

# Acts 27:1-28:10

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[0:00] Joy. Amen. Oh, good morning.

For those of you I don't know, my name is Dave. I'm one of Shoreline's pastors or elders. And we get to return to the book of Acts today. Acts chapter 27. It's been about a month since.

It's been four Sundays, so actually like five weeks since we've been in the book of Acts. So let's remind ourselves. Where are we? When last we left our hero, Paul, we've been tracing his journey, the Lord had dramatically turned him from an enemy, from a persecutor of the church into someone who planted new churches all across the Roman Empire over the course of three missionary journeys.

And on his way to preach the gospel in Rome itself, he wanted to see Jerusalem one final time to encourage the saints there and preach the good news of Christ to his own people, the Jews, one last time.

While he was there, some in the temple crowds started a riot over his presence. He was sort of a controversial figure. And so first he was on trial, and then he was under threat of assassination, and eventually he was shipped off to Caesarea, sort of for his own safety.

[1:46] He spent two years in custody, having made five defenses of himself. And because he could get no justice, as a Roman citizen, he appealed to Caesar and was shipped off to Rome.

And that is where we come today in Acts chapter 27. Now, a warning. This is one of the longest passages we've ever tackled at Shoreline, as in it's going to take me about ten minutes to read it. But never fear. While we are considering a large section, we will draw out one simple lesson. Now, before we begin, this is a sea voyage.

There are a few details that will help us understand the story as we navigate it. The setting here, right? We are in the northeastern section of the Mediterranean Sea.

We are heading northwest from Israel to Rome. Many of your Bibles, if you flip to the back, will have a map of this sea voyage. It might be helpful to check it out.

[2:59] Now, the climate of the Mediterranean varies seasonally, much like many places in the world. You do not hear about, you haven't heard in the news lately about a hurricane hitting the United States.

Why? This makes perfect sense to me. I was in the Coast Guard. The pollution response, this was our big season, was late August to early October, because that's when hurricanes hit us.

Similarly, in the Mediterranean, there is a storm season, and it is roughly from November to January, February time frame. That's when we're going to be setting sail, so to speak, today.

Anyway, if there were any cadets here today, got to talk to Carl about where they are, I would give them a quick pop quiz on what the term lee means.

The windward side of the ship is the side with which the, the side of the ship that the wind hits. The lee side is the opposite side. The lee side of an island is the side of the island that the island shields from wind.

[4:08] That will come into account later on. And one last thing. There's no GPS in the first century, nor there are Loran stations, for those who recall what that means.

Navigation is by sun and stars alone. So when we are about to hear Luke say, when neither sun nor stars, like day or night, when neither sun nor stars had appeared for many days, dot, dot, dot.

He's not only saying it was dark, he's also saying that for many days they had no bearings. They were helpless. They were lost at sea.

All right? That gives you some of an idea of what is about to happen. So let us turn then to Acts chapter 27 and into chapter 28 and hear what has happened to the Lord's apostle.

And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan cohort named Julius. And embarking in a ship of Adramidium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica.

[5:36] 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. There the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy and put us on board. We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Nidus. And as the wind did not allow us to go further, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Solomne, coasting along, yet with difficulty, we came to a place called Therhavens, near which was the city of Lycia.

Since much time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous because even the fast was already over, Paul advised them, saying, 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, to the owner of the ship, than to what Paul said. And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

[7:10] Now, when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to the shore. But soon, a tempestuous wind called the nor'easter struck down from the land.

When the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. Running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the ship's boat.

After hoisting it up, they used supports to undergird the ship. Then fearing that they would run aground on the Sirtis, they lowered the gear, and thus they were driven along.

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. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.

Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, 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 of the ship.

[8:34] For this very night there stood before 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 Caesar, and behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.

So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told, but we must run aground on some island. When the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land, so they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms.

A little farther on, they took a sounding again and found fifteen 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 as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense 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 of the ship's boat and let it go. As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing.

[9:59] 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. And

when he 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. We were, in all, two hundred and seventy-six persons in the ship. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.

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, then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach.

But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable when the stern was being broken up by the surf. The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape.

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

[11:22] And so it was that all were brought safely to land. After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta.

The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all because it had begun to rain and was cold. When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand.

When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, no doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live. He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead.

When they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god. Now, in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to a chief man of the island named Publius who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days.

[12:34] It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. Paul visited him and prayed and putting his hand on him, healed him. And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured.

They also honored us greatly. And when we were about to sail, they put us on board, they put on board whatever we needed. This is God's word for his people.

What a tale! With the exception of perhaps the riot scenes, there is scarcely a portion of the book of Acts as action-packed as this.

So is that why Luke includes it? I suspect that the Lord intended the inclusion of this scene in his scriptures for more than just let's throw something energetic into the climax.

I suspect we're supposed to see something, recognize something, become something based on this passage. What are we supposed to take from all this?

[13:54] Storms and shipwrecks and vipers. Oh my. Some of the themes I think will immediately jump out at us.

The Lord is faithful to his promises. Right? He promised back in chapter 23, take courage for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.

And here we see him seeing his promise through. And not only that, but within the passage we see a promise made and a promise kept from our Lord to the very letter.

Which leads us to a second theme. Our Lord's sovereignty. He is Lord over even the seas and the storms.

I don't know if you've ever been at sea in a storm. I have. It is really difficult to communicate the power of the sea if you have not experienced it.

[15:08] We modern Westerners are fantastically insulated from the natural world. We have weather sealed, climate controlled, and meteorologically forecasted ourselves away from it.

We are just sealed off from the natural world. But there is none of that in the face of the sea. The thing about the sea isn't just its tremendous power, but its indifference.

It's not fighting you. There is no fight. Even on a large Coast Guard cutter, you don't even register as a blip on its radar.

At all. the sea storm simply happens. Waves rise and fall like mountain ranges, and you are tossed like a passing thought.

And yet, who is in control throughout all of chapter 27? Who steers all things?

[16:24] us? It's very clear. It's the one who can tell Paul just what will happen, because it is he who brings it to pass.

Our Lord rules and reigns over even nature's fury. It is but a tool in his hand, God because he spoke it into being.

There is not a force in all this world that does not bow to his command. Praise his matchless name. There are some obvious themes that come to light, that jump out at us.

The Lord's faithfulness, his power. Others aren't quite as apparent. There's some really interesting literature about Luke's writing style in this section.

You can describe the same event in different ways, with different language. Imagine, if you will, Dr. Seuss and Edgar Allan Poe go on a walk together. I imagine their journal entries that day, but the same exact event, would read quite differently.

[17:45] Scholars have recognized that in chapters 27 and chapter 28, Luke weaves together two different styles. We won't go into all the details of why that would require reading the whole passage again.

but he's describing the events in two different styles, back and forth and back and forth. One Greek and one Hebrew.

On the one hand, he describes Paul and the events in ways very reminiscent of the Old Testament prophets. And at the same time, he employs terms that are familiar to the Greek epics, phrasing and themes from Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, may mark the storm in the shipwreck.

Elements of Greek mythology where the Olympian gods visited mortals are weaved through the Malta account. It's as if Luke is using his language to portray Paul bringing the gospel as the God of the Hebrews sending a prophet to bring the Greeks, what they had truly longed for all along, what their myths were grasping for all along.

So the sovereign, promise-keeping Lord is bringing a long-awaited hope of the world to the nations through his prophet and through some extraordinary circumstances.

[19:19] promises. But what does that mean for us, for you and for me today?

What are we to do with this? We aren't apostles. We haven't been given the promise, you'll preach the gospel in Rome. Few of us, I imagine, have been shipwrecked in the Mediterranean.

But this wasn't recorded for Paul's benefit. It's here for us. What are we to do with it? And I don't want to over-spiritualize this, right, and say something like, you know, Paul went through a major storm.

So when the storms of life come your way, dot, dot, dot, right? But I do want to consider that this storm and all that surrounded it was part of like an avalanche of trouble and uncertainty and suffering for Paul.

And I feel like even if you're an unusually strong person or an unusually insulated person who is mistaken about how strong they are, here in what, you know, it's month, what, 26 of 2020 now, right?

[20:43] I feel like everyone knows what it is like for troubles to build, to mount up one on another and compound each other. Consider the compounding troubles that Paul has faced.

What's on his plate right now? Beaten by a mob in Jerusalem, wrongfully imprisoned, subject to death threats, trapped in a government bureaucracy for more than two years, on trial multiple times. Those we saw today who are responsible for his life and safety disregard his wise counsel. He barely survives a storm at sea. The soldiers considered killing him rather than risk his escape, shipwrecked, which means he also lost all of his remaining possessions.

He's literally homeless, snakebitten, all of this on the way to go stand trial before Nero. If even one of those things happened to me, do you know what I would do?

I'd take the rest of the day off. How about you? I'd take it easy. I'd order out. I'd watch a movie. I would check out for a little bit. Self-care is like a buzzword right now.

[22:13] If any of this happened to me, I would be all about some self-care. And what does Paul do? If you look to chapter 28, verses 8 and 9, it happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery.

And Paul visited him and prayed and putting his hands on him healed him. And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured.

So what does Paul do? Where I would check out, where I would want someone to take care of me and my needs, he keeps on serving others.

At the very moment I would be checking out and focusing on me, Paul was giving, ministering, serving. It's likely that that did not land on everyone here the same way.

For some it landed like a guilt trip, piling up new burdens in the midst of whatever you've got on your plate. For you, let me offer you some grace and some hope.

[23:50] Others felt very little. That's nice. Let me offer you some conviction. Others, perhaps most, are somewhere in between, drawn to the example that Paul sets, but busy and tired and not knowing how we might follow in it.

let me offer you this encouragement that you can walk in his steps. And to do so, let me offer all of us, regardless of how Paul's example strikes us, some power to walk forward in service to others, even when our blades are full.

first, those who need conviction, if you saw Paul reaching out and serving, even in the midst of his own exhaustion and difficulty, and it didn't really make an impression on you, let me offer you some conviction.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously wrote, when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. He said that because Jesus said in Matthew 16, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Friends, salvation is the free gift of God. But let us not be so short sighted that we think solely of what we have been saved from wrath that we do not consider what we have been saved to and for.

[25:43] You have been saved into a new vocation. In the old covenant, a select few could serve as priests.

priests. Who are the priests of the new covenant? Revelation chapter 1 teaches us, to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father.

To him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Who are the priests of the new covenant? Every single Christian has been saved into the service of the risen king, which is a tremendous privilege and responsibility.

you've been saved into a new vocation and you have been saved in parallel for good works.

Paul says in Ephesians chapter 2, for by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not of your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast, for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

[27:16] You were saved from wrath into his service for good works.

Christians, pay attention to this, Christians are being returned, restored into true humanity in its pure original intent.

That's what that means. this is not something added to the end of the gospel. Okay, now go do some good stuff. No, the gospel is a restoration to true humanity where we echo after the Lord's good heart.

And if that does not excite you, something is muted, obstructed in your heart. So the example that Paul sets of service even in the midst of difficulty, if that doesn't really register with you, if the gospel has left you unchanged, might I suggest that you haven't truly come to terms with the fullness, with the results of the gospel you've believed.

And even as I say that, there's another group who already felt guilty coming in here today, who is already a bruised reed, who already struggles under a weight, and then here's not only the example of Paul, but what I just said as an added burden to a soft conscience.

Did that just fall on you like a heavy weight? Right? Thanks, Dave. I'm not technically in a shipwreck, but, you know, metaphorically, I'm really having trouble keeping my head above water.

[29:19] Thanks for adding some guilt to that. Not only am I not doing enough for others, but now I don't even know the gospel. How often is it, and let us each examine our own hearts, that we tend to receive the exact opposite from God's word that he intends for us.

How often do those who need conviction see vindication in the word? And how often do those who need comfort find and hear condemnation from it?

It's incredible how often we reverse what God intends us to hear. So if you have come here today already bowed down under the weight of trouble, I love how one writer put it.

He said, no one is ever too weak or needy to be used by God. Now it won't look like Paul.

We're not apostles, but do not underestimate what the Lord can do through you. Even when you feel like you have nothing to offer, you might not heal people like Paul.

[30:38] But when you have little to offer, you can offer a word of encouragement and the Lord can do great things through that.

When you have little to give, you can simply ask how someone is doing. How few people have somewhere to simply unburden their souls in this world?

In our Christian community where regularly we meet together on Sunday mornings during the week in community groups, we have this, we might come into this expectation that everybody has this place to offer up their souls one to another, to care for one another, to bear one another's burdens.

That is not the case for most people. How valuable is it when the saints obey their Lord's command to bear one another's burdens, which can be as simple as hearing their story?

Someone is literally a member of this church today because of a conversation that started when someone simply asked them how they were doing. You can serve out of your weakness when you pray for someone.

[32:19] You might not have much or anything to give, but you can serve that person by taking them to the one who has everything and who rules the storm.

It is incredible your tiny act of love and care, whether that's encouragement or listening or prayer, can, through the Lord's power, make all the difference for someone else.

And so, let's then last talk about that power. I think that the first element of that power is the simple knowledge that through Christ, your small act of encouragement or checking in or prayer can actually be huge for someone else.

That's an energizing thought, I hope. And let me also say, second, that experiencing the fruit of that is energizing.

How great is it to see someone else light up at what you offer them. So, serving others can actually itself be an energizing thing as the Lord has ordained it.

[33:50] But beyond that, Paul explains where all his power comes from. In chapter 27, in verses 21 and following, since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, men, you should have listened to me, 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 of the ship. For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship.

The key to all his power is right there in verse 23. The God to whom he belongs. Friends, the key is knowing that you belong to God in Christ.

Christian, when you don't have anything to give, in Christ you are still heir of all things.

Christian, when you don't have any strength left, in Christ a power dwells in you that is not your own.

[35:28] Christian, when you don't have the strength to move yourself, let alone serve someone else, if you belong to Christ, you possess the same power which enables Paul's miracles.

Where did Paul get the strength to keep serving as the troubles piled up upon him? The kind of service he gave, miracles, should key us in.

The power of God dwelling in him. And guess what? Every single Christian has that same power because every Christian is indwelt by the same Holy Spirit.

The king who commands the unconquerable sea dwells in you, works in you.

So when you feel you've come to the end of yourself running on empty, you possess the strength of another.

[36:49] So when you are bone tired and can't take another step and yet in that moment the Lord shows you an opportunity to serve but you've got nothing of your own to give, walking by faith might just mean walking forward into that opportunity and finding that you possess a strength that does not belong to this world to accomplish it even though you had nothing of your own.

And friends all of that depends on verse 23. Do you belong to this God?

Do you belong to Christ? And if not might I invite you now even this moment to repent and believe and trust in Christ find the forgiveness of your sins and let him redeem you into this new humanity this original humanity into a new vocation and give you the strength to persevere in it.

And if you do belong to Christ will you walk in Paul's example and in a moment as we do this in Christ's example will you serve others when you walk with a heavy burden and will you find that he is good on his promise to empower you to do it not by your strength but by his.

That closes our meditation on Acts chapter 27 and the first 10 verses of chapter 28 but so tightly tied is the message of the communion cup that I kind of want to make it part our communion meditation a part of this sermon right because that is in fact and indeed the same message Paul is not our great example Christ is and when the hour came he that is Christ reclined at table and the apostles with him and he said to them I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer when the

[39:44] Lord Jesus took upon his sinless shoulders the sins of the world right we have been talking about serving in a place of burden right that's been this whole idea today serving even when we are burdened when the Lord took upon his sinless shoulders the sins of the world no one has ever been so burdened before and in the midst of it what was he doing he was serving us the gospel looks like this it is a picture of one bearing the heaviest of all burdens and in so doing serving others my question he did it for you out of his unquenchable love and he calls you like

Paul to follow in his steps but he has not left you alone because he has come to dwell in you by his spirit the gospel purchased for us an inheritance who is the indwelling spirit to empower you to walk in his ways just as Paul did and so as we come to the table we are strengthened anew renewed by the promise that he who bore the greatest burden did it to serve us might that well up in gratitude and gratefulness and glad expectation in our hearts to follow hard after him Jesus said I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer for I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God and he took a cup when he had given thanks he said take this and divide it among yourselves for I tell you from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of

God comes and he took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it gave it to them saying this is my body which is given for you do this in remembrance of me let's remember him together! and likewise the cup after they had eaten sang this cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood let us receive that promise again together O matchless king who commands even the sea by a word it is beyond our understanding beyond our comprehension that you would serve us but in so doing you have shown us your heart and we made in your image are renewed by Christ in your image Lord would you excite us in our hearts to worship to worship you with our words and to worship you as we walk in this same servant way all glory be to Christ our king amen and And...