

## Anchored in the Storm

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Scripture Reading: Acts 27

Text: Acts 27

Paul could have gone free according to Agrippa. But Paul was still in chains. It was these chains that would be instrumental in bringing him to Rome. Paul had testified of Christ before the Jewish Sanhedrin and Jewish leaders. Now he was headed to testify before Caesar. But the chapter before us seems to indicate otherwise. Paul would encounter a furious storm, shipwreck, and even the possibility of losing his life. How could that lead to the furtherance of the gospel? Perhaps that's a question that you and I face in our current circumstances, both personally and corporately as a church. How do all these difficulties and challenges serve the furtherance of the gospel and the glory of God? Do they not hinder God's work in His world? Perhaps this statement can help us keep this chapter in perspective, and our own lives as well: "We are often *objective-oriented*, but God is *process-oriented*. We just want to get to Rome, but God is even more interested in *how* we get there."<sup>1</sup> So how did Paul get to Rome in the midst of a fierce storm that threatened his life and the cause of the gospel? Paul did so by being anchored in God; the eyes of his heart were turned Godward in confident expectation that God would accomplish His purposes. This storm

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1. R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1996), 338.

was used to not only test Paul's resolve, but to show where Paul was anchored. And that's what the storms of life do to us, don't they? The process that God is working out reveals where we are anchored in the voyage of life. And so the theme of this sermon is "Anchored in the Storm" under three headings: first, anchored in divine provision; second, anchored in divine confidence; and third, anchored in divine deliverance.

### **Anchored in Divine Provision**

So what helped Paul as he weathered the storm of his imprisonment and the literal storm on the sea? He was anchored in divine provision. This is evident as Paul sets out on his journey. The first such anchor is the courteous centurion. Luke drops details here and there in this chapter that are so helpful to understand how the Lord provided anchors for Paul to take hold of as he made the arduous journey to Rome. How is the centurion an anchor of God's provision? His name is Julius, as we read in verse 1, a centurion of Augustus's band. Notice how he cares for Paul. In verse 3 we read, "And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty." In other words, he treated Paul kindly and allowed him to visit friends on shore after they landed at Sidon. This centurion is not a mere accessory to the story. He was part of the divine provision for Paul's journey, not just in easing Paul's chains, but his kindness is mentioned as a detail of the man's character. It testifies to God's provision for Paul as His servant made this journey to Rome.

But there's more. There's not only a courteous centurion who helps Paul and treats him with kindness, but Paul also has a close companion Luke mentions. We can almost pass over him as he is embedded in the text, but note in verse 2, "One Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica being with us." Who was this man, Aristarchus? He appears in Acts 19:29 where he was seized by the Ephesian mob as Paul preached against the idolatry of Diana, goddess of the Ephesians. He accompanies Paul in Acts 20:4 on the return leg of his third missionary journey. In the book of

Philemon in verse 24, Paul describes him as his fellow-worker. In Colossians 4:10–11 Paul describes him as his fellow-prisoner from whom he had received much comfort. This companion was part of God's provision for Paul's comfort, along with Luke who speaks in the first-person plural and gives a firsthand account of the journey to Rome. These close companions are there for Paul's comfort and encouragement.

And then there's a caring church that meets Paul on the docks of Sidon. In verse 3 we read that Julius gives Paul liberty to get off the ship "to go to his friends to refresh himself." They had been alerted to the fact that Paul was coming. They met him and served to refresh him with their hospitality, their love, and their spiritual encouragement. Quite literally, these believers at Sidon cared for Paul's needs. That is what the phrase "to refresh himself" means. Paul is not alone in this journey, but in God's kindness he is cared for by a courteous centurion, close companions, and a caring church.

And finally, Paul travels with divine clarity as to what the outcome was going to be in the midst of this voyage on the sea. There was a conflict of sorts that arose when they had arrived at the place called "The Fair Havens" near the city of Lasea. Luke gives a clue as to the time of year that it was, the time of the fast. This was around the Jewish Day of Atonement and in this time of year there was poor sailing weather. Paul knew this and warned the owner of the ship as well as the centurion about what was coming in terms of danger and damage (v. 10). There is this common sense, a clarity of what was at stake, but Paul's clarity was overruled by the ship's owner, as well as the centurion. Paul chides them in verse 21, "Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss." Nevertheless, there is this common sense, we could say, or divine clarity based on what Paul knew to be true regarding the sailing season.

And so we have the anchor of divine provision which God gives to Paul and to which he clings during his stormy voyage

to Rome. What a beautiful anchor of divine provision that we so often pass over! Isn't it true that we become so focused on the circumstances, on the storm, or on the destination that we fail to grasp the divine provision that God gives to battered saints on the voyage of life? Isn't it also true that we fail to be these things to other battered saints because we are so focused on our own destination? This divine provision is both a comfort in the lives of believers and a challenge to fellow saints to be that instrument of kindness, care, and encouragement to one another. It is on this basis that Christ will judge His people: "For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me (Matt. 25:35–36).

### **Anchored in Divine Confidence**

But Paul was also anchored in divine confidence. As they set out from Crete, the south winds blew, and it seemed that all was fair weather for sailing. But in verse 14 we read that a tempestuous wind arose called Euroclydon, a hurricane-force wind from the northeast. What follows in verses 15–19 details the tempest that tossed the ship back and forth. For days they could not see sun or stars. They were lost because the sun and stars were used for navigation. Indeed, in verse 20 we read these mournful words, "And no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away." In the midst of this hopelessness, darkness, storm, what anchor could there be? Paul stands up and chides the ship owner and the centurion for not listening to him. He reassures them that there will be no loss of life, only of the ship (vv. 21–22). He can say this on the basis of the anchor of divine confidence.

First, there is the confidence of *God's presence*. In verse 23 he shares with them the presence of God, the presence of Christ is with him, "For there stood by me this night the angel of God." This is none other than Christ who appeared to him

to reassure him and give him confidence in this storm. We say this is Christ because Paul says that he belongs to Him. This is no mere angel. Although all human hope was lost, the divine presence gives confidence. Notice how Paul describes His presence, “He stood by me.” He was close. He was intimately involved in what was happening. He is no detached God. He is the Master of storms, who stands with His own people in their storms. The divine presence gives confidence and comfort and anchors the believer in the midst of the fiercest storm. That is where we can stand today.

Second, there is the confidence of being *God's possession*. In verse 23, “For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve.” Paul is confident of his identity—he knows “Whose I am and whom I serve”—in the midst of the storm. Are you? His identity is not in his past, his future, or in his present credentials, accomplishments, or job. It is simply “whose I am and whom I serve.” He is Christ's and he serves Christ. This loosens him from fear in the midst of the storm. He is eternally secure in Christ. Nothing will ever change that. What is your only comfort in life and death, in the storms of life? I belong to Jesus and I serve Him. I am His in this storm. He will either keep me safe in the storm or will use the storm to bring me to glory. That is the believer's confidence. I serve Jesus. This storm will either prove that He has more serving for me to do, or my life of service will be changed into eternal praise. This gives confidence, doesn't it? When storms come, what anchors you? Do you have to figure out who you are first, or when the storm comes is this your confidence and comfort—that you belong to Christ and Him alone?

Third, there is the confidence of *God's revelation*. Christ was not silent when He appeared to Paul at night. He spoke to Paul. In verse 24 we read, “Saying, fear not, Paul.” What revelation it is in the moment of greatest need when we hear the voice of Christ saying, “Fear not.” They are words of peace and reassurance. Words that give confidence in the midst of any storm. Fear not. How

many times has the Lord spoken these words to His saints? How we need to hear them again! Fear not. This gives confidence like nothing else. As the winds of the storm increase in volume and the creaking timbers of the ship of life threaten to splinter into a million jagged pieces, yet the voice of the Master speaks, "Fear not!" Is His Word of calm and peace your confidence, believer, in the storms that you face? In the midst of fear, God's revelation is the anchor: "Fear not!"

Fourth, there is the confidence of *God's purpose*. In the midst of the storm, when all hope is lost, when the sun and stars cannot be located to navigate, Paul is confident in God's purpose for his life. In verse 24b we read Christ's words to Paul: "Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar." There is divine necessity and purpose in this statement that helps Paul see through the storm with confidence. He needs to appear before Caesar. That doesn't take away the storm, but it does give renewed perspective in the storm. This is not just the statement, "You will get through this storm because God has a wonderful plan for your life." No, this storm is part of God's purpose to bring Paul before Caesar. Paul was in chains and he would be unjustly imprisoned again in Rome. There is no rose-petal-strewn path for Paul's life. Life would continue to be difficult but he had this unshakeable confidence that God's purpose would be fulfilled in his life. Does that give you perspective in the storms that you face? The fact that God is working out His purpose in your life may not remove the storm, but it gives perspective and confidence. Even this trial is in my Father's hand to refine me, to fulfill His purpose for my life. It stills us to see that God is at work in spite of the difficulty. He is concerned about *how* we get there, remember?

Fifth, there is the confidence of *God's preservation*. In the midst of that storm, Paul heard these words from the end of verse 24: "And lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." They would be preserved in the storm. They had to go through the storm, but they would be preserved. Isn't that a general principle that holds true for all of life for a believer? We still have to

go through the storms of life, but from the eternal perspective you will be kept. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

Sixth, there is the confidence of *God's promise*. Listen to how Paul responds in verse 25: "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." Paul takes hold of God's promise: "I believe God." And he takes God at His Word: "even as it was told me." That is what faith looks like in the midst of the storm: It leans into God's presence standing with us; it is anchored in being God's possession; it is focused on God's revelation. Faith that is confident in God's purpose is resting in God's preservation. Faith in the storm takes hold of God's promise. Beloved, are you taking hold of God's promise in the midst of the storms of life? Are you anchored in this divine confidence? What do you believe? This is the only way to get through life's storms that you are facing.

### **Anchored in Divine Deliverance**

As Paul is carried through the storm, he is not only anchored in divine confidence; he is also anchored in divine deliverance. This deliverance is seen in three parts. As the ship bobbed on the waves and faced the devastating winds, the shipmen were about to abandon the ship as their fate of death upon the rocks seemed sealed. In verse 30 they attempt to escape via a lifeboat, but then Paul says in verse 31, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." If these men escape, God's promise of preservation would be null and void. Paul took God at His Word and he continued to do so. The lifeboat is severed from the ship and the shipmen stay in the boat to guarantee deliverance. How often don't we want to devise our own deliverance and jump ship in the middle of the storm? In storms, we should certainly use means, but not means that fly in the face of God's promises for deliverance. We cannot live out of two sides of our hearts: trusting in God's promise for deliverance on the one hand and then devising our own way of deliverance on the other. We need to stay in the boat in order to be delivered.

Then, too, there are the practical measures that Paul takes in anticipation of deliverance in God's way and in God's time. Notice what he says in verses 33–34: "This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. 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." The final number of people in the boat was 276 souls. That exact number would be saved. Not one lost, not even a hair. There was no despair on Paul's part, but the divine confidence breathed fresh life into the mundane tasks of eating and drinking to strengthen the body for what lay ahead. And notice how Paul takes hold of the promise of deliverance again. He encourages his companions to eat for their health. Then he encourages them with the promise, "For there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you." There is no room for paralyzing fear, but a preparation and a continuation of life in anticipation of deliverance. How are we doing in this area? Do you put your life on pause because of paralyzing fear, or do you take measures to continue living in anticipation of deliverance, whether now or at the second coming of Christ? We need some of the audacity of faith that Luther showed when he said, "Even if Christ comes tomorrow, I will plant an apple tree today." Storms should not paralyze us, but call us to continue living so that others can be encouraged with the promise of deliverance, even if we live with the tension of not knowing when that deliverance might be.

Finally, the ship is run aground and broken up as the waves shattered the boat. The soldiers want to kill the prisoners so they don't escape, but the centurion intervenes, showing compassion to Paul again in wanting to keep him alive. And deliverance comes for all of them according to the promise. Some swam, and some floated on boards or broken pieces of the ship, but the bottom line is in verse 44: "And so it came to pass that they escaped all safe to land." Paul and his traveling companions were anchored in divine deliverance. They escaped all safe. What an encouragement as we navigate the storms of life. God is there. God is moving all



things for His glory even when we can't see it. That has been the theme lately, hasn't it? God brings storms to test believers and His church. He will bring us to the final destination, but He is more concerned about the process, and in the midst of that process He provides invaluable anchors to take hold of: the anchor of divine provision; the anchor of divine confidence, and the anchor of divine deliverance. Take hold of these anchors and be safe! Amen.

