

A Mediterranean Cruise?

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 12th of September 1999. The preacher is Phil Newman.

His sermon is entitled A Mediterranean Cruise, Christian Mark, and is from Acts chapter 27, verses 1 to 44.

Let me pray. Our Father, I pray that you would open our hearts and our minds, help us to understand your word, and help us to know what you are saying to us today.

For we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. I have spent many a holiday cruising the sea in yachts, living a life of luxury, as some might put it.

One of the more memorable trips that I have had was a two-day trip on the Mediterranean in Turkey, where Paul was sailing. A group of us sailed leisurely to an unknown island in the Turkish coast, and we took with us a goat.

[1 : 07] It was a dead goat, but it was a whole goat. And we cooked this goat on a spit, and we partied till late in the night. And as we cruised around the Mediterranean on this idyllic location, we swam alongside the yacht, holding a tow rope and soaked in the beautiful sun.

It was idyllic conditions. It was beautiful. The sea was crystal blue, and the winds were light. It was a fantastic experience. Everything was really smooth sailing.

Now I've got a couple of photos, which Wilma's going to show us. Hopefully, you might have to take that board off or something, of part of this trip on the Mediterranean.

This one, this first one, lift it up a bit, that's the boat that we were sailing. It was an old sort of sloop, and there were 22 of us on board the boat, I think it was. And that's the island we actually pulled into, and we cooked a goat on the spit.

And it was the middle of summer. It was a beautiful time. And there's a photo of this great-looking guy. See? I was young and handsome then, partying on the boat, sleeping in the sails.

[2 : 24] And you can see, I sort of had some other photos that would give us a bit more information about the Turkish coast, but they were the only two I could find. It was a great experience, and it was a great holiday.

Thanks. Well, life can be smooth sailing for many people. Lots of friends, plenty of money to live on, or to sponge from mum and dad if you're a kid still at home.

But life's not always like that, is it? Life's not always smooth sailing. There are times when the ideal Mediterranean cruise can turn into a bit of a nightmare.

Let me give you an example. The annual Sydney to Hobart yacht race is an example of that. There have been many years when it is smooth sailing, good companionship, and a great party at the end. And there have been other years, though, when many of the starters have not finished the race due to the extreme weather conditions. Now, I've sailed in a couple of Sydney to Hobart yacht races, but none like the last.

[3 : 27] That was the worst one on record. There were six lives tragically lost. A big inquiry was held into it. Cyclonic conditions were experienced for much of the fleet.

Many boats were damaged in major ways, severe structural damage and so on. People weren't expecting the sort of conditions that were experienced. They weren't ready for the storm that came their way.

Now, I'm going to read to you, just for a couple of moments, an eyewitness account of one of the crewmen aboard a boat called Wide Load. This was an email that was sent to me. And this boat, called Wide Load, like many that were in the Sydney to Hobart, was not prepared for the storm of trouble that they got into.

So let me just read you a couple of glimpses of it. The boat had been knocked down, and he goes on to read. He says, We were knocked down two more times with the forward starboard perspex window being cracked, the forward window of the boat being cracked.

Another wave hit us when Warren and I were on the deck. It hit us on the starboard quarter, and it lifted me over the winch and to the end of my harness tether. Otherwise, I would have been thrown out through the port lifelines.

[4 : 41] At the same time, Warren was thrown over the wheel, and this resulted in injury. Not allowed for this. He asked me to get Robbie on deck to take over. During one knockdown, all the...

Down below, people were all down below, all the cutlery that was in the drawers and so on flew from the galley locker across the cavern to the navigation station, landing on a guy called Gervais who sat there trying to sleep.

I said that he was very lucky that he didn't end up with a knife in his eye or something like that. The cutlery, can you imagine that? A boat being tossed around and thrown around. Well, the boat... This boat was tipped over. It did what they call a 360, a full roll in the ocean. And it had an immense amount of damage. And he goes on to explain some of those details.

You saw a photo of me sailing, sleeping on the sails in the calm seas. Well, this guy, one of the guys was trying to sleep in the sails just to get some comfort to stop the pounding and pounding that was going on.

[5 : 48] He goes on to write a little bit further. Steering was near impossible on two counts. The winds were firing drops of water at 70 to 80 knots.

That's over 100 miles an hour of this wind and water coming into your face which stunned the face and the eyes like shotgun pellets. Also, as the seas were so confused, it was always more luck than skill that we didn't get more sight on waves hitting us.

And he goes on to praise the efforts of some of the crew and so on. Well, pretty hair-raising experience. I haven't experienced that kind of condition. I've been in pretty rough conditions but not like that.

A couple of quotes which came from this report. One of the ladies on board, a lady called Kelly, said, there aren't any atheists on board, are there, thinking about the storm that they are in?

And another guy called Robbie said this about referring to the whole fleet. He said, I'll bet there are a lot of people in this race who will rediscover their religion.

[6 : 53] Well, I think that might have been the case. Well, tonight I want to ask each one of us whether we are prepared to face the storms of life that come our way. Whether it be at school, whether it be at work, whether it be at university, at home, in our relationships, out there on the ocean blue, are we ready to face the storms of life that come our way?

Is there an anchor point that manages all these areas of our life? Is it our own self-reliance, our own financial security, our family?

If it is, then what happens when one or all of those things fail us or let us down? Now, in the video that we saw of St. Paul's travels here of Acts chapter 27, he's travelling to Italy and the reason I've been talking about a storm is because he encounters a literal storm, doesn't he?

Possibly that storm is in around the same areas that I was cruising on when I sailed on the Mediterranean. Now, Paul has been through all sorts of trials and persecutions throughout his life but he has something that keeps him going, something that spurs him on.

He has a strong anchor point that keeps him secure and it's not his own self-reliance nor the reliance on others. What it is, is his absolute dependence upon and confidence in God that keeps him going despite any of the circumstances that might be surrounding him.

[8 : 32] Now, in the book of Acts, Paul has had some pretty hairy encounters with people and here in this chapter, we see how he and all who are on board have a major encounter with the forces of nature and the thing that comes through while all the others around him are panicked and so on is Paul's faith in God.

You see, in God, Paul has a rock-solid anchor that holds him fast. God is his anchor and one of the other things that we see here is that Paul uses what I've called common sense.

Paul's destination is Rome along with the other prisoners that are on board this boat and it's coming to the end of the time that they're sailing. It's coming to the end of the safe sailing season and in fact, that safe sailing season has just gone past.

And Paul knowing that if they sail on is to risk the lives of everyone on board that boat. So he suggests to the Roman centurion that they spend the winter in the particular port that they are in which is called the port of Fairhavens.

Well, the centurion who prefers to listen to the owner of the ship and press on to a safer harbour for the winter rejects Paul's advice. That was to be fatal.

[10:00] No sooner had they pulled out of the port of Fairhaven than they encounter a violent wind or what they call the northeaster. And it's a wind of hurricane force causing massive handling problems for this cumbersome ship and its crew.

And you saw that they take all sorts of measures to safeguard the ship. Literally strapping the hull together with ropes and cables throwing out these big sea anchors to try and slow the boat down and then to try and regain some control of the boat as well as abandoning some of the precious cargo on board because that's their trade.

That's how they make their living by trading over the seas and so on. Well, why is this happening? Why is all this stuff happening to them? It's happening because they have entered the season where it's not safe to sail due to the extreme weather conditions that they've come upon.

And we shouldn't think of this as being an act of God that is happening here due to somebody's wickedness. What we're seeing here is a series of circumstances.

It's not as if God is tracking this ship down with the storms that they cannot hide from. If they had listened to Paul's common sense advice, they could have avoided this storm by remaining in the safety of the previous port.

[11:29] And Paul's advice was common sense. He was perhaps a seasoned seafarer. We see that he's done quite a bit of travelling in some of the other books in the Bible.

So he knew when it was and when it wasn't safe to travel. Now I think that has some implications for us because I don't believe God punishes us every time we do the wrong thing.

Sure, God does prompt us from time to time but I think it's wrong to say that God's punishing me because of this or that. We need to look at the circumstances that are surrounding us and make wise decisions about the steps that we take rather than just being rash, glib or even heroic.

work. So for example, you can't say that God is punishing you if you don't get into the uni course that you wanted to get into if you haven't put in the work to enable you to get the marks that are needed or required for that particular course.

It's wrong to say that God is punishing you in that area. It's foolishness and unhelpful I think to think that way. Likewise, I think it would be foolish of me to participate in the Uncle Toby's Iron Man series without first putting in some serious training.

[12:43] If I did, without putting in some training, I would either die of a heart attack or come so far last that there would be no one to meet me at the finishing line. We have to be sensible about the decisions that we make.

God has also given us a mind and a wisdom to make informed decisions about the things that we do. So we need to use our common sense when making decisions.

Well, the circumstances of Paul and all those on board the ship lead us all to think that there is going to be severe loss of life, perhaps due to the lack of common sense.

Paul, in his advice, says there's going to be severe loss of life if we go on. And we see that they're in this terrible storm of trouble. And in fact, we see in this passage that the people lose all hope of survival.

All that is, except for Paul, the one who said that there will be severe loss of life. He now tells the people, all the people on board the boat, that there will be no loss of life at all, and that they ought to keep up their courage.

[13:57] Now, what is it that gives him courage to say these things? Let me read to you verses 23 to 26 of this passage. For last night there stood by me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, Do not be afraid, Paul.

You must stand before the emperor, and indeed, God has granted safety to all those who are sailing with you. So keep up your courage, men, he says to the people, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told, but we will have to run aground on some island.

What is it that gives Paul courage? It's his faith in God that it will be exactly as he has been told.

Now, the circumstances that these people are in look pretty hopeless, worse than a Sydney to Hobart.

That's why I tried to explain some of the details to you. These people do not know where they are. They have no way of navigating their way through the storm. They haven't seen the sun and the moon and the stars for days.

And they are in danger of sinking or being smashed against the rocks. It's a pretty grim situation. Yet Paul's confidence and anchor point is in God.

[15 : 25] His confidence is in the God who has created the heavens and the earth, who has created the wind and the waves, the sun, the moon and the stars and so on. God has spoken to Paul through an angel, granting him and all on board safety.

Now Paul has heard these words from an angel, but Paul can rely on these words because he knows that when God promises something, God keeps his promises.

How does he know all this? How does he know that God keeps his promises? It's not just because an angel of God has spoken to him in a dream. It's far from that. It's because Paul has been a faithful reader and follower of the scriptures as well as a proclaimer of God's words, a proclaimer of the scriptures, how God's word has been revealed to him.

He has seen God at work in his own life. He has seen how God has fulfilled his promises in scripture right back from creation through the history of scripture.

He's seen how that's been fulfilled. He therefore has no reason to doubt that what has been said to him now because God is the God who fulfills his promises.

[16 : 42] God has promised him something through an angel and from that point on to the end of the chapter we see some further trials that the crew and Paul go through.

But what we see right at the end of the chapter is God's faithfulness. At the end of verse 44 and the rest to follow, some on planks and others in pieces of the ship.

And so it was that all were brought safely to land. All were brought safely to land. After all the trouble and the turmoil that they have been through, all the people on the boat, 276 people on the boat are brought safely to land just as Paul had been told and had told the crew in return.

Long before Paul set sail to Rome though, Paul was prepared to weather any storm. It was natural for him, as it is for us, to be concerned about taking unnecessary risks.

And that's why he advised against sailing on to the next port. But his trust and his confidence was in God. Not that God would necessarily save him from the perils of the storm, but that whatever happened to him, he knew that he was in God's hands and that he would spend an eternity with God.

[18 : 13] God. Why is that? It's because of the faith and the trust that he had in God through Jesus Christ, God's Son.

Before Paul became a follower of Jesus, Paul tried to follow God by observing a strict law and code of conduct. His salvation, if you like, depended on what he did.

But he was shown that this wasn't the way to have a relationship with God. In fact, he learnt that it led to death. The only way that Paul could enter into a true and proper relationship with God was by surrendering to his will, to God's will, rather than doing what he thought was right.

God revealed to Paul that the only way to enter into a relationship with him was through Jesus, worshipping him as Lord, worshipping Jesus as Lord, being obedient to him, rejecting all sorts of selfish living and so on.

God was Paul's anchor and Jesus was the line that connects Paul to God, if you like. It was Jesus who weathered Paul through all the strife and the turmoil that he endured.

[19 : 42] And it was knowing Jesus that enabled him to have joy despite the circumstances that he was placed in. Because through Jesus and only through Jesus he was connected to God.

Paul went through some pretty hairy times. Just read Acts again or read some of the letters and you'll discover that. Well, through Jesus Paul was connected to God.

God, the same applies for us today. The only way that we can enter into a relationship with God is by following Jesus. A place in heaven is guaranteed when we put our trust in him alone rather than through our own efforts or through the latest fad that might be on at the time, whatever it might be. And the proof of that guarantee is seen at the resurrection. Now when Jesus was put to death on the cross by humans, by you and me, he died.

But Jesus didn't stay dead. He rose again from it to prove that he is the way, the truth and the life, that he is the son of God, that he is who he said he was when he was alive on this earth.

[21 : 04] And he offers us resurrection to life everlasting, eternal life, if we put our trust in him. As we continue on following him and serving him with the whole of ourselves, God's spirit, Jesus' spirit, enables us to endure the good and the bad times of life.

His word, the Bible, nourishes us. It helps us to make sense of the pain and the suffering that we see all around us. And that we may even be going through.

But it also gives us a great eternal hope to look forward to. Now just before the service started, you were all sitting there and talking and we turned on a tape and Wilma played some words.

The song that was played at the beginning of the service was a song by a guy called Rich Mullins. And the chorus of that song says, I am ready for the storm.

Now no doubt there were many storms or chaotic times in Rich Mullins' life, which we perhaps have experienced as well. We've all experienced hardship in some way or another.

[22 : 21] But Rich Mullins' faith was in Jesus and that enabled him to weather any situation. Christians. Rich Mullins was killed in a plane crash two or three years ago, I can't remember.

And he was killed in a plane crash, which many would say is the greatest storm that anyone could ever go through. But he was ready for the storm because he had a living relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Christ. And the Bible tells us that whoever trusts in Jesus will live forever. Now here in this chapter that we saw on video and heard read to us, we see that St.

Paul's faith in God was unshakable. There was nothing that could shake his faith in God. He knew that God would rescue him and those on board the ship from the storm.

God had told him he would and he did because God is a God who keeps his promises. Now God may not speak to you or me in the same way that he spoke to Paul, but we can be confident that anyone who serves and follows Jesus, trust in him, whether it's Rich Mullins, whether it's the Apostle Paul, whether it's Sue you, whether it's you or me, we can be confident that if we trust in Jesus, we have a place in eternity because God is faithful to his promises that we read about time after time in his word, in the Bible.

[24 : 04] There may be some rough storms along the way, but God is faithful. Now over the past few days and the days to come, we will hear from the Ridley team testimonies about what God has done in people's lives and we've heard some really good testimonies.

And I hope that they are an encouragement to you and that they challenge you to think about where you stand before God. I'm going to sing a song, I've never done this before, which talks about God's faithfulness.

I heard it last week at Melbourne Praise and some of you up the back might know it and sing it with me. And there's been many songs which talk about God's faithfulness over the years.

And I'm going to sing this to you, we're going to put the words up on the overhead and as you get the flavour of it, I encourage you to join in and sing with me. Thank you. Thank you.