

Lesson 22: The Shipwreck

Acts 27

Gentle, rolling waves give way to white caps. Ocean spray turns to crashing tide. The sun slips behind the clouds, and a cold shiver replaces the contented comfort of its rays. Quiet concern swells to fear. Feet slip on the soaked deck. Hands grasp for something steady. Heads turn, shielding their eyes from the whipping wind. In the midst of the storm, our hearts long for safety, crave security, ache for the shore. And if we were warned ahead of time of the impending danger, our minds play cruel tricks – *what ifs* and *if onlys* mock our desperation. Things we'd clung to in calmer days reveal their uselessness. We toss them aside in haste to save ourselves. If we aren't careful, fellow travelers are mistaken for excess baggage, and should-be teammates square off in opposition. There is a madness in the storm. Chaos fuels fear. Desperation clouds judgment. Hopelessness threatens faith.

“Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told.”

Acts 27:25

On his way to Rome, Paul encountered such a storm. And in the midst of it, an angel of God stood before him saying, “Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you” (Acts 27:24). The voice of calm reassurance in the height of the storm. A word of steady encouragement as the tempest swirls. Perhaps you need to hear it. Hold tight to His Word, and lean hard into His Spirit. Let's seek the very Maker of the seas.

Troubled Waters

As you begin this week, take some time to read through all of Acts 27. Then focus in on verses 1-12. You can chart the journey to Rome on your map: *Paul's Voyage to Rome*. These are real people in real places – with colors and winds and fears and seasickness as tangible as ours.

1. As a recap from the past few weeks, who is sending Paul away? Where are they sending him? Why? Who is with him now?
2. The group left for Rome aboard one ship but switched to a different one in Myra (Acts 27:1-6). Once they departed from Myra, how did their travel proceed according to Acts 27:7-8? What determined their course?

3. How did the winds affect the timing of their journey according to Acts 27:9?

The Fast that Luke referred to in Acts 27:9 is the Day of Atonement. That means that it was late September or early October by the time the group landed at Fair Havens. October was a questionable month for sea travel, and sailing from November through March was incredibly dangerous.³⁷

4. What was Paul's advice in Acts 27:10? How might he have gained this wisdom? See 2 Corinthians 11:25.
5. Many times, Paul has received direct revelation from the Lord Himself. In this instance, it seems Paul was instead relying on past experience and practical knowledge. Discuss the difference (if any) that you see between the two.
6. How did the Romans in charge respond to Paul according to Acts 27:11-12? Do you see any warning for yourself in their actions?

The Storm at Sea

Read Acts 27:13-26.

7. In verse 13, how did this leg of the journey begin? Then what happened in verses 14-15?
8. The sailors were caught off-guard by the sudden storm. We may be similarly lulled by calm circumstances in our own lives. What wisdom do you gain from the following verses?
 - ❖ 1 Corinthians 16:13 (Don't get hung up if your translation says "act like a man." It can also be translated *be brave* or *be courageous*.) –
 - ❖ Ephesians 6:18 (in the context of 6:10-20) –

³⁷ Wong, John-Michael. *Opening Up Acts*. Opening Up Commentary. Leominster: Day One Publications, 2010. Page 160.

- ❖ Colossians 4:2 –
9. As their troubles progressed for the first three days (Acts 27:16-19), the actions of the sailors became more and more desperate. What was the eventual result according to Acts 27:20?

 10. Compare this ship's circumstance to the disciples' situation in Mark 4:35-41.
 - ❖ What would Paul and the other believers onboard have known that Jesus was capable of doing during a storm?

 - ❖ How do you think they felt when Jesus did not calm the sea?

 11. Luke wrote, "all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned" (Acts 27:20). What a tender confession.
 - ❖ From Romans 15:13, by whose power do we have hope?

 - ❖ On whom is our hope dependent according to 1 Timothy 1:1 and 4:10?

 12. Have you ever been disappointed by something that you know the Lord *could* have done but chose not to do? Do you still hold that disappointment? If you do, take some time to feel the weight of that disappointment. Do you need to hold onto it for any reason? The Lord can carry your burdens. Are you willing to hand it over to Him? After you release your disappointment, ask Him to refresh you with His hope.

 13. In the midst of the travelers' hopelessness, from whom did Paul receive encouragement? See Acts 27:21-24. What was that encouragement?

 14. From whom did the other men receive encouragement in Acts 27:25? How does that demonstrate Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 1:3-5?

The Lord is willing and able to speak peace and strength to us, just as he did to Paul. One sweet way He does that is through others that He brings into our lives. Another extends the faith we need when ours falters: “Keep up *your* courage...for *I* believe...” (Acts 27:25, emphasis added).

15. How have you been encouraged by another’s faith in the Lord?

16. Later, Paul would pen similar encouragement to the Philippians. Read Philippians 1:3-6. What was Paul confident of for them? Let his words wash fresh over you.

He who began a good work in you will surely bring it to completion.

The Light and the Land

Look now to Acts 27:27-44. After *fourteen* nights on the restless sea, the travelers sensed they were nearing land.

17. Even after Paul’s encouragement and the promise of land, what did the sailors attempt to do in Acts 27:30? What human traits do you see exemplified in their actions?

18. How did the centurion and the soldiers respond to Paul’s warning in Acts 27:31-32?

19. What did Paul encourage the men to do in Acts 27:33-34? Do you sense any particular reminder from his words? See also James 2:14-17.

At times, the practical intersects the spiritual, and it’s no less holy. Sometimes we just need to eat! Sometimes we need to rest. Sometimes we need someone to look us dead in the eye and say, “Here is what you need.” Eat because you haven’t. Sleep because you’re tired.

20. How did Paul further encourage them to eat in Acts 27:35, and what was the result according to verse 36?

21. Is there anyone you need to encourage? Look to both Paul's example in this passage and in the earlier passage where he encouraged them with his message from the angel. Who can you encourage? And what would be the best way to encourage them?

22. Strengthened and encouraged, the travelers welcomed the breaking day (Acts 27:39). From John 8:12, who is our light even in the midst of our storms?

23. Even in the light of day, our travelers were facing some troubles. What happened as the sailors tried to run the ship into the shore, and what did the soldiers plan to do as a result? Who intervened on behalf of Paul?

We can only imagine the relief and exhaustion that overcame these men as they dragged their weary selves to shore.

Prepare for Life

Take some time to consider the condition of your sea, and spend some time with the Lord reflecting on how you might respond to Him in your present circumstances.

Are the winds determining your course as they did for Paul and the Romans at the beginning of their voyage? Do you feel you are at the mercy of your circumstances? Is your progress slower than you had expected?

- ❖ If so, what adjustments do you need to make? Is there advice you need to heed? What could you be doing to wait and seek the Lord in the midst of your hindered plans?

Have you pushed out to sea amid calm conditions as our travelers did when they departed Fair Havens in spite of Paul's warnings?

- ❖ Consider the earlier passages about staying alert (see question 8). What do you need to do to prevent yourself from being lulled into passivity or complacency? How can you stay on guard as you enjoy this calm season?

Do you find yourself in the midst of a raging storm?

- ❖ Ask the Lord for His encouragement and perseverance. Seek Him to be the Light of day in the dark of night. I pray He meets you this very week with encouragement. I pray He restores your hope if it has gradually run out. I pray He speaks a real and personal word straight to your heart.

Wherever we find ourselves, the Lord has spoken over His children: “I will never desert you; nor will I ever forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5, Joshua 1:5). So let’s take courage. I believe that it will turn out for us exactly as we have been told.

Lecture Notes: Lesson 22