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In our journey in through Acts, we are about to get on a several boats with Paul and Luke. Luke's account of Paul's voyage to Rome in Acts 27 stands out as one of the most vivid pieces of descriptive writing in the whole Bible. I would compare it to the Israelites escape from Egypt in Exodus, or Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the Fiery Furnace in Daniel 3, or Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem for the census in Luke 2. High Drama. In modern Day terms, think the movie ***Titantic*** or ***A Perfect Storm***.

Paul had always expressed a desire to preach in Rome (Romans 1: 14-15 ***14 I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. 15 That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.***) ***But the plan had not included traveling as a prisoner.***)

This details provided by Luke of the nautical journey are so accurate that even skeptics are inclined to believe it is based on the actual journal of a voyage as Luke describes. Luke's exciting descriptive report is a good theatrical break to the speeches that we have been reading in the previous chapters.

As we are about to see, Luke's description of Paul on the voyage to Rome focuses on three main segments: **Paul as a prisoner who receives special treatment; Paul as a speaker who gives advice; and Paul as a worker of miracles who is honored by all.** But the reality of the situation was Paul was traveling as a prisoner accused of inciting a riot. He had no decision making authority. Nevertheless, Paul was a Roman citizen who still retained rights until proven guilty.

Luke viewed Paul as his hero (much like a biblical Superman) and presented Paul as the courageous leader who could manage difficult situations during a great crisis. He earned the respect of everyone over the course of the voyage. But the most important truth Luke seeks to share is that Paul was a faithful follower of Jesus Christ who was protected and directed by God as we see in Acts 23:11— The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, ***“Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”*** Paul believed God's promise that he would see Rome with God's help throughout the journey. Luke shows us how **one person's faith can make a big difference for others in the storms of life.**

**Paul Sails for Rome in Acts 27** beginning in verse 1

***When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment.***

The account of Paul's journey to Rome is the longest of Luke's four "we" eyewitness accounts. Julius, who was a Centurion and a member of the Imperial Regiment is assigned to take Paul to Rome. Paul has a number of encounters during his lifetime with Centurions but Julius is the only one whose name we know. The Imperial Regiment had a number of duties. They organized the transportation of grain to Rome and had police duties and often were charged with accompanying those who needed to be officially escorted throughout the Roman Empire. So, someone who belonged to the Imperial Regiment was part of a combined Department of Transportation and Agriculture with some Homeland Security Responsibilities thrown in.

Paul was not the only prisoner that was on board. Some were being taken to Rome to die, not to stand trial. And then we hear about Paul's companions in verse 2.

***<sup>2</sup> We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us.***

Paul, Luke and Aristarchus leave from Caesarea on a coastal boat. Even though Paul is a prisoner, he is permitted to take his personal physician and a servant. **Roman citizenship had its' privileges.** We know that in Paul's letters later from Rome in Colossians and Philemon, Aristarchus is still with him.

***<sup>3</sup> The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs.***

Paul is allowed to spend the night with fellow Christians as they travel up the coast. Julius sent a soldier along to keep Paul in custody.

***<sup>4</sup> From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us. <sup>5</sup> When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. <sup>6</sup> There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board.***

They then begin the journey that is more "open sea" than hugging the coastline and encounter a bit more difficulty. They were sailing "upstream" on the ocean against the winds. They finally make it to Myra which is in Modern day Turkey. Its' port became the main stopping point for ships with grain cargo bound for Rome from Egypt. It makes sense that the centurion would arrange their next passage on an Egyptian ship stopping in a Turkish port on its way to Italy. The Roman government gave special consideration to those who operated these grain ships from Egypt to the major centers of population like Rome. The sea lanes were the economic arteries for the Roman Empire and many coastal cities like Caesarea depended on them for their economic health.

Most commercial ships during this time were sailing vessels and relied on the winds and weather, with winter travel being very dangerous. Most sea voyages were during the day and followed the coastline so they could stop at night for safety. They didn't have GPS or radar, just the stars and experience.

#### **Acts 27: 7-12 Paul Sails for Rome**

***<sup>7</sup> We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone. <sup>8</sup> We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea.***

***<sup>9</sup> Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Day of Atonement.<sup>[a]</sup> So Paul warned them, <sup>10</sup> "Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also." <sup>11</sup> But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. <sup>12</sup> Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbor in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest.***

They encountered strong winds so it took many days to travel the 130 miles from Myra to Cnidus. The northern winds that blew this time of year caused the ship to travel off course along the southern coast of Crete, the 160 mile long island southeast of modern day Greece (Achaia & Macedonia). It is dangerous to navigate the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas by sail after September 14 and almost impossible after November 11. The Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur is usually in late September or early October and we know from verse 9 it is after that holiday. They finally reached Fair Havens on Crete. It had already been a difficult voyage and they still had most of the way to go.

Paul tried to warn everyone about the waiting disaster. Paul had already experienced 3 shipwrecks (2 Cor 11:25 **Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea.**) The captain who was also the owner of the

ship wanted to winter in the larger and safer port of Phoenix which was 40 miles west of Fair Haven. But those 40 miles would expose the ship to northern gales before it reached Phoenix. The U.S. National Weather Service defines a gale as 39–54 miles/hour of sustained surface winds. Nevertheless, the centurion agreed with the captain.

**Sometimes the majority is wrong.**

### **The Storm**

#### **Acts 27: 13-17 The Storm**

**<sup>13</sup> When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. <sup>14</sup> Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the Northeaster, swept down from the island. <sup>15</sup> The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. <sup>16</sup> As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure, <sup>17</sup> so the men hoisted it aboard. Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Because they were afraid they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor<sup>[b]</sup> and let the ship be driven along. <sup>18</sup> We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. <sup>19</sup> On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands.**

Soon after their ship left Fair Havens to travel to Phoenix, a gentle southern breeze began to blow, (**Beware of the calm before the storm**) and it appeared they would have no trouble making the 40 mile trip. But they almost immediately encountered the Nor'Easter or Hurricane. With cyclone strength wind, torrential rain, and thunder and lightning, the crew found themselves completely helpless. They quickly were drive 23 miles to the small island of Clauda.

The crew attempted some different strategies to provide stability to the ship during the storm—they hauled on-board the life boat that normally trailed the ship so they wouldn't lose it or it damage the larger ship and then they braced the ship by passing ropes under the hull to reinforce so the pounding waves and winds would not break it apart. They also dropped their anchors to slow them down. At some point, they started throwing cargo and gear overboard to lighten their load because they were taking on so much water.

**Sometimes the Storms in Life are Made Worse by Expert Advice that Ignores the Will of God**

#### **Acts 27: 20 The Storm Continues Raging**

**<sup>20</sup> When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.**

Did you hear Luke **“We finally gave up all hope of being saved.”** Luke includes Paul in this description. But then hear what happens to Paul:

**<sup>21</sup> After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: “Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. <sup>22</sup> But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. <sup>23</sup> Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me <sup>24</sup> and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’ <sup>25</sup> So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. <sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island.”**

Paul shared God's message and an encouraging word with all aboard. We can still be encouraged today by God's words to Paul. Did you hear how Paul described the Angel: **An Angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve.** What confidence we can have when we know that we belong to

God and that we serve aWhile Paul was not a sailor, he was an experienced traveler—the frequent flyer, platinum level points. Paul, as the apostle to the Gentiles was perhaps the most traveled person within the New Testament world. From biblical sources, we know he traveled over 6,200 miles. It is no wonder that Paul often uses travel imagery in describing the Christian faith. He was willing to offer advice and Julius, the centurion, the captain, and the crew were now, finally, willing to listen at this point. Let's watch the next episode about the shipwreck:

## The Shipwreck

### Acts 27: 27-41 The Shipwreck

***<sup>27</sup> On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic<sup>[e]</sup> Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land. <sup>28</sup> They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet<sup>[e]</sup> deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet<sup>[e]</sup> deep. <sup>29</sup> Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. <sup>30</sup> In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. <sup>31</sup> Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved." <sup>32</sup> So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it drift away.***

***<sup>33</sup> Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. "For the last fourteen days," he said, "you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food—you haven't eaten anything. <sup>34</sup> Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head." <sup>35</sup> After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. <sup>36</sup> They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. <sup>37</sup> Altogether there were 276 of us on board. <sup>38</sup> When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.***

***<sup>39</sup> When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. <sup>40</sup> Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. <sup>41</sup> But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.***

The sailors schemed to save themselves and abandon ship by lowering the small lifeboat so they alone could escape. Their lack of belief in Paul's reassurance of God's help was also an act of selfishness. Paul had told them of God's promise but they were choosing to ignore it. **We often take matters into our own hands when we are most afraid.** But Paul knew a full crew would be needed to safely reach shore so he advised Julius, the centurion not to permit it.

Paul recognizes that everyone on board needs to be prepared for a strenuous time and has everyone eat and takes this opportunity to thank God for his provision. The passengers and crew were all encouraged by this. **One faithful believer can influence the attitude of a group simply by openly trusting God.** After they had eaten, they finished throwing the remaining cargo overboard so they would have a shallower draft (or depth of the ship's hull) as they approached shore. The ship does get stuck on a sand bar and can't move. Let's read together what happens next.

***<sup>42</sup> The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. <sup>43</sup> But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. <sup>44</sup> The rest were to get there on planks or on other pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land safely.***

Roman military law required that a guard who allowed his prisoner to escape was subject to the same penalty the escaped prisoner would have suffered. Remember in Acts 12 when Peter escaped, Herod ordered the guards executed. And in Acts 16, when Paul and Silas were in prison and there

was an earthquake, the jailer was about to kill himself and Paul stopped him by saying we are all here. By now, Julius, the Centurion cared so much about Paul that he stopped the soldiers plan and ordered everyone who could to swim and the others to float to safety using the planks from the ship as it was breaking up.

So God in his providence brought them all safely to shore, as he had promised Paul he would in verse 24 of this chapter. **Sometimes we suffer because of the unbelief of others. Storms have a way of revealing character. Even the worst storms cannot stop God or his purpose for our lives.**

Let's finish the story by seeing what happens once they are on shore on Malta.

### **Paul Ashore on Malta**

#### **Acts 28: 1-6 Paul Ashore on Malta**

**28 Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. <sup>2</sup> The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. <sup>3</sup> Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. <sup>4</sup> When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, the goddess Justice has not allowed him to live." <sup>5</sup> But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. <sup>6</sup> The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead; but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.**

Malta is an island about 18 miles long and 8 miles wide. It is 58 miles south of Sicily and 180 miles north of the African coast. In Paul's day, the island was known for its prosperity and residential architecture, and its native population spoke a Phoenician dialect and also some Latin and Greek. The island was first named by Phoenicians and *melita* meant a place of **refuge**—a name that fits quite naturally. The traditional location of Saint Paul's Bay on Malta is still considered the most probable site for Paul's landing.

Safely on shore, Paul is still showing what it means to be a servant leader. After safely getting all 276 passengers and crew to shore, Paul is helping to build a fire. When Paul was bitten by the snake, the islanders concluded he was a murderer that the Goddess Justice had caught up with since he had not died at sea. Seeing that Paul was unaffected by the snakebite, the islanders decided he must be a god or a favorite of the gods but they did not worship him. Paul did not rebuke the islanders as he had in Acts 14 when people mistook him for a a god and wanted to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas when a man had been healed of being lame. Luke has given us such a vivid account of this episode so we can appreciate that **Paul was directed by God and protected by God**. And this direction and protection are again highlighted in this final episode we watch while they are on Malta and recipients of the Maltese hospitality.

#### **Acts 28: 7-10 Malta's Hospitality**

**<sup>7</sup> There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days. <sup>8</sup> His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. <sup>9</sup> When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. <sup>10</sup> They honored us in many ways; and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.**

Luke includes this account to illustrate the continuing power of Paul's ministry. The Maltese Roman Governor, Publius brings the survivors of the wreck to his estate while they find a permanent place for the survivors. Publius' father is ill with Malta fever. Paul heals him and then those on the island who also need healing. The islanders show their appreciation by taking care of their needs for the 3 months they winter on Malta. And legend has it that the first Maltese Christian church was started by Paul during his time on Malta before he leaves for Rome. This was a time of refreshing and renewal for

Paul after the shipwreck, the arduous voyage and the previous two years in prison, and it prepares him for Rome.

Many of us have had shipwrecks in our lives. A divorce, a death of a loved one, a job loss, a frightening diagnosis. When the storms cause all hope to be lost. I hope this story of Paul's faithfulness during a storm and God's protection throughout will remind us when we face those storms, we do not go through them alone. God is faithful.

Some of you may need to start that journey with Christ today. Some of you may need to continue your journey with us here at Redland and want to join our fellowship of survivors. Or some of you may have allowed the storms of life to take you off course and want to take this time to reach a safe shore and begin again with God's mercy. Whatever your decision, after we pray, now is the time to begin.

Lord, thank you that we can know that sometimes we suffer because of the unbelief of others or our unbelief. Storms have a way of revealing character. Even the worst storms cannot stop God or his purpose for our lives. Even as Paul was directed by God and protected by God, we too can be directed and protected by God through your son Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen