

EXPOSITION OF ACTS

Message #54

Acts 27:1-26

Most of us love to take a boat ride. Most of us have enjoyed taking a ride in a pontoon, speed boat or even going on a cruise. But back in Paul's day, they did not view boat rides the way we do. Boat rides were not comfortable and often dangerous. There were no compasses, no GPS systems, so most ships tried to sail within eyesight of land and would navigate by the stars, the sun and by following the coast.

Ships in Paul's day were not designed like ships in our day. If a major storm hit, you didn't have the confidence in your boat that one has today. There were no life jackets and no rehearsals of what to do in an emergency. So any time you stepped foot on a ship and started to sail, you truly did risk your life.

Doing the will of God in our life is the most wonderful thing we can ever do, but doing God's will in our life is also the most difficult thing we will ever do. The road to accomplishing what God wants us to accomplish is one filled with twists and turns.

We may remember that Jesus Christ, Himself, showed up to spend a night with Paul when he was really at a low moment locked up in Jerusalem, and Jesus told Paul that he was going to be His witness in Rome (Acts 23:11). Paul had been through several trials and he was the one who appealed to Caesar, which would take him to Rome. Now the way Paul gets to Rome is anything but a way we would script it.

He spends over two years in jail in Caesarea and then he gets on a ship that gets into some serious problems out at sea. In the next couple of weeks we are going to take a boat ride and in this chapter we will see one of the most famous shipwrecks in world history. What we will learn from this boat ride is this:

THE PLAN OF GOD FOR PAUL'S APOSTOLIC MINISTRY WAS THAT HE GO TO ROME AND PREACH THE GRACE GOSPEL AND THE WAY GOD SOVEREIGNLY TOOK HIM TO ROME WAS BY A SHIPWRECK.

According to II Cor. 11:25, Paul was in three shipwrecks before this one. God is going to use a major life threatening crisis and catastrophe in the ocean as part of the means of getting Paul to Rome. This will actually further establish his reputation as a powerful man of God. Don't be surprised when doing God's will if you don't have some shipwrecks in life.

When Paul was standing before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, he was the dominant figure. When he was standing before Felix, he was the dominant figure. When he was standing before Festus, he was the dominant figure. When he was standing before Herod and Bernice, he was the dominant figure.

Now if you take Paul and put him on a boat in the Mediterranean, he again will become the dominant figure. Why is that? God's hand is on him. He is the apostle of Jesus Christ and everywhere he goes in life, that fact becomes evident. There are three nautical parts to this part of the story:

NAUTICAL PART #1 – Paul sails from Caesarea to Myra. **27:1-5**

There are nine facts we want to observe about this nautical leg of the trip.

Fact #1 - It was decided by the Romans that a ship would sail from Caesarea to Italy. **27:1a**

A ship in Paul's day with good wind could travel about three nautical miles per hour. A nautical mile is 6080 feet or 1.1 miles. So in an hour a ship could sail about 3.3 miles. The distance from Caesarea to Italy is well over 1000 miles. If you could sail it directly, which you cannot do, and if you had perfect winds, which you do not have, it would take over 300 hours to make this trip, which is well over twelve days.

Fact #2 - On the ship was Paul, his associates and other prisoners. **27:1b**

Actually, there were others on the ship who were traveling to Italy, but the story here is really about getting Paul to Rome. He is linked in with other prisoners. Think of the humiliation of this scene. Paul is being treated as some criminal who needs to be extradited to Rome with a bunch of other criminals. His crime is he preaches the grace of God found in Jesus Christ.

Fact #3 - The prisoners were controlled by a centurion named Julius. **27:1c**

Julius will turn out to be a good guy. In fact, God will turn his mind to favor Paul. No matter where you put a faithful man or woman of God, they will be favored because God will see to it. This was true of men like Joseph, Daniel, and women like Esther and Ruth. You can stick a faithful man of God on some ship and he will end up being favored; this is the story of Paul.

Fact #4 - The ship on which they were sailing was an Adramyttium ship. **27:2a**

What this means is that this ship came from a port city located on the eastern shore of the Aegean Sea. This particular ship was designed to hug the coast and pull into various ports along the coast.

Fact #5 - The ship's route was to sail to the regions along the coast of Asia. **27:2b**

What this means is that they were not going to sail out in open water, but he decided to sail along the coast and stop at various places and Myra would be one of those places they would stop. This Adramyttium ship would take them to Myra in Lycia and there they would change ships, sail to Cnidus and then head out across the Mediterranean. This was the plan and the route.

Fact #6 - Traveling with Paul were Luke and Aristarchus. **27:2c**

This is the same Aristarchus named in Acts 19:29; 20:4. There is no question that he traveled with Paul to Rome (Philemon 24; Col. 4:10). In Colossians 4:10, Paul identifies him as a “fellow prisoner.” The specific pronoun that Luke uses “other” prisoners means another of the same kind. So it is very possible that other believers were being taken on this ship to Rome as prisoners.

Fact #7 - The ship first landed at Sidon . **27:3a**

The next day after leaving Caesarea, the ship pulled into Sidon. The geographical distance from Caesarea to Sidon is 67-70 miles. If you can sail this in one day, one writer observed, you had good winds because to sail this distance at 3.3 miles per hour would take twenty hours. It is obvious that the ship made good time getting from Caesarea to Sidon.

Sidon had one of the finest harbors in the world in Paul’s day. At the time this ship ported there, Sidon was known all over the world for its wealth and commerce.

Fact #8 - Julius lets Paul spend time with his friends . **27:3b**

Julius was good to Paul. He treated him with respect and he allowed him freedom. He let him spend time with his friends, probably escorted by some sort of guard. It is interesting to observe that Julius treats Paul respectfully this entire trip (27:43; 28:16). **Isn’t it interesting that Julius’ name ends up in the inspired Scriptures because he treated God’s servant so well.** We don’t know the name of Paul’s friends in Sidon, but we do know the name of this Roman centurion. Those who treat God’s people well will never regret it.

During the Tribulation, those non-Jews who treat Jews well, even caring for them when they are prisoners, will end up sharing in the Kingdom when Jesus Christ reigns (Matt. 25:35-34). It would not surprise me to discover that this Julius ends up in heaven.

Now the text says that Paul was allowed to receive “care” (επιμελεια) from his friends. This word indicates that his friends gave him some shelter, food and some supplies and even money for his trip to Rome. You cannot help but see the sovereign hand of God in this. Paul is a prisoner on a ship and God is still seeing to it that His servant has all of his needs met. God has promised that He will provide for His people and He will, even if you lock them up in jail.

Fact #9 - The ship sails from Sidon to Myra . **27:4-5**

The distance from Sidon to Myra is well over 350 miles to the northwest. If you have perfect winds this distance can be covered in 106 hours or 4 ½ days. But it is clear they did not have perfect winds. The winds were contrary winds and it was slow going. Those who know how to sail know you have to zigzag to make any progress and it is a slow and tedious process.

They left Sidon and hugged the coast of the Mediterranean moving northwest as best they could.

It is estimated that the current along the coast runs about two miles per hour and also land breezes flow down valleys at night which would make the ship sail better than if you are bucking a head wind.

They sailed around the port side or north side of Cyprus rather than the open side or south side on the Mediterranean. They went along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia and landed in Myra. The language would indicate that they deviated from the normal route. Normally you would leave Sidon and sail straight out into the Mediterranean to Crete and then on to Italy. But the winds would not permit it. This leg of the trip took a whole lot longer than the minimum time.

Now Myra was one of the major Roman grain ports. There have been archaeological discoveries of old grain storage facilities that testify that this was a major part of the Roman trade route. So as Paul is going to Rome, business is being conducted as normal in various parts of the world.

NAUTICAL PART #2 – Paul sails from Myra to Crete. 27:6-12

There are five key facts we see from this part of the narrative:

Fact #1 - The centurion put Paul and the others on an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy. 27:6

Now an Alexandrian ship was a grain ship or, as one writer said, a “corn ship” from Egypt that was obviously transporting grain to Italy. We learn from **verse 38** that this ship was carrying a lot of wheat. Apparently they wanted to get one more load to Rome from this port before winter and the centurion decided this would be a good ship on which to travel.

According to H.V. Morton, these grain ships were the finest and largest of that time. They were normally navigated by well-trained Egyptian sea captains who were famous on “all the seas of the ancient world” (*In The Steps of Paul*, p. 373). Alexandria had one of the largest fleets of Mediterranean trading ships in the world.

According to Kent Hughes, a typical grain freighter was 140 feet long and 36 feet wide. It was a good, sturdy ship but in high seas it had its disadvantages. It did not have a rudder but was steered by two great paddles which extended from the stern. It had only one mast with one very large square sail. A real problem with this ship is that it could not sail into the wind (*Acts*, p. 332).

There were 276 people on board (*Acts* 27:37). Some have suggested there were 100 Roman soldiers which form a centurion, 100 crew workers on the ship and 76 others, including the passengers and the prisoners.

Fact #2 - The ship has a difficult time sailing from Myra to Cnidus. 27:7a

It is only 125 miles from Myra to Cnidus, but the text says the trip took a “good many days.” At normal speed of 3.3 miles per hour the trip should have only taken 1 ½ days. So this shows us the trip was slow going.

They made poor headway because they ran into a northwest wind. Now this should have sent a red flag up that perhaps we better rethink trying to sail to Rome.

Fact #3 - The ship had a hard time sailing from Cnidus to Crete. **27:7b-8**

A decision was made to sail south. All of the places mentioned here, Salome, Fair Havens and Lasea are port cities on the island of Crete. So the ship sailed from Cnidus about 180 miles to Crete and landed in Fair Havens. The trip with good winds would take 2 ½ days, but as Luke says it was slow going.

Fact #4 - Paul warns the Centurion that they should remain in Fair Havens because the trip across the Mediterranean would be dangerous. **27:9-10**

We may surmise from these verses that some sort of meeting was held to determine how and when to sail. Paul was a well-seasoned boat traveler and it was mid-October after the Passover, and most experienced sailors know you do not want to sail out into the open waters of the Mediterranean at that time of year.

When we lived in the mountains there is a major weather change that takes place in mid-October and you do not want to get yourself trapped deep in the mountains because that weather is unpredictable. The same is true on the ocean.

This centurion should have listened to Paul and this is critical here because this will become life saving later in the story.

Fact #5 - The Centurion does not listen to Paul but to the captain of the ship. **27:11-13**

If most people were not going to listen to Paul concerning salvation from sin, we may assume that they aren't going to listen to Paul concerning the sailing on a ship. They figured that Paul was some land lover who didn't know much about sailing. What they did not realize is that this man is an apostle who is very much in tune with God. If you give most people a choice between listening to someone from the world versus listening to a man of God, most will choose to listen to someone from this world. That is what happens here.

Fair Havens was a boring port city so the captain thought if we are going to winter somewhere we would be better off sailing over to Phoenix which is only about forty miles away. They thought they could just sail over there and spend the winter.

According to **verse 13** the weather seemed moderate and they had a nice south wind and they dropped the anchor and were staying close to the island of Crete and everything appeared just fine. Probably someone said, see Paul doesn't know what he is talking about, everything is just fine. Just because things appear to be fine does not mean they are. Just because things seem to be sailing along nicely doesn't mean some storm cannot change that quickly.

Many people have gone to a doctor thinking everything was fine only to learn something was drastically wrong. Some thought their investments and retirement was secure only to learn it wasn't.

But in no place is this false confidence more dangerous than when it comes to eternity. Many people are drifting through life thinking they will leave this world and it will turn out okay. If you have not believed in Jesus Christ you are heading to eternal destruction, no matter how wonderful you think things are right now in your world.

This does illustrate an important point—do not ever listen to the counsel of people over the counsel of the Word of God. People who know God’s Word are in the best position to warn others.

NAUTICAL PART #3 – The ship gets pulled out into the Mediterranean and moves toward shipwreck on Malta. **27:14-26**

An ancient writer, Vegesius, said that up to September 14 sailing is safe in the Mediterranean, but from September 14 to November 11 it is dangerous and after November 11 sailing was impossible. Typically all navigation stopped from November 11 through February.

As the ship was nicely moving, a violent wind, called by the sailors “Euraquilo,” which means northeast winds, began to howl. Sailors know this today as a deadly northeaster wind. It started to blow and the waves became mighty. It caught the sail and put them out to sea in the Mediterranean. This wind was driving them straight west out into the open waters of the Mediterranean Sea. This was a violent and terrifying wind.

According to **verse 15** the only thing they could do was to let the boat go with the wind and as they passed right by the small island of Cauda they were still having trouble getting the ship and the ship’s dinghy boat under control (**verse 16**).

According to **verse 17** they finally got the dinghy hoisted up and then they used supporting gables to under gird the ship. This is known as “frapping” in which you lower the cables beneath the vessel and tie them tightly to help relieve the strain on the timbers. By running the cables beneath the hull and tightening them down you help hold the ship together. Then they threw out anchors trying to slow the ship down because they were fearful of going into the “shallows of Syrtis.”

If you have ever lost control of a vehicle on ice in which you are just spinning at the mercy of the ice, you can sense what was happening on this ship. It is completely out of control and even though the sailors are doing everything they can, they could not stop it.

Off the coast of Africa there is a place called “Syrtis Sands” that is known to be a place that can destroy a ship. Around the area known as Syrtis there were sandbars, and if a ship got in there it would never get out.

According to **verse 18** they were violently tossed by the storm. They felt they were going to sink so they started throwing off cargo with their own hands, which would include corn and wheat (**verses 18-19**). I am reminded of another storm that occurred on this very same body of water when Jonah tried to make a run from God and God tracked him down with a storm. In that case, they had to throw Jonah overboard.

Verse 20 tells us they had not seen the sun or stars for many days. They had no sun or stars to even guide them so they were out in open sea and they lost any hope they would survive this. The ship was probably taking on water and there was no land in view, so they lost all hope of being saved.

Back in the 1800's, James Smith wrote a book entitled "The Voyage and Shipwreck of the Apostle Paul." In that book he said that research has shown and has been confirmed by modern navigation that if you took a ship from the island of Crete and let it drift for two weeks, it would drift to the general vicinity of the island of Malta.

They hadn't eaten for days and about this time Paul stood up and said (**verse 21**): "Men you should have followed my advice and stayed in Crete. If you had you would have not been in this dangerous situation and suffered this loss." Now one reason why Paul said this is so that they would listen to him from now on. This man was in tune with God and they had better seriously think about listening to what he had to say not just about storms, but about eternity.

I believe there will come a day for many believers when they will hear very similar words. It will be time for the Bema Seat Judgment and the writings of Paul will be part of that judgment. This judgment will be to determine who gains and loses rewards and the statement will be something like this: If you would have listened to the Word of God and followed its advice you would not suffer loss today.

Now Paul was calm and controlled in the midst of this violent storm. Huge waves and high winds were blasting this ship and Paul was as calm as could be. **Why? Because Paul's soul is anchored to Jesus Christ and he knows the Word of God and he knew the will of God. He was going to Rome.**

When we get hit with uncontrollable and unexplainable storms, where do we find a comfort and calm? We will always find it in our relationship with Jesus Christ and in our knowledge of the Word of God and will of God.

In **verse 22** he told them all that not one person would lose their lives, but they would lose the ship. **Verse 23** gives the reason why Paul knew this; because an angel of God stood before Paul and told Paul that he was going to stand before Nero and that all those with him would be saved.

Now do not miss the theology of **verse 24**; it is God who determines who lives and who dies. It is God who determines when a person dies and how they die.

Paul said keep up your courage because God will have it turn out just that way, but they will end up on a certain island (**verses 25-26**). Here is what real faith does—it believes the Word of God.

We are all on a ship of life heading toward eternity and you can live or you can die. Here is what Paul said—Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Ladies and Gentlemen, we must follow the advice of Paul.