

Paul Sails for Rome

Bible Background • Acts 27

Printed Text • Acts 27:1–2, 33–44 | Devotional Reading • Romans 1:13–17

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **KNOW** how Paul's faith in God enabled him to remain calm in the midst of a storm; **APPRECIATE** how our relationship with God helps us cope in a crisis; and **WITNESS** to others about relying on God's strength when facing crises.

In Focus

Lamar and Joyce stood on their porch, eagerly awaiting the ambulance that would bring their son, Drew, home from the military rehabilitation center. He had been there four months as he recovered from an injury suffered during military maneuvers overseas. Once strong and athletic, Drew was now paralyzed from the waist down, but they were grateful their son was alive.

Initially, Lamar and Joyce resented the situation, but Drew's response to his disability had changed that. Over time, they came to appreciate how Drew's faith in Jesus Christ enabled him to respond to this life storm with cheerfulness instead of bitterness, and they were learning to do the same. Lately, they were attending church, hoping to experience some of the peace Drew had. The many friends, neighbors, and strangers who had donated time and resources to renovate the home in time for Drew's homecoming awed them. They knew adjusting to home life might be difficult for them, but they were ready to accept the challenge.

How we weather life's storms reflects whether we truly have confidence in God's faithfulness.

Keep In Mind

"And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land." (Acts 27:44, KJV)

Words You Should Know

A. Delivered (Acts 27:1) *paradidomi* (Gk.) – Handed a prisoner into someone's custody.

B. Health (v. 34) *soteria* (Gk.) – Denotes salvation or deliverance.

Say It Correctly

Adramyttium. ad'ruh-MIT-ee-uhm

Augustus. aw-GUHS-tuhs

Aristarchus. Air'is-TAHR-kuhs

Centurion. sen-TOOR-ee-uhn

Julius. JOOL-yuhs

Macedonian. Mas-eh-DOH-nee-uhn

Thessalonica. thes-uh-LON-nay-kuh

KJV

Acts 27:1 And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band.

2 And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.

33 And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.

34 Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.

35 And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat.

36 Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat.

37 And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls.

38 And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

39 And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.

40 And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.

41 And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.

42 And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.

43 But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land:

44 And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.

NLT

Acts 27:1 "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.

2 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.

33 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.

34 "Please eat something now for your own good. For not a hair of your heads will perish."

35 Then he took some bread, gave thanks to God before them all, and broke off a piece and ate it.

36 Then everyone was encouraged and began to eat—

37 all 276 of us who were on board.

38 After eating, the crew lightened the ship further by throwing the cargo of wheat overboard.

39 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.

40 So they cut off the anchors and left them in the sea. Then they lowered the rudders, raised the foresail, and headed toward shore.

41 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.

42 The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners to make sure they didn't swim ashore and escape. 43 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.

44 The others held on to planks or debris from the broken ship. So everyone escaped safely to shore.

The People, Places, and Times

Book of Acts. The second of two books written by Luke, Acts highlights “the acts of the apostles.” It shares accounts of how the early church fulfilled its mission to “be witnesses [of Jesus Christ] . . . in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8, KJV). As such, it offers a historical view of the growth of the church and the unity—or sometimes disunity—of its members. Furthermore, Luke shares the encouraging message that the Gospel is available to all people, regardless of race, class, or ethnicity.

Ships. In biblical times, ships were functional, not recreational, and used by merchants and traders in normal business dealings from spring through fall. Winter made sailing more hazardous. Soldiers, meanwhile, used ships to protect the seas from pirates and during war.

Background

Arrested after preaching the Gospel in Jerusalem, Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen and requested a trial before Caesar. Within days of traveling there, the stormy weather made the trip dangerous. Paul warned Julius, the centurion guarding the prisoners, that, “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” (from Acts 27:10, NIV). Julius ignored the warning, and the ship continued until it encountered a hurricane-like storm.

When they had given up hope and feared dying, Paul first encouraged them by sharing a vision he had in which an angel told him that no one on board would die. However, Paul warned that despite the encouraging news, they would be shipwrecked. Throughout the entire ordeal, Paul’s confidence in God’s faithfulness enabled him to act calmly. He believed the word of the Lord, delivered by the angel, and trusted God to fulfill His promise.

At-A-Glance

1. Calm before the Storm (Acts 27:1–2)
2. Calm in the Storm vv. 33–38)
3. Shipwrecked, But Saved (vv. 39–44)

In Depth

1. Calm before the Storm (Acts 27:1–2)

On the surface, Paul’s request for a trial before Caesar seemed easy to accomplish: Board a ship, travel to Rome, and speak with Caesar. But an unexpected hurricane-strength storm made the journey arduous and life-threatening. Before the storm hit, Paul—and everyone else on board—was seemingly unaware of its approach. The ship’s crew comprised experienced seamen familiar with navigating seas in different weather conditions. Yet, their experience was no match for the storm.

Paul’s experience with the possible cyclone or hurricane-force wind mirrors how Christians often unknowingly encounter storms. One day all may be well, and on the next a catastrophic storm rages. That storm could be a spouse’s plea for a divorce, a life-threatening car accident, a medical diagnosis

that seems impossible to beat, or an assault by a stranger that causes great physical or emotional harm. Whatever the case, like Paul, we are not aware of what is approaching, but God knows.

2. Calm in the Storm (vv. 33–38)

How did Paul remain calm? He relied on a previously developed, surefire method of weathering life's storms that he had learned which allowed him to be calm. We can use calm as an acronym advising us to: Call on God during crises, anticipate God stepping in to save us, listen to God's instruction, and make known God's promises.

Call on God during crises. Faith is an anchor, not a crutch. It tethers us to our Lord and Savior, who teaches us how to act calmly during storms. In faith, Paul called on God during the crisis, and God answered by sending a heavenly messenger. As the days lengthened, the storm became stronger while the passengers' hope of survival diminished. They needed God's help. Calling on God during a storm is paramount for the Christian who wants to weather that storm calmly.

Anticipate God stepping in to rescue us. Initially, Paul had sensed prophetically that there would be loss of life and loss of ship. Later, however, God in His mercy sent an angel to strengthen Paul and to deliver a divine message. Thus, despite the raging seas, Paul anticipated God's salvation. He expected to live, not die. Paul's trials had taught him to surrender his will, emotions, and plans to God. We must do the same in order to weather life's storms with calm as we anticipate God's salvation.

Listen to God's instruction. In Acts 27:24, Paul was instructed to "fear not" (KJV). It is the same instruction Abram, Israel, Joshua, and many others received in the past. It is the same instruction that God whispers to His children today. He intends for Christians to go through storms without fear. Prayer, Bible study, fellowship with other believers, and a dogged determination to trust God are all necessary at such times to help defeat fear.

Make known God's promises. After Paul received instructions from the angel, he shared the vision and the inherent promise with the other passengers. He encouraged them, "[K]eep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me" (from v. 25, NIV). Sometimes in the storms of life we are involved not for our own good but for the good of others. Through us, others can see the mercy, grace, and love of God. That Paul and all others on board the ship could go more than two weeks without eating, for example, is a testament that God alone kept them alive. That they broke their self-imposed fast by eating bread is also miraculous as most people seek liquid to ease their bodies back into eating after a prolonged fast. Furthermore, that they could still be strong to maneuver the ship, that none died from disease or starvation prove that there was another "force" battling the external situations. Finally, although they may not have realized God's presence or protection, they were comforted by His promise as shared by Paul.

3. Shipwrecked, But Saved (vv. 39–44)

Panicking neither diminishes nor stops a storm. Rather, panic hinders our ability to hear from God and to share God's promises with others. When Christians respond by staying calm, their faith shines through storms. Our friends, family members, and coworkers observe the confidence we have in God and can gain strength from us as we cope calmly with crises. Thus, it's possible to turn storms into opportunities to share Christ and to bring others to salvation. We learn from Paul's experience that in many storms of life, we are unprepared to handle the storm without God's help. Our educational background, gifts, talents, finances, or other resources cannot provide the safe harbor we seek.

Satan is a thief that “comes only to steal and kill and destroy” (from John 10:10, NIV). When storms arise, he uses them to fulfill that purpose. But God is greater than our enemy. This is an important lesson to learn because when everything else fails, when all of our systems, vehicles, plotting, and schemes fail, we can be assured that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8, NIV). He never fails, and we can trust Him despite the thoughts that the enemy may place in our minds.

Finally, the crewmen’s sneaky decision to cast out to sea with lifeboats—and later, their plot to kill the prisoners (Acts 27:30, 42)— shows how times of panic can lead us to behave irrationally. Ultimately, the ability to weather the storm was due in large part to Paul’s calm response to it. He trusted in God’s faithfulness. When we respond in a similar fashion, we, too, help others draw closer to God.

Search the Scriptures

1. Why did the centurion ignore Paul’s advice in Lasea (Acts 27:8, 11–12)?
2. How did all of the passengers get to safety (v. 44)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Paul’s past experience with life’s storms enabled him to calmly weather a natural storm. What have you learned in the past that enabled you to weather a recent storm? How did your positive response affect others?

Liberating Lesson

Places such as Japan, Haiti, and some southern U.S. states have been hit hard recently by tumultuous weather conditions. When storms strike, how can Christians serve as beacons of calm and hope?

Application for Activation

Paul was able to provide an encouraging word to the others in the storm. Ask God to show you how to encourage others through e-mails, letters, or cards that provide hope and peace.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Acts 27:1–2, 33–44

1 And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustas' band. 2 And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.

Paul had waited two years under house arrest in Caesarea. Two Roman governors, Felix and Festus heard his defense against groundless charges of disturbing the peace and sedition against Rome. The first wanted a bribe, but Paul had used repeated appearances before Festus to fulfill his call by God to proclaim the saving message of Christ (Acts 26:22a, 25; Romans 1:1, 14, 16). Finally, it was decided to transport Paul and some other prisoners to Rome under the supervision of a Roman officer. The officer was Julius, a member of an elite cadre of trusted, experienced soldiers.

Julius boarded his prisoners onto a ship from Adramyttium, a port city at the northeast corner of the Aegean Sea, which extends north off the Mediterranean Sea. His respect for Paul's faith may have begun gradually when he discovered the dedication to their shared faith. One of Paul's Christian converts, Aristarchus, boarded with Paul and either paid his own fare or he voluntarily boarded as Paul's slave. After an easy 50-mile jaunt from Caesarea to Sidon, nothing went well for the rest of the voyage. After 400 miles of slow going, "because the winds were contrary," the ship docked at the coastal city of Myra (Acts 27:4, KJV).

There, Julius switched Paul and his other prisoners to another ship, a vessel full of grain that was supposedly going directly to Italy. While the first ship had been slow, everything on the second became worse. Because of turbulent weather, most shipping on the Mediterranean

Ocean ceased by November, and it was already mid-October. Ships in Paul's day would often have a single sail. This meant that a ship went in whatever direction the wind blew it. After Myra, the wind forced their ship 100 miles south past Crete, where the ship briefly put into another port. The ship's captain, its owner and Julius debated over staying docked there through the winter.

Paul was an experienced traveler on the Mediterranean. Ernst Haenchen lists 11 voyages of Paul that are recorded in the New Testament (Haenchen, 702–703). Another commentator estimates that those trips totaled more than 3,500 miles. Paul knew the dangers of winter sailing and urged staying put. His opinion was ignored.

After that, for the next 14 days, a hurricane-force wind blasted them west about 700 miles. The word Luke used in Acts 27:14 for the storm is related to our present-day word "typhoon" (Gk. tuphonikos, too-fo-nee-KOS). That is where most of today's text begins.

27:33 And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.

34 Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.

As daybreak approached, the storm's ferocity had not let up. Here, we see why Paul was such an effective witness for God's revelation in Jesus Christ. The sailors had just tried to desert the ship and leave its passengers to fend for themselves. Nobody had eaten for 14 days. When we speak of

fasting today, we mean going without food deliberately. Here “fasting” (Gk. asitos, AS-ee-tos), refers to a lack of appetite or available food. Perhaps the waves and rain had run down into the ship’s hold and soaked into its stores, spoiling most of its food. Perhaps conditions were so tempestuous that cooking became impossible in its galley. Ancient writers hardly mention seasickness, but Luke may have viewed that as a given.

When things reached their worst, God’s love for others was evident in Paul’s concern for those on board. The selfless action of this small- framed, accused-heretic gave his witness with a trustworthy integrity on his way to trial before Caesar and possible execution. He “besought” (Gk. parakaleo, pa-ra-ka-LEH-o), or urged, his fellow passengers to eat because it is essential for their survival. Luke’s word here described something Paul did repeatedly, not something he did once for show. In its noun form this was the same word John used in John 14:26 for the Holy Spirit, “the Comforter” (Gk. parakletos, pa-RA-kleh-tos).

This was not Paul’s first effort at persuading the crew, the prisoners, and other passengers to eat. Nor was it his first assurance of their survival (Acts 27:21–26). He supports his first appeal to eat by relaying the appearance of an angel from God. This foreshadows Paul’s appearance before Caesar and the survival of all on board but with the ship’s eventual crash upon an island. Likely, only Paul’s concern for the well-being of all the others on board saved him from being thrown overboard. The apostle began that first lecture about eating by saying, “I told you so” (27:21). Even a godly apostle is not above times of exasperation and despair. Note Acts 27:20, KJV, where Luke admits, “all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.”

35 And when he had thus spoken, he took some 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 of good cheer, and they also took some meat.

37 And they were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls.

For two weeks, other seafarers observed Paul confront their shared life-and-death struggle with the storm. The steadfast certainty of Paul’s faith comforts them. While the storm rocked the ship, Paul takes bread and holds it while thanking God before eating it. His example renews the courage of his onlooking shipmates who follow his example by eating. The word “meat” (Gk. trophe, tro-FAY), here and in verses 33 and 34 can mean “animal flesh.” However, it was the common Greek word for nourishment in general.

38 And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

When everyone’s hunger was satisfied, everyone thought more clearly, including the captain and the ship’s owner. The time had come to focus on saving their lives more than on saving the ship and its cargo. As Ecclesiastes 9:4 (NASB) says in part, “A live dog is better than a dead lion.” They lightened the ship to make it float higher in the water by throwing overboard the ship’s cargo of wheat, which was doubtlessly intended for sale in Rome. By doing so, they lessen chances that the ship would run aground too far out for survivors to make it to shore. They accepted Paul’s prophecy that God’s will was for them all to survive the ship’s destruction.

39 And when it was day they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.

40 And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.

41 And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.

The first compass on a ship was not known outside of China until over a century later, and the sextant was not invented until the 1700s. Consequently, in Paul's day unless the sky was in view, sailors had no way to determine where they were or in what direction they were headed. When the ship came close enough to land to see the shore through the storm, no one recognized where they were. They did, however, see a depression in the coastline. Our KJV text for Acts 27:39 says they saw a "creek" (Gk. kolpos, KOL-pos), but most modern versions, such as NLT, NIV, and NRSV, say they saw a "bay." Therefore, they decided to try and run the ship aground on its shore.

To that end, the crew cut loose the four anchors they had dropped to drag the sea's bottom and slow the ship. They had feared running aground or crashing onto boulders in the storm's blinding squall so far out that survivors couldn't make it to shore (27:29). Besides releasing the anchors, they severed the top water paddles that served as the ship's primitive rudder. They then raised their one sail. Now, only God and the force of wind control the ship's movement. Once again, events proved more difficult than they hoped. As the wind hurtles the ship toward shore, it passes over a spot where two channels, or "two seas," forced it into a sand bank (v. 41). The front of the ship was wedged firmly in it, but its rear continued to be slapped violently by the fury of the waves.

42 And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them swim out, and escape.

43 But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purposes, and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land.

44 And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.

As Paul had done, the soldiers helping Julius guard the prisoners foresee the coming destruction of the ship. The soldiers plan to kill them all, rather than risk that any might swim to shore and escape when the ship breaks up. The Roman penalty for allowing prisoners to escape was that their guards would receive whatever sentence the prisoners were due. It is probable that many of Paul's fellow prisoners were being sent to Rome for execution before bloodthirsty crowds in the Colosseum.

But Julius intervenes on Paul's behalf, and countermands the soldiers' plan. When KJV says in verse 43 that Julius is "willing" to save Paul, it sounds like a grudging decision to act by today's use of that word. Just the opposite is the case. The word "willing" (Gk. boulomai, BOO-lom-ah-ee) refers here to an action that Julius wanted and was determined to take. His desire to save Paul illustrates the respect he had for the apostle. Instead, he instructs that those who could swim to jump in immediately and swim to shore. He told those who could not swim to grab onto floating planks or other pieces of the ship and hold them while paddling to shore.

Thus, the reality of the angel's appearance to Paul and his prophecy that all 276 passengers would survive the ship's destruction were confirmed. Few Christians will ever share a spiritual experience as extraordinary as Paul did. But the power of Paul's witness lay not in his private, supernatural experiences. Instead, other passengers, like the centurion, observed that Paul faced deadly peril and treated others kindly during the dangerous encounter. This observation gave witness to the credibility

and authenticity of his faith. Likewise, Christians today can add power to their witness of trusting God by treating those who do not know Him with love, dignity, and kindness in every situation.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Called to Be an Apostle
(Romans 1:1-7)

TUESDAY

Encouraged by Each Other's Faith
(Romans 1:8-12)

WEDNESDAY

Eager to Proclaim the Gospel
(Romans 1:13-17)

THURSDAY

Paul's Journey to Rome Begins
(Acts 27:3-12)

FRIDAY

A Fierce Storm Dashes Hope
(Acts 27:13-20)

SATURDAY

Keep Up Your Courage
(Acts 27:21-32)

SUNDAY

Brought Safely to Land
(Acts 27:1-2, 33-44)