

The Shipwreck

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[0 : 00] Please be seated. Well, today is a very exciting chapter in the book of Acts. We've left the trial scenes of the Apostle and move into amazing adventures at sea.

And as we look at it, I want to just remind you of the clear promise that the Lord Jesus has already given to the Apostle Paul in Acts and that is just, he said, just as you, Paul, have testified to me in Jerusalem, you must testify to me in Rome.

And so Paul has this promise that however the journey, he will get to Rome. And remember who Jesus is. In the book of Acts, how is he described?

He's the risen Lord and Christ. He's the one who now has all power, all authority. He is the coming judge. So if Jesus has said, you'll make it to Rome, Paul knows he will make it, although the journey there is very, very precarious.

And interestingly, for Luke who wrote the book of Acts and the Gospel of Luke, which is part one, this is the final part of the book of Acts where he, instead of saying, they did this and they did that, he's actually saying, we did this, we did that.

[1 : 20] There are these four wee sections of the book of Acts and so Luke is very much writing as one who was present there on the boat. And although we know Luke to be a Gentile physician or doctor and not a sailor, it seems that he kept some kind of written log of the journeys on the boat and used that as a basis for what we have here in Acts chapter 27 because it's so, it's just a very vivid and detailed account.

Many nautical terms that unless you're a kind of a boat buff, you just won't know and I don't pretend to know them all myself. Now to be helpful, I've got a map I'll just put up on the wall and this is sort of a, I know it's very hard to read, it just gives you an impression, this is the Mediterranean Sea and of the journey that Paul took and we'll leave this up for the whole sermon and just so you can get a sense of where we're going.

So as names are mentioned, I'll try and say where we are on the map and if you get a bit bored, just imagine you're on a holiday in the Mediterranean, eh? But you can't get bored because this is so exciting, this chapter.

Let's start back at chapter 27 and we're going to meet who's in charge of Paul. When it was decided that we were to sail for Italy, that is, you know, Paul's on his way to meet the emperor, they transferred Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan cohort named Julius. Now he's going to turn out to be a very fine and upright Roman leader, lots of integrity. It says in a minute he's wanted to treat Paul kindly. Later in the chapter he's going to save Paul's life and so he's a good guy.

[3 : 01] With Paul, it says, are some other prisoners. Now most likely it wouldn't normally be worth sending a prisoner all the way to Rome. What they probably are are prisoners who are destined for death.

They're under capital punishment and Nero needs more people for the arena, for the gladiators to have sport with or for the animals to chew up.

And so there's lots of that going on in Rome. There's a market for people on death row and so these other prisoners are probably under capital punishment except for Paul who's there.

Again, people want him dead but he's appealed to the emperor. Now Paul's allowed some freedoms. It seems that he gets to see some of his friends and has some friends travel with him.

So embarking on a ship of Adramatium that was about to set sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica.

[4 : 02] So Aristarchus has been mentioned already in the book of Acts. He's a companion of Paul. He's on Paul's ministry team and so as the Romans sort of commandeered the ship, he himself buys

passage as well as Luke.

And so there's at least two Christian friends of Paul on the ship and Paul is allowed to see some friends along the way. So the next day we put in at Sidon. This is further north of Jerusalem and Julius the centurion treated Paul kindly and allowed him to go to his friends to be cared for.

No doubt, you'd be happy to be kind to this guy because you basically think when he gets to meet the emperor, he's dead. So you might as well say goodbye to some friends along the way and Sidon is not far from Damascus where Paul did his first ministry.

So no doubt there were many Christians who would come to say their final farewell to Paul and maybe he passed on some letters that became letters of our New Testament. So Paul's on his way to certain death and they've commandeered this boat.

Putting out to sea from there, he said this whole journey involves two boats. The first boat is very kind of conservative and it hugs the coast of the Mediterranean of what we would call Turkey and the second boat is where they take more risks and actually go into the heart of the Mediterranean where trouble happens.

[5 : 27] And so putting out to sea, verse 4 from there, we sailed under the Lee of Cyprus. So you can see that on the map, just around the hook of Cyprus because the winds were against us. After we had sailed across the sea that is off Sicilia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia.

And so hugging the coastline around what they call Asia, which we would call modern day Turkey, this boat travels very safely because the winds are so bad.

We'll find out in a minute that it's getting to the time of year where people just wouldn't sail. It's getting so rough in the Mediterranean. And I think it would have been hard for the Apostle Paul at this stop in southern Asia.

That's where he did a lot of his ministry across Asia, ancient Asia. It would have been hard for him to think, I'm in a boat and a day's travel is probably like five different churches I've planted.

All that are in trouble. All that need me. And here I am chained. What is God doing? What is God doing? So it would have been very hard for Paul. And at this point they change boats in verse 6.

[6 : 37] There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship bound for Italy and put us on board. Now the trouble is going to start here. Now what this boat probably was, because there are no passenger vessels at this time, most of the boats going around all carry cargo.

And Rome had in North Africa, at Alexandria near Egypt, very large stores, very large granaries that they kept. And therefore boats had to travel from Alexandria to Rome to basically feed them.

And there was good money in that, but it was very risky business if you were a boat owner. By the way, this is a very big boat. We find out later there's nearly 300 people in it. It's a very, very, very large vessel.

And unfortunately most of their grain they're going to end up chucking overboard because it's going to end badly. And so they go on verse 7 and 8.

They sailed slowly for a number of days, arrived with great difficulty off Sidus, and as the wind was against us we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmon. Sailing past it with difficulty we came to a place called Fairhavens near the city of Lycia.

[7 : 46] This is on the island of Crete, so hopefully you can make out Crete on the map. That's where they are and they've only just made it. It's been very kind of rough going up to this point. It's at the bad time of year.

What are they going to do? Are they going to risk it and keep going or are they going to stay? Well, Paul actually wants them to stay. He says, verse 9, since much time had been lost and sailing was now dangerous because even the fast had already gone by.

That is, the fast is the Jewish Day of Atonement, probably around October. And basically boats wouldn't sail in the winter at this time because it's too rough. And so it's not a good time of year.

And so Paul gives advice. He puts in his true sense and they won't listen to him yet, but this is what he says. He says, I can see, and I think here Paul is speaking as a sailor, as an experienced sort of person who's been on a lot of boats.

I can see that the voyage will be with danger and much heavy 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.

[8 : 55] And since the harbour was not suitable for spending the winter, the majority was in favour of putting to sea from there on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, where they

could spend the winter.

It was a harbour of Crete facing south, west and north-west. Now, Paul's role on the ship is going to prove to be critical. There's a bit of a vacuum of leadership because the centurion has commandeered this ship and yet he's not an experienced sailor and so he's kind of getting advice from everyone.

And in the end, it seems to be kind of a group decision that they'll keep going. Now, we'll find out they should have listened to Paul. And Paul is actually quite experienced at sea.

In the book of Acts alone, people have counted it and he's had 11 journeys by sea and travelled over 3,500 miles by sea and we don't even know what Luke didn't write in and we don't even know what other experience Paul had before he was a Christian.

So Paul is actually a very experienced sailor and he probably knows more than maybe a lot of the people on that boat and so they should have listened to him. They should have respected his authority, which they will do in due time.

[10:04] So anyway, they take off and this is going to end badly. You know this is going to end badly. When a moderate south wind began to blow, they thought they could achieve their purpose so they weighed anchor and began to sail past Crete, close to the shore.

So there's a moderate wind. Let's stick to the shore. If it gets bad, we'll just quickly pull into shore and we'll be fine. It's not going to go that well though. Verse 14, But soon a violent wind called the Northeaster rushed down from Crete.

And you know when they give winds a name that they've got a bad reputation. So this wind, the Northeaster comes and actually pushes them away from the shore, taking away their escape plan. Since the ship was caught and could not be turned head on into the wind, we gave way to it and were driven. Now you can kind of hear Luke's involvement here.

We gave way to it. By running under the lee of a small island called Korda, we were scarcely able to keep the ship's boat under control. Now Korda is a tiny little dot to southwest of Crete and Luke says we were hardly able to keep the ship's boat under control.

[11:16] That is, the ship has another boat, the lifeboat, which they tow. And so he's saying this wind was getting so great that the lifeboat was basically starting to bounce around and it was potentially going to damage the main vessel.

And so what they have to do is sort of hoist that on board. So after hoisting it up, verse 17, they took measures to undergird the ship.

Then fearing they would run on the surges, they lowered the sea anchor and were driven. And so you get a sense here not only did they have to put the lifeboat on board a deck, they had to sort of tie it down somehow.

And in doing that, Luke says they also took measures to undergird the ship. That is, they probably tried to get a rope around the whole hull of the ship to reinforce it and strengthen it.

So they can really get a sense that there's a storm coming that's going to just knock them to pieces if they're not careful. Verse 18, We were being pounded by the storm so violently that on the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard.

[12:24] You don't do that lightly because that's your income. It's getting even worse. On the third day, so three days of intense storm, on the third day with their own hands, they threw the ship's tackle overboard.

Now that is a sign of really basically giving up. But they're basically getting equipment off the boat they think they don't really need and it's expensive and chucking it off board just basically so that it doesn't bounce around and smash up stuff and it lightens the load.

And then finally verse 20, When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and no small tempest raged, that is a very large tempest raged against them, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.

So this was a huge error to go out and they've basically given up all hope. They can't see the sun, they can't see the stars because the storm clouds are so dark and so thick and just thundering against them they abandon all hope of living.

Now I think at this point I sense there's some parallels going on here or at least allusions to the book of Jonah where there's a similar fierce storm and the sailors are kind of just clutching at straws giving up hope.

[13 : 48] And like the book of Jonah there's a man of God aboard the boat and he is the key to their survival. I mean unlike the book of Jonah it's not because of Paul's sin but Paul is the man of God on the boat that the storm draws attention to Paul and Paul is the one when they've abandoned hope who stands up now and gives hope and here's what Paul says.

Since they've been, verse 21, without food for a long time Paul stood up among them and said men you should have listened to me and have not set sail from Crete and thereby avoided this damage and loss.

I don't think he's gloating but it's a rebuke from one sailor to other sailors. You know, who knows what they're doing here?

You should listen to me. I urge you now, do this. Keep up your courage for there will be no loss of life among you but only of the ship and now Paul sort of speaks as the man of God, as an apostle. For last night there stood by me an angel of the God to whom I belong and of whom I worship. It is, I've met an angel of God on this boat and he said to me, do not be afraid Paul for you must stand before the emperor.

[15 : 02] You must stand before Caesar and indeed God has granted safety to all those who are sailing with you. So keep up your courage men, says Paul, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I've been told.

So that they'd abandoned hope and now Paul gives them hope a special revelation from God that they'll be safe. Although he doesn't quite know how they're going to be safe because they're throwing all the equipment overboard and they can't see anything, they don't know where they're going and the storm's pulling the bits.

He doesn't really know how God will deliver this. He guesses that we will have to run aground on some island. Now, what's going to happen?

Will people listen to Paul? Will people embrace his leadership now? Will people believe in him as an apostle, as a man of God, a man of faith? Well, let's find out.

Verse 27, When the fourteenth night had come, as we were drifting across the sea of Adria about midnight, the sailors suspected they were nearing land. So they're basically flying blind at this point.

[16 : 08] The ship is falling apart. They can't see where they're going. They don't know where they're going and they can't even steer if they wanted to. But they sensed they're getting close to the land.

They took soundings and found 20 fathoms. That's about 40 metres deep. A little farther on, they took soundings again and found the water was 15 fathoms, 30 metres deep.

They get a sense that we're getting closer and closer to land. And of course, that's actually a problem because they're flying blind in the night. They're basically going to, if there's rocks around wherever this land is, they will crash and die.

Fearing that we might run onto the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. And you can imagine, I think here Paul would be leading the prayers because later he seems to lead them in prayers of thanks for food.

But there are some sailors on the board that think, prayer? We're not going to pray. We're going to look after ourselves. And so they secretly get this lifeboat that they brought on board and start lowering it, wanting to, as a group of sailors, escape and leave the others to certain death on board the boat.

[17 : 21] This is verse 30. But when the sailors tried to escape from the ship and lowered the boat into the sea, on the pretext of putting out anchors from the bow, Paul said to his centurion and to the soldiers, unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.

And so you imagine, well, what would you do? This man has confronted you. This Christian leader has confronted you. Will you actually believe him or will you just sort of selfishly jump ship?

Well, the soldiers cut away the ropes of the boat and set it adrift. And so they've actually repented of being selfish and they've said, no, we'll throw in our lot with Paul and we will live or die with him and his God.

And they really do have no way out now. There's really no escape for anyone unless they can run aground as a group in the main vessel. I think Paul here is like Jonah in that Jonah has a word from the Lord.

He has a mission to do. But unlike Jonah, who's actually causing them to die and Jonah has to be evicted, the only hope for salvation on this boat is with the man of God.

[18 : 36] You have to stay with the man of God to be saved on this boat because this man of God has been promised that he will stand before Nero. And so they choose to trust Paul and they cut away the lifeboat.

They cut away their escape plan. And now here's a wonderful moment of leadership in verse 33 where Paul really steps up and takes charge of the whole ship and brings hope.

Just before daybreak, Paul urged all of them to take some food saying, today is the 14th day that you have been in suspense and remaining without food and eaten nothing.

Therefore I urge you to take some food for it will help you survive and none of you will lose a hair from your heads. And then there's a sort of moment of worship where after he had said this, he took bread and giving thanks to God in the presence of all, he broke it and began to eat.

And I'm not saying that they're doing communion. I'm just saying that he took a moment and they're all so busy just stressing out and being depressed and sort of thinking they're going to die. Paul actually gets the whole attention of the boat and sort of models before them.

[19 : 44] He gets bread and just thanks God and they're panicking, they're in suspense but Paul is at peace. Paul is trusting his God and it seems that his faith then sort of energises the whole boat and then all of them were encouraged and took food for themselves.

We were in all 276 persons in the ship. After they had satisfied their hunger, they lighten the ship by throwing the wheat into the sea. Probably their load of grain, as it was getting wetter and wetter, it expands and if they had a pretty full boat and it's very, very wet, it could basically expand so much to start to break the boat.

So just get rid of that weight. There's an interesting picture here, by the way. This is just tangential. What do you do when God has promised that something will happen?

Does that mean they just sit back and do nothing? Paul says, to survive, you have to eat. You know, God has promised you safety but you have to work.

God has promised not a hair of your head will be numbered but you still need to take food. There's essentially what Paul models a really strong faith in the divine providence and yet there's still human activity, there's still human responsibility that God will use Paul's activity as an instrument to achieve his divine purposes but they just can't sit back and do nothing just because God has promised safety.

[21 : 11] Now finally, there's some good news here. Verse 39, in the morning they did not recognise the land but they noticed a bay with a beach. That's good. They want a beach on which they planned to run the ship ashore if they could.

So basically here on the map we're at the island of Malta. So that's not bad. They've just drifted across the Mediterranean in the storm not knowing what they're doing. The island of Malta is not that big and so God has brought them here.

But typical to the book of Acts Jesus keeps people on the edge and it actually gets worse before it gets better. They cast off anchors and left them in the sea.

At the same time they loosened the ropes that tied the steering oars then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach. So they're trying to get there but something really bad happened.

Striking a reef or a sandbar they ran the ship aground too early. So they're still sort of out at sea.

They can see the bay but they're stuck out here in the storm and the bow stuck and remained immovable but the stern was being broken up by the force of the waves.

[22 : 20] This is the worst thing that could happen. They're basically stuck here getting smashed to bits by the storm and they can see sort of salvation in sight but they can't reach it. Of course at this point everyone would just jump ship and start swimming which creates a problem for Paul and the prisoners because if a Roman soldier lets a prisoner escape then they will be killed.

But if all the prisoners are just jumping off and swimming away and you're under death sentence you're on death row you're going to basically have a run for it aren't you? You're not going to wait and put the chains back on or anything.

And so the soldiers plan was to kill the prisoners so that none might swim away and escape. So just when they nearly reach salvation they run aground and are getting smashed up and just when they could just jump off and swim to shore the soldiers decide let's kill all the prisoners.

So it's not good for Paul is it? Jesus keeps them on the very edge of a precipice the whole time.

And I think this is a little bit like the sailors by the way.

The sailors earlier they want to get in the lifeboat save themselves let others die. Here the soldiers are thinking save ourselves let others die. You know we don't want to risk our own bacon so let's kill them so that we can protect ourselves.

[23 : 39] Ironically there's only one man in the boat who's guaranteed he will live that's Paul and he's actually using all his gifts to get everyone rescued.

And luckily the centurion is a good guy in verse 43 he wants to save Paul so he stopped them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land and that is to sort of be there to get the prisoners and then everyone else follows on planks and pieces of the ship.

And so it was that all were brought safely to land and everyone goes whew that's good. Actually I'd love to keep going but I want to draw some lessons from this.

There's more adventures to come. Paul is going to get bitten by a snake on the island and he's going to be healing people and just amazing things are still happening on the island of Malta in chapter 28.

But just let me friends I want to tell you what I think what has Luke put this in here for? Some people think Luke has put this in here just for entertainment and I buy that a little bit because it's actually quite exciting and why wouldn't you put it in there it's one of Luke's favourite memories of his time with the Apostle.

[24 : 55] Why not just slip that in he's given us you know 28 great chapters why can't he have one chapter of his favourite adventure with the Apostle? So there's something in that but also I think there's something theological going on Luke is teaching us about trusting in the providence of God isn't he?

Luke is teaching us something about that Jesus is able to protect those whom he wants to protect that the Lord Jesus he's risen from the dead he has all power he is both sovereign and smart he's powerful and he's able to wisely smartly lovingly take care of all his people when Jesus wants to protect you he will protect you and it may look like in the eyes of everyone else that you're you're done for but if Jesus wants to protect you no one can get you that's the lesson I think and we can see here that there's some wisdom in God doing it this way that God didn't make it easy for Paul to get to Rome but it allowed it to be a demonstration of God's power to protect his people when they are suffering I mean think about where Jesus has been from if your king is all powerful but he's the one who has died for you and risen for you you can trust him with your life you can trust him with your suffering and so it's a very encouraging chapter for the sovereignty of God for the providence of God for the power of God

I think too quickly as I speak to some of you or as I this happened in the past where people who are suffering a lot are quick to jump to the conclusion that Jesus is not in control but that's not the Jesus of Acts or they jump to the conclusion that Jesus doesn't know what he's doing but that's not the Jesus of Acts friends I would encourage you I would challenge you in your suffering to choose to believe on the evidence of the book of Acts that you are in the care of the king and that whatever is happening you are in good care and he will do what he needs to do in your life I mean unlike the apostle Paul none of us has a divine revelation from an angel saying that we're going to be protected for the next year or whatever although if you think about it Paul only got given that promise so that he could get to Rome to die there so his destiny is actually to be a martyr to die for Jesus to suffer for Jesus it's not that Paul is given invulnerability from everything he's only being protected so that he can die to maximise witness to Jesus

I think there is one of the lessons actually that in your suffering Jesus wants to show forth his goodness and power by you staying faithful to him by you trusting him with whatever you're going through so I think that is the big lesson that the Lord Jesus is sovereign and he's able to take care of his people there are two other small lessons that I'll just finish with the first one is I just want to remind you of this because we forget this very easily the Christian life is an exciting life this is an exciting chapter isn't it the Christian life is a very exciting life and sometimes people treat the book of Acts this section like it's kind of quaint like it's a kind of quaint adventure story but I think because Jesus is sovereign every part of the Christian life no matter how mundane is of value to him because he is in control of all things whatever you do you know whether you eat or drink you do it for the glory of God and so the

Christian life is the most exciting life to wake up knowing that you are serving the all powerful King Jesus you know whatever you do even if you are like mowing the lawn for church or something or

you're just praying for someone he will use that powerfully with eternal results you know friends the Christian life is more exciting than watching TV the Christian life is more exciting than boring hobbies serving Jesus and serving Jesus people is not a distraction to your life it is your life it is the most significant thing you can do and I worry that some of us in selfishness sort of like the sailors and the soldiers try and do things for ourselves and we justify why we're not serving Jesus more to do things for ourselves in doing that we cut ourselves off from the adventure of the Christian life we cut ourselves off from the joys of the Christian life in seeking some other kind of pleasures in life friends don't do that whatever you do for

[29 : 52] Jesus because he is in control he will always do more than you ask or imagine and that is exciting to know that so the Christian life is the most exciting life and the final thing I want to say is and this is really to the men in the room so at the risk of letting the women get proud as I try and rebuke the men I just want the men here to think about the kind of man that Paul is where are the men in the church today like Paul the apostle do you know what I mean where are the men who are he's a veteran sailor he's bold in leadership he leads in prayers to God in front of 276 pagan sailors he's a hard man he's a tough man he rebukes people and yet he's compassionate and prayerful and he's reliable he steps into the leadership vacuum and takes charge of situations where leadership is needed where are the men like that in the church today ever thought about this this is what

John Stott says of the apostle Paul here John Stott says what a man he was a man of God and of action a man of the spirit and of common sense where are the men like that in the church today you with me I mean the early church was full of men like Paul other times of church history like the reformation was full of men like that the great awakening under George Whitefield was full of men like that in fact George Whitefield had amazing adventures at sea preaching the gospel very much like Acts 27 I just worry that the men among us today and I'm just preaching to myself as well here we are so prone to sulking so prone to dragging our feet evading responsibility giving up easily we quit so easily where are the men that like the apostle are reliable committed work hard take initiative know the scriptures love their

God and are bold in challenging other men where are the men that are publicly prayerful and compassionate in heart like the apostle Paul I put that out there to the men here but to all of us may God help us to embrace the excitement and the risk-taking excitement of living for Jesus as the ascended king amen and through his routine hard and him out there is