in pieces of the ship.

And so it was that all were brought safely to the land. Turn back in your Bibles to verse 21 to 26, but a couple of points in closing.

One of the most common phrases that the Bible uses is that the people are lost. And there's a famous text where Jesus says, I came to seek and save the lost.

And every time you hear this word, the lost, I've heard preachers and others use analogies of, like being, and I was in another city, maybe you're in Montreal, which has some, at least maybe it's changed weird traffic patterns.

Of one-way streets and not always sequential, and one-way streets ending in streets going one way the opposite direction to you, and you have to turn and you get lost.

[37 : 01] And that's not what the Bible means. And sometimes people have used examples of, you know, you're with a five-year-old and they wander off, and for a moment you can't find them and there's feelings of terror. That's not what the Bible means by lost.

Every time you come across the word lost in the Bible, think of Acts 27. Think of being driven along by the wind and being one of the sailors and know that there is no hope.

You are going to die. I am going to die. And that is how the Bible wants you to understand being lost. It helps you to understand the beauty of the gospel, that when you were lost, and that means you are doomed, you are done, you are dead, but you're not dead yet.

And in that situation, Jesus comes with this news that if you put your faith and trust in him, he has done all, he has come seeking you. There is no one so lost.

There is no one so far from God. There is no one so far into death or sin or shame that Jesus has not come to seek you and to find you and to reach out a hand to you.

[38 : 16] No shame so thorough or so deep. No sin so horrible that Jesus has not come to save you. And so the next thing is that to understand in this text, I mean, the meaning of the text isn't that God is going to send an angel when you're having a really, really hard time and he's going to tell you that he's going to rescue you.

That's not the meaning of this text. It can't be the meaning of the text. And we know that because if you read 2 Timothy, Paul will share with people that he's been saved many, many times, but this time that he's in jail, he knows he's going to die and he's correct.

He gets executed by Nero sometime after he wrote 2 Timothy. But here's another thing about the text is that God does not make 100 million promises to you.

He doesn't make promises to you that you will be wealthy, healthy, wise, successful, powerful, beautiful. If you want to have a long, single life of thriving, he doesn't promise you that.

If you desire to marry and have children, he doesn't promise you that. He doesn't make you 100 promises or a million promises. Christians who tell you that God makes all of these promises upon promises upon promises to you, all they will do is make you depressed and despair because hard times will come.

[39 : 45] But here's the thing about our great God. Our great God does not make 1,000 promises or 100,000 promises. He makes a very small number of promises.

But those promises that he makes are the most important promises and he will always keep them. And that's seen in this particular text when he, Paul, talks about the God to whom I belong.

He was lost, but Jesus saved him. And Jesus doesn't just sort of save you and let you out of the mess and then say, off you go, just do all the sin, you know, do whatever, whatever it is you want.

No, no. When Jesus saves you, he saves you by taking him to himself. And this image of belonging to God has within it a connotation of something precious.

So when you as a Christian are able to say, God hasn't promised me that I will never have storms in my life, but he has promised me that when I put my faith and trust in him, I will belong to him forever.

[41 : 02] And so, yes, it is the case that maybe when you are having hard times, you can ask, are there things that I have done that brought this on? If you come to me and you say, I don't know why I'm having all these illnesses and inwardly I'm thinking, well, maybe you should not have smoked two packs of cigarettes a day for the last 30 years and drank a dozen beers every day for the last 30 years.

And maybe if you did that, you wouldn't have those health problems. And I might think that and maybe I would say that because sometimes I'm not as nice a person as I should be. But generally speaking, when people ask these questions, they don't ask them at times like that.

They ask them when they're just really, really, really having very, very hard times. And the thing to remind another Christian about is that they belong to Christ and nothing will change that in their circumstances.

It's not a sign of judgment upon you that you are bad. And so the Christian question to ask in the midst of having very, very, very hard times, well, actually, the first step in dealing with very, very hard times is to remember that you belong to God, that you belong to Christ, and that you belong to him as his precious treasure.

And it's from that basis that you can do these other things. You can pray to him. You should pray to him. And one of the things you can pray to him is ask him why you're having those hard things.

[42 : 27] And he might not answer. You might have to wait till heaven before he answers you on that particular one. But given that you know that you belong to him and that the end of your story is that you will see him, then what you can do is say, Lord, in this particular situation, even though it's very, very hard, and I'm afraid, the question isn't why is this happening, although you can ask him that.

The question is how can I pray for others and serve you in this situation? That's what Paul did in the boat. He prayed for the others.

He would have prayed not only for their spiritual salvation, but also for their physical salvation, and God granted him that. And that's what we can do. We can say, how can I bear witness to you in this storm?

How can I pray for myself and for others in this storm? You see, it's in light of that that you can remember when I said that God doesn't make lots and lots of promises to you, but he does make a small number of promises, and those small promises are about the most important things.

It helps you to understand the end of chapter 8 of Romans. I'm sorry it's not up on the screen. You have to listen. Romans 8.31. What then shall we say to these things?

[43 : 45] If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect against me? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn me? Christ Jesus is the one who died, more than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who is indeed interceding for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or the sword?

Shall that separate us from the love of Christ? As it is written, for your sake, we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No. No.

In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

[45 : 00] He hasn't made a lot of promises, but he's made the promises that matter the most, and by which you can stand even in the storms of life.

Part of our task is to be a communion, a community of people who remember. So that when our brother and sister in Christ is having a very hard time to remember, we remember for them.

We encourage them, not that it'll all get better, and we don't, you know, it might be that the encouragement doesn't mean that we give hallmark-type greetings to each other, which just might piss the person off, but we remember them in prayer, and we ask that this Roman 8 promise that they would know that that is true for them.

And part of the way we might just do it is by standing beside them in their hard time, maybe putting an arm around them or a little note that we are praying for you. But we are a community that is called to remember these profound promises that God has made to his people, and we are those who are lost, and he sought us, and he found us, and when we put our faith and trust in him, he saved us, and when he saves you, you belong to him as his precious possession and treasure, and he will never let you go, and he will be with you in the storm.

And the end of your story will be to stand before him face to face like Jesus and filled with joy. That is the end of your story in Christ.

[46 : 40] Invite you to stand. Father, once again, I began my opening prayer was that you know some of us are really having a very, very hard time, and you know that some of us aren't.

Some of us, Father, might just be coming out of a hard time. Father, you know that some of us might be just a week away from a season of a very hard time, some very, very bad news, and you know, Father, how easy it is for us to look around at other people who seem to have it easier and wonder why we aren't like that, and you know how easy it is for the devil to speak into our hearts and to accuse us and make us feel as if there's something bad around us, and we know, Father, that the devil will tempt us to despair, and so, Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would bring these words of Acts 27 and Romans 8 deep into our heart, that we might know, Father, that you do not make a hundred thousand promises and promise us health and wealth and success in everything we do on this side of the grave, but you do promise, Father, that you save those who are lost, and when you save us, when you save me, when you save each person here, that we are now your precious treasure and possession, that you will never leave us or abandon us, and that you will bring us unerringly and unfailingly and powerfully into the presence of you, Father, where we will see you face to face and we will be like Jesus and there will be great joy, and that in Christ that is the end of our story, and we ask that you help us to remember these things and remember it for each other, and we ask all these things in the precious name of Jesus and all God's people said,

Amen.