

A Terrible Storm Gave Paul New Opportunities

Lesson 03 of the Series: "Storm Stories"

1. On his way to Rome the apostle Paul was caught in a terrible storm.

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... 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. "Men," he said, "I believe there is trouble ahead if we go on—shipwreck, loss of cargo, and danger to our lives as well." But the officer in charge of the prisoners listened more to the ship's captain and the owner than to Paul. And ...most of the crew wanted to go on to Phoenix, farther up the coast of Crete, and spend the winter there... 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. But the weather changed abruptly, and a wind of typhoon strength (called a "northeaster") caught the ship and blew it out to sea. They couldn't turn the ship into the wind, so they gave up and let it run before the gale... Then the sailors bound ropes around the hull of the ship to strengthen it... they lowered the sea anchor to slow the ship and were driven before the wind. The next day, as gale-force winds continued to batter the ship, the crew began throwing the cargo overboard. The following day they even took some of the ship's gear and threw it overboard. The terrible storm raged for many days, blotting out the sun and the stars, until at last all hope was gone.

Acts 27:1, 9-20 (NLT)

Life Application: Followers of Christ will go through storms.

"Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."

John 16:33 (NLT)

2. The storm gave Paul an incredible opportunity to share his faith and encourage others on the ship.

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. But take courage! None of you will lose your lives, even though the ship will go down. 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.' So take courage! For I believe God. It will be just as he said. But we will be shipwrecked on an island." ...Paul urged everyone to eat. "You have been so worried that you haven't touched food for two weeks," he said. "Please eat something now for your own good. For not a hair of your heads will perish." Then he took some bread, gave thanks to God before them all, and broke off a piece and ate it. Then everyone was encouraged and began to eat— all 276 of us who were on board.

Acts 27:21-26, 33-37 (NLT)

Life Application: Storms can give us incredible opportunities to demonstrate our faith.

"Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people." Philipians 2:15 (NLT)

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

Life Application: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging... The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress." Psalm 46:1-3,7 (NIV)

"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... 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. The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners to make sure they didn't swim ashore and escape. 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. The others held onto planks or debris from the broken ship. So everyone escaped safely to shore." Acts 27:39-44 (NLT)

Note: Unbelievers notice authentic faith. "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." 1 Peter 2:12 (NIV)

3. The storm gave Paul new ministry opportunities in places he never intended to go.

“Once we were safe on shore, we learned that we were on the island of Malta. The people of the island were very kind to us. It was cold and rainy, so they built a fire on the shore to welcome us. As Paul gathered an armful of sticks and was laying them on the fire, a poisonous snake, driven out by the heat, bit him on the hand. The people of the island saw it hanging from his hand and said to each other, ‘A murderer, no doubt! Though he escaped the sea, justice will not permit him to live.’ But Paul shook off the snake into the fire and was unharmed. The people waited for him to swell up or suddenly drop dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw that he wasn’t harmed, they changed their minds and decided he was a god. Near the shore where we landed was an estate belonging to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us and treated us kindly for three days. As it happened, Publius’s father was ill with fever and dysentery. Paul went in and prayed for him, and laying his hands on him, he healed him. Then all the other sick people on the island came and were healed. As a result we were showered with honors, and when the time came to sail, people supplied us with everything we would need for the trip.” Acts 28:1-10 (NLT)

Life Application: God can use storms in our lives for good.

“And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.” Romans 8:28 (NLT)

Life Application: In order to be available for God to use us anywhere we must surrender.

“My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20 (NLT)

“For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.” Philippians 1:21 (NLT)

“As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified, and the world’s interest in me has also died.”

Galatians 6:14 (NLT)

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Discussion Questions

1. Read Acts 27. Looking back at your notes from this week's lesson on this passage was there anything that particularly caught your attention, challenged or confused you? How would you have responded if you had been on the ship with Paul? Why were Luke and Aristarchus willing to travel with Paul? Would you have been willing to go?
2. Have you ever been in a situation where you were ready to give up hope? What happened? How did you make it through? Read Psalm 46:1-3.
3. Read Romans 8:28. Have you ever experienced a storm or difficult trial in your life that brought about a positive change or opened new opportunities for you? If so, what happened? How did you change/grow from the experience?
4. What do the following verses teach us about Paul's worldview?
 - Galatians 2:20
 - Philippians 1:21
 - Galatians 6:14

Why was Paul so courageous? Why was he so flexible and available? What keeps us from being available for God to use us anywhere at any time?

5. What do the following verses teach us about authentically living out our faith?
 - Acts 4:13
 - Philippians 2:15
 - 1 Peter 2:12
 - 1 Peter 3:15-16
6. Read Acts 28:1-10. At Centerpoint we often say that in order to reach people for Christ we need to:
 - Become Aware
 - Commit to Prayer
 - Show you Care
 - Be ready to Share

How do you see Paul living out these steps on the ship? ...on Malta? Do you live out these steps where God has placed you? Why? Why not?

7. Discuss the following quotation:

"Prayer is *the* battle, and it makes no difference where you are. However God may engineer your circumstances, your duty is to pray. Never allow yourself this thought, "I am of no use where I am," because you certainly cannot be used where you have not yet been placed. Wherever God has placed you and whatever your circumstances, you should pray, continually offering up prayers to Him. And He promises, "Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do..." (John 14:13). Yet we refuse to pray unless it thrills or excites us, which is the most intense form of spiritual selfishness. We must learn to work according to God's direction, and He says to *pray*. "Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:38). Oswald Chambers in My Utmost for His Highest (October 17 reading)