



Acts 27:1-38
Conduct in a Crisis, Pt 1

Summary: In the middle of a crisis Paul is still concerned about others and comforted by God.

They say that a crisis can bring out the best of people, and also the worst. It can be sacrificial giving and extraordinary heroism or selfish me-first, survivalism. What is 2020 bringing out of you? The answer is probably complicated, right? Especially as conditions drag on you may find your reactions evolving, sometimes you're upbeat and encouraging, patient, ready to do this, and other days you're bitter, and full of rage at one more thing that's different or wrong or prohibited or changed.

We have three more studies left in the book of Acts, including this one. And I've titled them all: Conduct in a Crisis – Parts One, Two, and Three because, we're going to see the apostle Paul endure life-threatening circumstances *while under* life-threatening circumstances, and do it more than once. He's under life-threatening circumstances because he's a prisoner, in Roman custody, on his way to face a trial before Caesar. So he has that hanging over his head every day. But then, on the way to Rome he faces several other life-threatening circumstances, one after the other.

So, in the month of October as multiple crises unfold around us, we're going to look to Scripture and see what we can learn about God in a crisis – where is He when difficult times come our way? We're going to see, what affect does prayer have on a crisis – can we pray our way out of it, and what does that look like? We're going to see how a Christian can and should, by the grace of God, live through and respond to a crisis.

And my hope is that we will be encouraged and strengthened, my hope is that we will grow. My hope is that we will clarify what we believe about God and the world and our place in it. And my hope is, that we will be a source of hope, peace, joy, and strength to the people around us as we grow – that God will make us look more like Christ, so that more people can see Christ, and see Him better.

We pick up in Scripture where we left off last week, Paul is being shipped to Rome for an appeal before Caesar. Luke, the author, gives us a lot of details about the trip. I'll explain some things as we go so we can better understand the circumstances Paul faced.



Acts 27:1 And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to *one* named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment. 2 So, entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us. 3 And the next *day* we landed at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave *him* liberty to go to his friends and receive care. 4 When we had put

to sea from there, we sailed under *the shelter of Cyprus*, because the winds were contrary. 5 And when we had sailed over the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, *a city of Lycia*. 6 There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, and he put us on board.

7 When we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under *the shelter of Crete* off Salmone. 8 Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the *city of Lasea*.

You're starting to pick up on the fact that the trip's not going so well. And that's about to become very clear.

9 Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, 10 saying, "Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives." 11 Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul. 12 And because the harbor was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, *and winter there*.

Now, you have to know that sailing was an important business on the Mediterranean, even in the ancient world. The Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Romans, and other civilizations all had their own navies and fought large battles at sea. If you wanted to control the land in the Mediterranean, you also needed to control the waters, because they were the logistical backbone of the region.

For example, wheat was crucial to the strength of the Roman Empire which offered free bread to its citizens and paid soldiers a ration of 3lbs of wheat a day – but in order to do so, it had to be able to move the wheat from Egypt where it was grown, to other parts of the empire.

Large cargo ships were used to do that. Roman grain transports on the route from Alexandria were the size of smaller ships in some modern navies. Lucian, a writer from the 2nd Century AD, described a Roman grain ship he saw in port in Greece:

'What a tremendous ship it was, 180 feet long and 45 feet across and 44 feet from the deepest part of the hold. And the height of the mast and the yard it bore, and the forestays that were necessary to keep it upright - the crew was like an army.'



What Lucian describes was probably an **average** size grain carrier. But in the 1930's archaeologists found evidence of even bigger ships when they explored the sunken remains of two ancient party boats, used by the emperor Caligula, which were 240 feet long with a beam width of 47 feet.



To give you a rough comparison, here is a Reliance Class - Medium Endurance Cutter from the Coast Guard. It's 210 feet long with a beam width of 34 feet.

You can land a helicopter on it, and it's actually 13% smaller than Caligula's party boats. In other words, people who lived a long time ago weren't all stupid and incompetent. They built big stuff, and it worked.

And yet, as large as the Roman grain carriers and other ships were, they weren't safe at sea year-round. The waters of the Mediterranean were, and still are, famous for dangerous storms that come along during certain times of year.

Typically, traffic on the water began to taper off in the fall. Mid-September to November was considered risky, but possible - and from early November on, no one really traveled the open seas until at least February.

Luke says sailing is dangerous because the Fast has already passed; he's talking about the Day of Atonement, or what is called Yom Kippur today, the day when Jews stop to remember all that God has done for them. That was last Monday, September 28 - maybe you saw it on the calendar - but in the year 59 AD when Paul likely made this trip, it was on October 5th. So, the events we're reading about happened around this time of year, which Paul knows is way too late to be trying to complete the voyage all the way to Rome.

Remember, Paul is an experienced sea traveler. At this point, in the book of Acts alone, we have seen him take eleven trips on the water. He's logged over 3500 miles of sea travel - he knows a thing or two about boats and so he tries to offer his insight, but his opinion gets rejected. And here is where we move from filling our head with neat historical information and start dealing with the stuff that can make us uncomfortable in our heart and soul.

Because, consider the relationships we see here – the centurion, who is control of Paul and all the rest of the prisoners has been kind to Paul so far, he has given him some freedom and let Paul visit with friends when they pull into harbor.

Paul speaks respectfully to him and the others, addressing them as “Sirs.” You get the impression that they get along, there’s no tension here. And when Paul offers them his opinion about the safety of the trip, he’s not just trying to get his own way, he’s looking out for everyone’s safety, everyone’s good.

In other words, Paul is doing everything right, but he still gets shot down. The centurion takes someone else’s advice.

Friends, the same kind of thing happens to us all the time – at home or in class, hanging out friends or at work. We see what should happen, and we speak up, but we get shot down.

And then, we either lean in, or pull back.

We might lean in and engage by arguing, pointing out why we think we are right. How often do we get offended because everyone else doesn’t immediately adopt OUR idea or belief? We feel like, “Hey, I put some serious thought into it that!”

We point out what we know or what we have experienced: “I’ve done this before, or I’ve seen this before, or this happened to a friend of mine and they did such and such.”

Or, we point out what we are capable of “I know I can do it, you just won’t let me try.”

Or, we point out the logic of our argument compared to the weakness of the other person’s position – “Yeah, but you’re not thinking about this, or what if that happens, etc.”

Friends, this happens every day, in countless settings, over just about every issue you can imagine. We see things differently and so we lean in and try to prove we’re right.

Or, we disengage, we pull back. We just shut our mouths and think, “Alright, fine. You don’t want to hear my opinion, or you don’t want to listen to me, then I’m not going to say or do anything else to help.” I’ll be here if I have to, but all I’m going to give you is the bare minimum to get by. I tried to help, I got rejected, so I’m done.

Now, are you ready for this to hurt? There’s a common theme that runs through both of these common responses – they both put me at the center. Both options reflect the attitude of people who feel hurt because they were rejected and don’t think it should have happened to them.

Pride naturally makes us either puff up or fall back.

But there’s another way to live when you’re walking in the Spirit. The sailors and soldiers have decided to do their own thing, they’ve blown off Paul’s opinion and there are going to

be consequences, serious, life-threatening consequences if they're wrong – and Paul is sure they are. But watch how he responds – does he lean in and argue or pull back and sulk?

13 When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained *their* desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete.



14 But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon. 15 So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let *her* drive.

As soon as they get a little breeze, they think they have what they need, and they set out – the trip to Phoenix should have only taken a few hours, it was a distance of only 40-60 miles. But not long after they take off, this major storm comes up suddenly, and starts to drive them south. Paul was right - they were wrong - and now things are going BADLY.

16 And running under *the shelter of* an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty. 17 When they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship; and fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis Sands, they struck sail and so were driven. 18 And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next *day* they lightened the ship.

19 On the third *day* we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands. 20 Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on *us*, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up.



Now, there is something important to note here about these grain ships – they had no oars or engines. They had rudders for steering, but this thing was entirely at the mercy of the wind.

- They have pulled the skiff, the small little boat they used for quick trips, onboard so it doesn't get smashed into the larger boat.

- They haven't seen the sun or stars for days, just clouds and storms, so they have no way to navigate or judge their position.

- They're afraid of being blown onto some sandbars down by Libya, so they lower the sails so they won't be blown around as much.

- Then, they start throwing things overboard so they don't slide all over the deck and hurt someone or knock them into the sea.

- We'll learn in minute they haven't been eating.



- Things go on like this for days – until finally, Luke says, [all hope that we would be saved was finally given up.](#)

But watch Paul, what will his conduct be like in the crisis?

[21 But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. 22 And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. 23 For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, 24 saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ 25 Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. 26 However, we must run aground on a certain island.”](#)

Evidently, *while everyone else is panicking, Paul is praying* and as a result, God sends an angel to comfort him and bring him a message.

The angel says that Paul should not be afraid – he’s going to survive this storm because God wants him to appear before Caesar in Rome. But it’s what the angel says about everybody else in v. 24 that amazes me: [“and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.”](#)

The NIV says God has ‘graciously given’ you. The Greek word here is kecharistai, from the root word charis, or grace. It means to grant a favor gratuitously, in kindness. In other words, Paul was asking God to save everyone on board and God has granted Paul’s request. God changed the natural outcome of events and brought a miracle to pass *because Paul was interceding on their behalf.*

Even though he had been snubbed, even though the leaders made a different decision than the one he believed was right, he was praying for them, asking God to spare them from the effects of the decision they had made.

Paul well understood that God has created a world with order, and that includes positions of leadership and positions of submission. He understood that while all human beings are created equally in God’s image, God also grants to some positions of authority and responsibility. And one of the biggest reasons Paul was able to submit to this kind of authority was because he knew who God was and how he related to God.

In fact, did you notice how Paul introduces these Roman sailors, soldiers, and prisoners to God? He says Yahweh is the God **to whom I belong**, and **whom I worship**. Paul knows that *while he may be in the custody of the Romans, he is still under the care of God.* And God can overrule or negate the influence of any Roman decision he sees fit. So instead of fighting back or withdrawing when his opinion was rejected, instead of getting aggressive or moody, Paul just appealed the decision to a higher court.

The Bible consistently stresses roles of submission and authority telling us to listen to those in charge.

Children obey your parents
Wives submit to your husbands
Workers are to obey their masters
Christians, submit to Christ as the head of the church

That's OK when we feel like the person in authority is making good decisions. But what are we supposed to do when we disagree, when we **strenuously** disagree, with a decision that has been made, and which we believe will have a negative affect us?

Well, just like Paul, you should PRAY – ask for a miraculous outcome, and for the person or persons who made the decision that's affecting you to be blessed and protected by God. Remind yourself that you **belong to God** and **worship Him**. He really is in control and really can bring His will to pass no matter what decision your politicians or parents make.

Paul would later write to Timothy in:

1 Timothy 2:1 Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. 3 For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Scripture is full of examples of people under authority who were a blessing to those over them instead of being a bitter, stubborn, or resentful pain in their rear end. Whether it is our President, our boss, our husband, our parents, our teachers, or whomever – we should be praying for God to bless them and to help them make wise decisions – including the decision to submit to Him. Because when leaders hear from God **and obey**, they are blessed, but so are we!

Now turn with me back to Acts 27 and watch what happens next. Remember, God promised Paul he would be delivered, but He didn't promise him an easy ride...

27 Now when the fourteenth night had come, as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land. 28 And they took soundings and found *it* to be twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found *it* to be fifteen fathoms. 29 Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come. 30 And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow, 31 Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." 32 Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off.

The sailors see a chance to make a get away and they know they have a better chance to make in in the smaller skiff which has oars that they can row. They'll be able to make it

land OK but who knows about this big boat? Paul catches them in the act though and he says something to the centurion who is more than willing to listen to him now.

Contrast the actions of the sailors who decide to look out for themselves with Paul who is still concerned about everyone else.

33 And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored *them* all to take food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing. 34 Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you." 35 And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken *it* he began to eat. 36 Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves. 37 And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship. 38 So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea.

We're in the middle of a crisis and Paul is praying for people, looking out for people, trying to help people and 275 lives were affected for good.

Why? Because Paul saw himself in an important light – there was a God that Paul belonged to and who He worshipped. He may have been in this crisis, but he knew God was watching over him. He felt the winds, he got wet from the rain just like everyone else. God didn't spare him from the crisis, but God walked through it with him. And that made a difference.

He was under the authority of a Roman centurion and the boat's captain. He didn't always agree with their leadership decisions or the way they handled the crisis. But he didn't attack them over it, he didn't shut down. He trusted God, *because he was under the temporary authority of these men, but he was under the eternal authority of King Jesus* – the God to whom he belonged and whom he worshipped.

My friends, do you know this God? Do you belong to Him? And do you worship Him? What difference is that making as you go through your crisis?

Jesus does not change. He's the same for you as He was for Paul. He is with you; He is for you. He has given you His Word to encourage you, strengthen you, and provide you with light in the darkness.

He has given you brothers and sisters in the family of God to walk with you. You are not alone.

Yes, the storm is raging, and yes, the boat may crash, you may even suffer along the way, but God knows. And He invites you to pray – for yourself, for the people in authority over you, for the people going through this with you – to make a difference in their lives because God has made a difference in yours.

That's something to think about as we prepare to receive communion now.

The worship team will come up and play a song as we take a moment to consider these things and pray. Come up and grab the elements for yourself – maybe send just one or two people up for your family if you're here with a group so we minimize the crowding, and hold onto the elements, we'll receive them together in just a moment. But first,

Let's Pray.