

# There Once Was a Ship... (Acts 27)

---

## Adventure on the High Seas

**Quick Poll: Who would you trust most to keep you safe on the high seas?**

- Captain Jack Sparrow
- Maui
- Captain Philips\*  
(\* if you vote for him, remember he looks a lot like the guy who got *Cast Away* on a deserted island...just sayin')

I don't know about you, but I enjoy the occasional nautical adventure.

- I grew up reading *Treasure Island* and later *Moby Dick* (would not recommend!)
- I watched *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and *Pirates of the Caribbean*
- I've visited the U.S.S. Constitution ("Old Ironsides" - historic naval ship anchored in Boston)
- I built a few models of ships (the Cutty Sark and the U.S.S. Missouri)
- I've even ventured aboard a vessel, braving the elements along the Alaskan coast...navigating the buffet line on our cruise ship. (Oh, the peril!)

So, for a landlubber who grew up more familiar with waving wheat than breaking waves, I feel like I'm pretty well-prepared to share today's passage in Acts 27!

If you love a good voyage on the seas, today's sermon should capture your attention. It's filled with adventure, exciting destinations, peril, and dramatic rescues!

But even if you aren't excited by the salt spray hitting your face, or if you don't have a sea chanty to sing, Acts 27 is a chapter you're going to want to read. God is at work in this maritime message!

So, hoist the main sail and fix the jibs! Let's see where this tale takes us.

## Previously, in Acts...

Our sermon series on the book of Acts is almost at its end (one chapter left after today). But for the past few weeks, we've been at a bit of a standstill: after three different missionary journeys, Paul has been stuck in prison for years because of his faith. The main action we've encountered has involved Paul *talking* to a parade of officials as they try to figure out the legal basis for his imprisonment. He has appealed his case to the emperor, and that means at some point he's going to be transported to the city of Rome.

Well...wait no longer, because that point is today!

## Paul Sails for Rome (Acts 27:1-44)

Acts 27 finally sends us in the direction of Rome, and it reads like its own mini novel. It's a *snippet* that fits inside the bigger story of Acts, but it is told in such a way that we can almost view it as a stand-alone adventure.

The chapter is lengthy (forty-four verses), but I want to read it to you...a bit of Sunday morning story time! Sit back and settle in, and let's listen to this story together. (I'll be using the NLT version today)

### Acts 27:1-44 (NLT)

<sup>1</sup> *When the time came, we set sail for Italy. Paul and several other prisoners were placed in the custody of a Roman officer named Julius, a captain of the Imperial Regiment. <sup>2</sup> Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was also with us. We left on a ship whose home port was Adramyttium on the northwest coast of the province of Asia; it was scheduled to make several stops at ports along the coast of the province.*

<sup>3</sup> *The next day when we docked at Sidon, Julius was very kind to Paul and let him go ashore to visit with friends so they could provide for his needs. <sup>4</sup> Putting out to sea from there, we encountered strong headwinds that made it difficult to keep the ship on course, so we sailed north of Cyprus between the island and the mainland. <sup>5</sup> Keeping to the open sea, we passed along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, landing at Myra, in the province of Lycia.*

<sup>6</sup> *There the commanding officer found an Egyptian ship from Alexandria that was bound for Italy, and he put us on board. <sup>7</sup> We had several days of slow sailing, and after great difficulty we finally neared Cnidus. But the wind was against us, so we sailed across to Crete and along the sheltered coast of the island, past the cape of Salmone. <sup>8</sup> We struggled along the coast with great difficulty and finally arrived at Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea. <sup>9</sup> We had lost a lot of time. The weather was becoming dangerous for sea travel because it was so late in the fall, and Paul spoke to the ship's officers about it.*

<sup>10</sup> *"Men," he said, "I believe there is trouble ahead if we go on—shipwreck, loss of cargo, and danger to our lives as well." <sup>11</sup> But the officer in charge of the prisoners listened more to the ship's captain and the owner than to Paul. <sup>12</sup> And since Fair Havens was an exposed harbor—a poor place to spend the winter—most of the crew wanted to go on to Phoenix, farther up the coast of Crete, and spend the winter there. Phoenix was a good harbor with only a southwest and northwest exposure.*

<sup>13</sup> When a light wind began blowing from the south, the sailors thought they could make it. So they pulled up anchor and sailed close to the shore of Crete. <sup>14</sup> But the weather changed abruptly, and a wind of typhoon strength (called a “northeaster”) burst across the island and blew us out to sea. <sup>15</sup> The sailors couldn’t turn the ship into the wind, so they gave up and let it run before the gale. <sup>16</sup> We sailed along the sheltered side of a small island named Cauda, where with great difficulty we hoisted aboard the lifeboat being towed behind us. <sup>17</sup> Then the sailors bound ropes around the hull of the ship to strengthen it. They were afraid of being driven across to the sandbars of Syrtis off the African coast, so they lowered the sea anchor to slow the ship and were driven before the wind.

<sup>18</sup> The next day, as gale-force winds continued to batter the ship, the crew began throwing the cargo overboard. <sup>19</sup> The following day they even took some of the ship’s gear and threw it overboard. <sup>20</sup> The terrible storm raged for many days, blotting out the sun and the stars, until at last all hope was gone. <sup>21</sup> No one had eaten for a long time.

Finally, Paul called the crew together and said, “Men, you should have listened to me in the first place and not left Crete. You would have avoided all this damage and loss. <sup>22</sup> But take courage! None of you will lose your lives, even though the ship will go down. <sup>23</sup> For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me, <sup>24</sup> and he said, ‘Don’t be afraid, Paul, for you will surely stand trial before Caesar! What’s more, God in his goodness has granted safety to everyone sailing with you.’ <sup>25</sup> So take courage! For I believe God. It will be just as he said. <sup>26</sup> But we will be shipwrecked on an island.”

<sup>27</sup> About midnight on the fourteenth night of the storm, as we were being driven across the Sea of Adria, the sailors sensed land was near. <sup>28</sup> They dropped a weighted line and found that the water was 120 feet deep. But a little later they measured again and found it was only 90 feet deep. <sup>29</sup> At this rate they were afraid we would soon be driven against the rocks along the shore, so they threw out four anchors from the back of the ship and prayed for daylight.

<sup>30</sup> Then the sailors tried to abandon the ship; they lowered the lifeboat as though they were going to put out anchors from the front of the ship. <sup>31</sup> But Paul said to the commanding officer and the soldiers, “You will all die unless the sailors stay aboard.” <sup>32</sup> So the soldiers cut the ropes to the lifeboat and let it drift away.

<sup>33</sup> Just as day was dawning, Paul urged everyone to eat. “You have been so worried that you haven’t touched food for two weeks,” he said. <sup>34</sup> “Please eat something now for your own good. For not a hair of your heads will perish.” <sup>35</sup> Then he took some bread, gave thanks to God before them all, and broke off a piece and ate it. <sup>36</sup> Then everyone was encouraged and began to eat—<sup>37</sup> all 276 of us who were on board. <sup>38</sup> After eating, the crew lightened the ship further by throwing the cargo of wheat overboard.

<sup>39</sup> When morning dawned, they didn’t recognize the coastline, but they saw a bay with a beach and wondered if they could get to shore by running the ship aground. <sup>40</sup> So they cut off the anchors and left them in the sea. Then they lowered the rudders, raised the foresail, and headed toward shore. <sup>41</sup> But they hit a shoal and ran the ship aground too soon. The bow of the ship stuck fast, while the stern was repeatedly smashed by the force of the waves and began to break apart.

<sup>42</sup> The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners to make sure they didn’t swim ashore and escape. <sup>43</sup> But the commanding officer wanted to spare Paul, so he didn’t let them carry out their plan. Then he ordered all who could swim to jump overboard first and make for land. <sup>44</sup> The others held onto planks or debris from the broken ship. So everyone escaped safely to shore.

## The End

**\*\* Prayer \*\***

God,

We thank you for your Word. We’re blessed just to hear it, but we aren’t satisfied just to hear...we want to understand! So open up your Scriptures to us so we may know the plans You have for us, and so we might listen and be transformed.

Amen

## Protecting Paul for a Purpose

Great story, right? I think it’s fascinating for several reasons – the geographical details, the insight into 1<sup>st</sup> century sailing practices, the story itself, and of course the happy ending. But it raises some questions. The biggest question is this: **Why does Luke (the author of Acts) spend so much time on this sea-faring escapade?** Other travels got a simple description earlier in the book. Why share extra information here?

One answer is that the story is personal. Luke has an intense memory of the experience. In several sections of Acts, you might have noticed that the pronouns change<sup>1</sup> from third person (“they”) to first person (“we”). In other words, in these sections Luke isn’t just writing about someone else’s experience – he is writing about his own! This entire sea-faring passage is a “we” section, so we can assume that Luke was on the boat with Paul...and later in the water and on the shore. He knows and remembers the voyage and shipwreck vividly! He lived it! He survived it!

But Luke isn’t motivated by ego or a need to include himself in the story (the rest of the book proves that). No, the reason he includes this story is because it shows a key point.

**\* Paul has been PROTECTED FOR A PURPOSE. \***

### *Paul Has Been Protected*

Even before this, Paul’s life had been anything but dull. We’ve seen some amazing and life-threatening encounters in the book of Acts already. And elsewhere, in one of his letters to a church he planted, Paul describes even more of these encounters.

*“Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden<sup>2</sup> of my concern for all the churches.” (2 Corinthians 11:24–28, NLT)*

Paul faced danger! In fact, Paul has faced so much danger in his service to Jesus that he hardly seems like someone you would describe as “protected!”

If “protected” meant completely safe and unaffected, then you’d be right. Paul hardly seems protected in that way. But if you mean “watched over” and “undefeated” and “successful,” that type of protection is Paul’s in abundance!

Paul faces hardship, yet Paul lives. Paul survives. Paul endures. In each of these difficult encounters, God sees Paul through and prepares him for the next step in the path of obedience. His journey is an embodiment of what James describes:

*“Dear brothers and sisters, **when troubles of any kind** come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your*

---

<sup>1</sup> Hard to write those words without thinking of other contexts!!!

<sup>2</sup> I love that he pairs “certain death” with “caring about his congregation”

*endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.” (James 1:2–4, NLT)*

Paul has been protected, grown, and matured by God. When God protects Paul, he does so with a *purpose*.

### ***Paul Has a Purpose***

In the midst of this storm, Luke helps us see God’s purpose. It is revealed to Paul through an angelic messenger. Look back at verses 23-24.

*“For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me, and he said, ‘Don’t be afraid, Paul, for you will surely stand trial before Caesar! What’s more, God in his goodness has granted safety to everyone sailing with you.’” (Acts 27:23–24, NLT)*

Paul’s whole life since meeting Jesus has been driven by purpose. He has been called to faith in Jesus, and more specifically called to be God’s ambassador to the Gentiles. On the road to Damascus, (the story we retold last week in chapter 26) Jesus promised to rescue Paul in his missions to proclaim the good news of victory and forgiveness. (Acts 26:16-18).

Paul has a purpose! By going to Rome (the political “end of the earth”), Paul is accomplishing the last part of Jesus’ words from chapter one.

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and **to the ends of the earth.**”” (Acts 1:8, NLT)*

This is God’s plan; this is God’s purpose. He is using Paul to spread the message of Jesus and to build up the church. He enables Paul to survive and push forward with this mission...

Because what God plans and purposes...will happen.

## **Protecting People for a Purpose**

Paul in Acts 27 is just the latest in a long line of protected people throughout the Bible. Scripture is full of stories where we see God **protecting people for a purpose**.

For example, Queen Esther had to put her life on the line to approach the King of Persia and try to save her people from genocide (Esther 4-5). Though put in a dangerous position, God saw her through.

The same can be said about others, like:

- Joseph – thrown in a pit, sold into slavery, falsely accused and imprisoned
- Daniel – thrown in a pit...full of lions to be eaten
- Jonah – thrown in a pit...of a whale/giant fish’s stomach to hang out for a few days
- Job – who luckily avoided any pit-related danger...he just lost all of his possessions, his health, and his children

None of these Bible heroes were *thrilled* to be going through the danger. None of them felt particularly safe. Neither did Paul...who was probably cold and exhausted and puking off the side of the boat during the storm, who got blisters from helping offload the cargo into the sea, who ingested gulps of saltwater as he paddles clinging to a piece of the rudder, heading toward shore.

These Bible heroes didn't avoid danger or feel safe...but they knew and trusted that they were protected through it. God made it clear that He was at work in their circumstances. He was with them...standing beside them in the fire, empowering them against giants, guiding them through the parted waters.

God's protection was not always simple and easy and pleasant...

But it was purposeful.

God always had a plan. He always had a goal. He was always moving...and he would not be stopped. God himself declares in the prophetic book of Isaiah:

*“Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.” (Isaiah 46:8–11, ESV)*

Sometimes God's purpose was focused on an individual, sometimes it was focused on a nation, sometimes it was focused on His overall plan of salvation. The protection He provided might vary according to that purpose. But protection has always been rooted in His plan. Short-term pains might be allowed – for a season – yet the final victory is assured. God has long-range, certain plans to prosper people, to glorify people, to transform people.

His plans are unstoppable, and that means his people have always been (ultimately) protected, even when they were in danger.

## **Protecting Us for a Purpose**

So this morning, I ask you, “Do you believe that you've been protected for a purpose?”

### ***We Are Protected***

If you expected to be completely safe and unaffected by trouble in your life, then of course you haven't. No one has...including Jesus!

But if you consider whether you've been “watched over” and “undefeated” and “successful” like Paul, that type of protection has been yours in abundance!

You are:

- *Watched over* by a God who is always there.

- *Undefeated* as Christians because your Heavenly King has already won the war.
- *Successful* because anytime you align with God's will, you can ride on the coattails of His triumph.

How do I know this? Because you're here! You survived. You're in this sanctuary, listening to this passage!

- Maybe you survived financial ruin and had to claw out of bankruptcy.
- Maybe you survived a situation of abuse with someone you thought was safe.
- Maybe you survived the death of someone you loved and needed.
- Maybe you survived the crushing anxiety of an uncertain decision.
- Maybe you survived the teasing and heartache of being a social outcast.
- Maybe you just survived...barely...the physical ailments of your current decade.

The survival could've been years ago, or it could've been this morning.

Whatever trouble you've been through...or trouble you're currently going through...God is (and has been) with you and at work in you. God's **protection** has been given to you.

To claim this about God is to claim a basic doctrinal truth. It speaks of God's power and sovereignty over all of us. Jesus reminds us of God's power of protection in the Gospels:

*"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered."*  
(Matthew 10:29–30, ESV)

You might not understand it. You might not like it. You might not agree with what His protection has looked like. But **we are protected...even when we don't feel like it...because God is in control of our days.**

### ***We Have a Purpose***

And if God has protected you to get you to this point...you can have confidence that He did so with a purpose.

In the back of Deb's car for the past few weeks, there was cardboard trash. It was clean trash, but it was literally trash. My son, Jacob, had put it in there after cleaning up some boxes from his work. Instead of putting them in the dumpster, he put them in the car. We had the bumpy, formed pieces that had been molded to better protect some electronics from the rigors of shipping...just sitting back there. "Why are you saving these?" Turns out some of the pieces are perfect for a tabletop game that his friends played. They could be shaped and painted to fit another context where they weren't trash – they would be treasured!

I'm not saying this to say that you are trash! But the point is that God doesn't just protect; the point is that God protects for a *purpose*!

You and I might not see it. Maybe we don't see the purpose He has in mind. Maybe you feel like you *aren't* protected or purposeful, like a chess piece sitting in the middle of the board,



vulnerable from all sides. But God knows what pieces are being attacked and what pieces are being defended. He has a grand strategy and purpose for putting you where He has.

- You might have been protected because God wants to use you to play a big role for the kingdom, like Paul.
- You might have been protected as an encouragement to someone else, like the sailors in Acts 27 who were saved for Paul's sake.
- You might have been protected to serve as an example to the next generation.
- You might have been protected to continue glorifying God and telling of His greatness.
- You might have been protected to give you enough time to repent and turn to him!

If you've been protected, the focus shouldn't be on you or your safety. The focus should be on what God is doing! If He protects, He does so for a purpose.

Job, the guy from the Old Testament we mentioned earlier? He knew this. Amid his gut-wrenching trouble, he proclaimed to God:

*“I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.”*  
(Job 42:2, ESV)

Take that to heart!

God has a plan, a strategy, a PURPOSE for this congregation. God is working here! You and I have been protected in one way or another to be here... and to be part of his plan at Tonganoxie Christian Church! We have been PROTECTED FOR A PURPOSE.

If you're too focused on your own self, you might miss out. But God has spared you and placed you here. He is the captain who can keep you safe on the high seas!

So, pay attention to His purpose.

- Are you looking for it?
- Are you listening for it?
- Are you seeking it with all your heart?
- Are you willing to be part of it?

Look for the purpose now, and then pursue it!

## **Prayer**

## Commission

Normally at this time in the service, we have a time of invitation – inviting anyone to come up and share a decision to join the church, to follow Christ, or share a prayer request.

While you can still track me down after service (or any of our elders or deacons), today we're going to do something a little different.

With all this talk about protection and purpose, now is a fitting time to bring up Ashley Hagen.

For those of you who don't know Ashley, she has been part of our church for a few years. She came here, and here faith just took off! (Involved in studies and small groups, digging in on her own, inviting newcomers, hosting groups for women and young adults, serving in different areas, and going on a mission trip). She's an amazing lady, made more amazing by the work God is doing in her.

And now...Ashley is going on a mission trip.

- Can you give share the 60-second summary of what this trip is and where you're going?
- What are you most excited about? What makes you most nervous?
- How can we pray for you?

Since this trip is a longer, more involved trip than our traditional short-term trips (like Dan and Andy in Romania right now), the leaders wanted to invest a little more time in sending you out.

I'd like to invite any elders, deacons, staff, missions team members, or anyone here who has been part of Ashley's journey to highlight this call and affirm our support. Join us on stage so we can lay hands and pray for her.

When a new vessel is set to sail it is "commissioned." It is what happens as the build is finished and handed over to the new owner. The same should be done for Ashley as she is following what God has laid on her heart. We've helped in the process of building her faith, and now we're handing her over (for a season or longer!).

It's sad that we won't have her here, but this is a time for our church to rejoice and give thanks for her extraordinary commitment!

**In Acts 13:2-3, Paul and Barnabas were sent off by their church.**

*"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off."*

Ashley, take the gospel into all the world! Be a messenger of salvation and peace. Proclaim Jesus and serve Him in whatever way he calls you.

Let us pray (Ask 2-3 to pray as hands are laid on Ashley)

## SERMON NOTES

---

Previously, in Acts...

**Paul Sails for Rome (Acts 27:1-44)**

**Protecting Paul for a Purpose**

*Paul Has Been Protected (2 Corinthians 11:24–28; James 1:2-4)*

*Paul Has a Purpose (Acts 27:23-24; Acts 1:8)*

**Protecting People for a Purpose**

*(Isaiah 46:8-11)*

**Protecting Us for a Purpose**

*We Are Protected (Matthew 10:29–30)*

*We Have a Purpose (Job 42:2)*

# SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

---

## Fellowship

- If you could take a journey by boat to any port in the world, where would you sail? Why?

## Exploration

- Paul is about to travel from Caesarea (on the coast of Israel) to Rome. Look at a Bible map of Paul's journeys and sketch out his route. How far does he travel?
- Who travels with Paul? (v. 2 – don't forget that "we" includes the author of Acts). What value would their companionship provide for Paul?
- Read Acts 27:10 and compare to Acts 27:23-26. How does Paul's opinion compare with God's promises. Which does Paul trust more? Which do you trust more?
- Imagine being tossed about on a sailing ship in the Mediterranean. How do you think you would've reacted? How do the sailors' actions show an increasing desperation (ex: Acts 27:18-19)?
- Read Acts 27:30-32. Why do you think the centurion trusted Paul's advice now?
- In what ways was Paul protected on this trip? For what purpose (see v. 23-24)?
- How has God protected you in your life? Looking back, can you see any benefit to the times when His protection included allowing hardship? What does that tell you about current or upcoming times of trouble?
- Do you trust that God has a purpose for you? What encouragement could you give someone who doubted God's purpose in his or her life?

## Prayer

- Pray for courage as you face difficult circumstances. Ask for God to make his protection known to you, and to help you understand His purposes.