

“PAUL’S MEDITERRANEAN CRUISE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Texts for the Sermon: Acts 27:1-12

Introduction.

Acts 27 recounts in much detail one of the most famous shipwrecks in ancient history, and certainly one of the most spiritually profitable, as it is given to us by the Holy Spirit in Scripture for our spiritual benefit and training in righteousness.

Chapter 27 of Acts is a detailed travel diary of Paul’s all expenses paid Mediterranean cruise from Caesarea, Israel to Rome, Italy, with body guards, security detail and friends, including his personal physician Dr. Luke. We will spend three weeks at sea with the apostle Paul. During our voyage with him we will learn several lessons on how to cope with the difficult and unexpected providences of God we encounter all through our lives.

It is most providential that Dr. Luke is on board with Paul, so we have much more detail than we might otherwise. This is one of the most detailed ship logs in ancient literature.

But this leaves us with a question. What is Luke’s purpose in giving us this detailed travel diary of Paul’s voyage? What does he want Theophilus and us to know?

First, it reveals the historicity of these events, all these geographical details can be traced on a map and confirmed.

There is a well known story of a British scholar and skeptic of the late 1800’s, Sir William Ramsey, who went to this part of the world to trace Paul’s steps with the intention of proving it was not true. By the time he finished his research he was a convinced believer and he wrote a well-known book “St. Paul the Traveler.”

But more importantly, Luke wants to show us, as with all his other journeys, how God was with Paul every step.

When the circumstances and storms of life come crashing in we learn from Paul how in the midst of seemingly hopeless situations, our hope is rooted in the trustworthiness of God.

We set sail for Italy, verse 27:1-3.

The kind providence of God.

Luke wants us to see the hand of the living God leading Paul and in this way for us to see the glory of God on display. Do you see God’s grace in the first three verses of our text?

We see God's providence and grace in the first verse in the word "we." In the marvelous providence of God Paul is rejoined by his dear friend Luke.

We see it in the second verse, Paul's longtime friend and companion, Aristarchus, is on board.

He may have been one of the wealthy converts from Thessalonica who now journeyed with Paul. He was a true loyal friend. He patiently suffers with Paul, two years in Caesarea and now on the open sea. Paul calls him his fellow prisoner in Rome (Colossians 4:10).

This is a remarkable picture of real friendship, two friends who stick with Paul through the worst of circumstances, suffering with him, standing by him in times of trial and trouble. Do we have such a friend? Are we such a friend? Do you know the incomparable gift of a friend who would do anything for you, even lay down their life for you? Pray for one, pray to be one.

God has not left Paul alone and He doesn't leave us alone, He never leaves us or forsakes us. Friendship is one of God's great gifts of grace which should never be taken for granted.

We see God's providence and grace in verse three, when the Roman centurion, Julius, is kind to this prisoner, Paul, and gives him special treatment and freedom.

Such is the nature of God. It is good when we can see God's hand, God's presence in the midst of our daily lives and experiences. It is good when we can give a testimony to them. When you know God is with you, it changes our perspective on our circumstances and it gives us hope and courage, and when you share that with others it gives them hope and courage.

The winds were against us, verses 27:4-8.

The severe providence of God.

The tone of Luke's account changes in the next five verses.

The winds were against us, vs. 4.

We sailed slowly, vs. 7.

We arrived with great difficulty, vs. 7.

The wind did not allow us to go farther, vs. 7.

We coasted along with difficulty, vs. 8.

Why are the winds against Paul? Didn't God say He wants Paul to go to Rome? Isn't Paul right in the middle of God's will for his life? Questions like this muddle our thinking.

Storms have different purposes and uses in God's providence, they are part of His grace.

II Corinthians 1:8-10 We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of

life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. 10 He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.

Paul says the affliction was spiritually profitable, to make him rely on God and not on himself, and to show him God's deliverance in ways he would never have known otherwise, so that he would have confidence of God's continued and future deliverance. The storm was to anchor Paul's hope securely in God (see Romans 5, James 1).

Some storms come to clear a path in a new direction. I can testify that the storm that blew into our lives in early 2000s and was painful for a couple of years, ended up blowing us here to a far better place. Like the old country song, I can say, "God bless the broken road that led me to you."

Storms remind us that we are finite and flesh, we are not in control. Someone else is writing our itinerary. Divine providence is choosing our course for us. Storms blow us off our course, but always on God's course.

God is charting the course of our sanctification on our way to heaven. He is the one bringing to completion the good work He has begun. Our journey is made up of fits and starts, sometimes becalmed, making little or no progress at all. Other times on detours when God's providences seem at cross purposes to ours. Often times we are not making as much progress as we think we should, other times we are just trying to hang on to the ground we have already made.

The journey toward our final destination is difficult at best, hard at times, and even painful.

"Lord, I believe you called me here, to this time and place, to this marriage, to this job, to this task, but why is it so difficult?"

We want fair havens, but it doesn't always work out that way. And then when we get to Fair Haven, it's not so fair. So it is in life, the places we think are pleasant or comfortable, pleasing to our eye, are not safe for our soul. The places that seem most pleasurable may be the most dangerous. This world as desirable as it is, it not our home, and should not be grasped too tightly.

Psalm 57:1-2 Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by.
2 I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me.

In the severe providences and mercy of God, take shelter under His wings, and trust His purpose.

**The majority was against us, verses 27:9-12.
Warnings not heeded.**

While they are harbored in Fair Haven on the island of Crete, Paul speaks up.

It was past the suitable time of year for safe sailing. The Fast was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, around October 5. Sailors knew sailing after September 14 was considered dangerous and after November 11 suicidal.

Paul was a man of great faith, he trusted God completely, with full confidence God would see him safely to Rome. But he is no fool, and it is the better part of wisdom to not tempt or test God, but to do what is reasonable and rational. So he speaks up and warns them.

Julius shouldn't be blamed for listening to the ship's captain more than to Paul. Julius clearly respects Paul, but Paul is a prisoner, not a seasoned sailor. Julius defers to the man with training and experience in navigation.

But the decision may be tainted by other factors. Fair Haven was a poorly situated harbor for the winter. Winter storms blew directly into it. But there may have been a selfish motive as well. Fair Haven was a very small little town, and the sailors may have argued it was a terrible place to spend the next five months. Phoenix was a much better and bigger port only 45 miles away. How hard can it be to go there?

Finally, there may have been economic/financial considerations driving the captain.

Someone has said all decisions are economic decisions and ever since I heard that several decades ago I have been aware how often it has proven true. How often do we make decisions motivated by money concerns, rather than considering or consulting God? Is running a cost benefit analysis really the only way we want to live our lives?

How often does God do things that run counter to our financial sense? How are we guided? To whom do we look for wisdom and counsel? Are we more guided by human reason, prudence, practicality or divine wisdom and revelation? How well do we balance this?

The majority.

Notice the majority decided to put back out to sea. We all know that the majority isn't always right. There can be danger in going along with the majority.

We all know how we want to teach our children and grandchildren to learn to be wise and discerning about going along with the crowd. Students must learn to resist evil, resist being motivated by envy, jealousy, covetousness, anger, getting even, returning evil for evil.

Learn to listen to God, to wait on God, to trust God. Learn to stand against the majority when the majority is against God.

Athanasius stands out as a great example when he was alone in defending God's Word and stood up to the heresies of his day. Someone rebuked him for his stand and said, "Athanasius, the whole world is against you." And he replied, "Then I am against the whole world."

When you are accused of being on the wrong side of history, be willing to stand. When the experts, scholars and professionals deny the things of Scripture be willing to stand against them.

An easy to name example is when the science experts proclaim Darwin over Moses, stand firm. Better to be on the wrong side of history than the wrong side of God.

The centurion faced a dilemma. He respected Paul, but saw him as a prisoner and a missionary and underestimated him. He looked at the ship's captain and saw a successful businessman and a seasoned sailor and overestimated him.

A word of encouragement from this exchange is even though your wisdom and good counsel are not always listened to, don't be silent. God has placed us in this world to be salt and light, so let your light shine. You don't know when what you say will make a difference.

They didn't listen to Paul in this instance, but what he said would serve him will later. Later when he spoke the people listened to him. What he said here established his credibility for later.

Implications and application.

I keep a journal of my travel through life and details of my trips and vacations. But it isn't just facts, I add to these records, our grace sightings or grace notes, where we have seen the hand of God, His blessings, benefits, provision, protection.

There are several good reasons for doing this.

First, we are all remarkably forgetful. The proof of it is how much I have forgotten when I go back and reread those note and it comes back to me. Otherwise, it would be lost forever.

Second, remembering is a holy activity, a spiritual exercise. How often in the OT did Israel recount the great works and mighty miracles of God?

Psalm 105:1-2, 5 Give thanks to the Lord; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples! 2 ... tell of all his wondrous works! 5 Remember the wondrous works that he has done, his miracles.

Psalm 78:6-7 ... arise and tell them to their children,
7 so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God.

How often did the Israelites remind each other of the Red Sea and the miraculous provision in the wilderness and the walls of Jericho.

I don't just want to remember the events, times and places, what I did. I want to remember what God did, where He was, what He showed me of Himself.

Third, writing down so we can remember is important when we find ourselves in difficult in trials and suffering and difficult. It is important to remember in the dark what we saw in the light. Because we have learned to see and notice God's hand and presence, we can be confident that He is with us even when we don't see His hand so clearly.

I witnessed someone else's experience of this, this past week when I met with the Vander Woude family to talk about Doug and plan his service. Carly shared all the ways she had seen God's presence and perfect provision over the past three weeks, in hospitals and at home.

The nurses looking the other way when there were 13 people in Doug's hospital room. Seattle hospital releasing Doug and making all the arrangements quickly, and All the kids being able to be here and given much favor by their employers. Carla being able to get married in her parents backyard and Doug walking her and giving her on the last possible day he could do that.

That needs to be written down, remembered and recounted in the years to come. Do what Luke did and you will receive benefit from it as we have from what Luke wrote.

“All that happens to me in life, the little worries and the great anxieties, the crises and the daily annoyances, the sorrows and the joys, the harms that reach me through the sins of others ... are permitted by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three Persons determine my life, and, since I walk by faith, I must surely grow very patient in my attitude toward life. For how can I complain or criticize God's Providence, since it all comes under that triple influence of Power, Wisdom, and Love? ... I can walk through the valley of death ... without loss of courage or hopefulness. Nothing can make me afraid.” (Bede Jarrett).