



## Shipwreck!

*Series: Acts -- Worldwide Witness to the Worth of Jesus Christ*

Acts 27

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Pastor Nick Shaffer

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The text that we are looking at this morning is a little different from what we have seen so far in Acts. There are no theological controversies, no pursuit of Paul's life by those opposed to the gospel, no trials, no accusations and defenses. This story offers us a picture of Paul and the practical impact of his faith in Christ in the midst of a massive storm at sea and the resulting shipwreck. He's just a passenger on this voyage, just another prisoner on his way to appear before Caesar, and yet because of his faith, because of his courage, strength, and poise, Paul emerges as the leader, as the man to be followed and trusted -- in the midst of peril and trouble, in the midst of heaving seas and the threat of imminent death. If you want a practical example of the worth of faith in Christ, of the combination of faith and action, of the impact that real and tangible faith in Christ can have – here it is. Luke's account begins simply enough. Look at it.

“And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius. And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica.” (Acts 27:1–2, ESV) After Paul's defense before Agrippa, Bernice, Festus and all of the important people of Caesarea that we looked at last week, it was decided that no more time should be lost and that Paul should be shipped as soon as possible to Rome to stand before Nero. Paul was remanded to the custody of a centurion from the Augustan Cohort, the Roman occupation force there in Caesarea, named Julius. Since Romans did not have a naval presence in Judea, they had the practice of using commercial ships of other conquered nations for official business and they did so here, placing Paul in a ship out of Adramyttium. The ship was really what is called a “packet-ship,” a smaller vessel that would hug the coast of Asia Minor, jumping from port to port without venturing into the deeper waters of the Mediterranean Ocean. If you have a study bible with the map of this voyage, it might be helpful to take a look at it in order to familiarize yourself with the route. If not, all you need to know is that the first part of the voyage would be a series

of port hops heading north along the western coast of Asia Minor and then west along the southern coast of Turkey. Both Luke, and one of the men that had travelled with Paul to Jerusalem, Aristarchus, went along for the ride.

“The next day we put in at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for.” (Acts 27:3, ESV) After a short jaunt up the coastline, they put in at Sidon, maybe 70 to 80 miles or so. While there, Paul was granted liberty, probably accompanied by a Roman soldier, in order to visit the church there and to receive care – probably a good meal and some provisions not provided by the Romans, that he would need for the trip. Then it was back aboard ship to continue the journey. So far, so good.

“And putting out to sea from there we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. And when we had sailed across the open sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia.” (Acts 27:4–5, ESV) From Sidon, they sailed north, along the eastern edge of Cyprus – under the lee – that means on the side of the island away from the wind, until they came to the coast of Turkey and then headed west, in open water, but still skirting the coastline of Turkey, always keeping the coastline in view. Finally they landed at Myra, which was a moderately sized port city in Lycia and it was time to get a connecting ship to Italy.

“There the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy and put us on board. We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, and as the wind did not allow us to go farther, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone. Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.” (Acts 27:6–8, ESV) In Myra, the centurion found a larger vessel, a freight ship registered out of Alexandria in Egypt, which was bound for Rome, in order to complete the voyage. This ship would have been one of the largest of the day, used to transport grain to feed the Roman Empire in Italy. It is here that the voyage, that so far had been typical and uneventful, suddenly starts to take a turn for the worse. The winds, which during this time of the year blew predominantly from the west, requiring that a ship heading into the wind use a method called “tacking” – kind a zig-zag pattern into the wind – were blowing particularly fiercely making travel even slower than usual. Rather than sail due west, they had to duck behind the island of Crete to break up the wind. They landed at a port called Fair Havens, on the southern side of Crete.

“Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, saying, “Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.”” (Acts 27:9–10, ESV) Travel on the Mediterranean Ocean can be dangerous any time of the year, but particularly from late October or November through the winter. Most intelligent mariners would simply harbor their ships for the winter and begin travelling again in Spring. By this time, it was getting extremely late in the sailing season. The Fast, that is, the Day of Atonement, had already passed – that was would have been in late October that year – and so Paul spoke up and let the captain and Julius, the centurion, know that it would be a good idea to put in for the winter right where they were. Now listen, Paul was no neophyte, no novice, when it came to sea-travel. Remember what he wrote to the Corinthians -- “Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.” (2 Corinthians 11:24–27, ESV) Paul had been shipwrecked before, even adrift at sea, and he had no desire to repeat the experience and so he gives the centurion a little free advice.

“But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.” (Acts 27:11–12, ESV) Paul was overruled. Instead of staying at Fair Havens, the plan was to make for Phoenix, which was a better port in all honesty, more protected from the elements. But the plan soon went awry.

“Now when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to the shore. But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land. And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along.” (Acts 27:13–15, ESV) At first things went well. They had a nice moderate breeze out of the south and it looked like the plan would succeed. But not too long into the journey, it really opened up. A tempestuous wind – a typhonikos – from which we get the word, typhoon, opened up on them. The local mariners called it a northeaster – massive winds out the northeast -- the Eruaquilo. From their perspective, Euroclydon, the terror of mariners, had been watching and waiting from the top of

Mt. Ida – the fabled home of the god Zeus, to drive them to destruction. They were at the mercy of a hurricane force wind, a massive storm on the open seas, driven away from the safety of land and into the open water.

I don't know if you have ever been in a storm at sea. I have and it is one of the most terrifying things imaginable. Imagine being in the middle of the ocean, no land in sight, no stars or moon to be seen, pitch black all around you, save for the flashes of lightning that reveal crashing waves and boiling water everywhere you can see but only for an instant, then it's back to black, the deck beneath your feet giving way as you are pitched one way and then another. There is nothing that can make you feel more insignificant, more helpless, more powerless, more fearful for your life than a raging storm at sea. It was terrifying to me and I was on a Navy ship made of steel, not an ancient freighter made of wood. In the midst of the storm, the mariners did all they could.

“Running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the ship's boat. After hoisting it up, they used supports to undergird the ship. Then, fearing that they would run aground on the Syrtis, they lowered the gear, and thus they were driven along. Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. And on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands.” (Acts 27:16–19, ESV) Getting at least a little protection for a very short time in the lee of Cauda, they hoisted the ship's boat aboard -- a life raft sized boat, pretty small, that they would trail along in the ocean in case the ship's crew needed to abandon ship – everyone else would be left to die.

They got that on board and then they used supports to undergird the ship. Let me explain what that means. They would take ropes or cables and passing them under the ship, they would cinch up the boat around the top and bottom as best they could. They would also pass ropes from fore to aft and tie them down in an attempt to keep the boat from falling apart. Trying not to run aground, they also threw out anchors to slow the boat down. The next day and the day after they began jettisoning the cargo and the ship's tackle – extra rigging and sails, what ever wasn't bolted down – in order to lessen the ship's draft, how deeply it rode in the ocean. The idea was to make the ship lighter, so it would ride on the tops of the waves and not be beaten by them and to lessen the amount of water that they took on the ship. They did everything they could, but Luke tells us:

“When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.” (Acts 27:20, ESV) The storm was seemingly endless. They had no idea where they were since they could not use the stars or the sun to get a geographical fix. The storm continued in its severity with no end in sight – and they all gave up heart, all hope was gone, all of them had abandoned hope of being delivered – except Paul. At first, just a passenger, a prisoner, now Paul became the leader and takes charge of the situation.

“Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.” (Acts 27:21–22, ESV) What does that mean, that they had been without food for a long time? The point that Luke is making is that they had given up. Sure it’s hard to eat in a storm at sea, but the point is that they were despairing to the point of not eating – they had completely given up and that is when Paul springs into action.

When Paul says, “Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete”... it is not a case of Paul saying “I told you so.” Instead, what Paul is doing is asserting his authority, asserting his credibility. They should have listened to him earlier and now they needed to hear him. If Paul had been right in his own wisdom earlier, he had even more important words to speak now, not from his own perception or judgment, but from the God to whom he belonged and whom he served. He commands them to take heart; the ship will be lost but they will all live if they listen to him now.

What is it that makes Paul stand out above the others in this calamitous situation? How can Paul remain filled with courage when all around him are faint of heart? How does Paul, in the midst of men who have given up all hope and resigned themselves to a hopeless fate, keep his mind and remain confident in the midst of such fearful circumstances? It is because he is anchored to God by faith in Christ. He is anchored to the immovable. He is anchored to the rock. Listen to what he says:

“For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God

has granted you all those who sail with you.’ So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on some island.”” (Acts 27:23–26, ESV) While everyone else was storm-tossed, not only in body but in soul, Paul was anchored in the Lord. Let me show you four ways that we see this in what he says.

First, Paul was anchored in God’s presence with him. Paul was anchored because he knew that God was with him. An angel had appeared to him and reminded him of the enduring and unending truth – that God was with him even in the midst of this storm. And the presence of God, His continuing care, and His omniscient faithfulness made a real difference in the heart of Paul. God’s presence was no merely theological truth, but practical and tangible fact, that God was with Him and would be with him no matter what. The promise God made to His covenant people in the OT is the same promise he makes to us now. “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you.” (Isaiah 43:2–3, ESV) Notice that this promise is not that you will not pass through waters or through rivers, or through fire – you may – but the promise is that God will be with you through it all. That is what gave Paul a sure hope and a rock upon which to fasten his soul. With David, Paul could pray: “Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer; from the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I...” (Psalm 61:1–2, ESV) He could pray that prayer and know it would be answered because God was with him. Paul, who knew what it was to face daunting circumstances, who knew what it was to persevere in great trials, who knew what it was to have his life at stake, also knew the power and strength of God’s presence with him and to be comforted in the reality that God in Christ would never leave him or forsake him.

AW Pink writes: There are seasons in the lives of all when it is not easy, no not even for Christians, to believe that God is faithful. Our faith is sorely tried, our eyes bedimmed with tears, and we can no longer trace the outworkings of His love. Our ears are distracted with the noises of the world, harassed by the atheistic whisperings of Satan, and we can no longer hear the sweet accents of His still small voice. Cherished plans have been thwarted, friends on whom we relied have failed us, a professed brother or sister in Christ has betrayed us. We are staggered. We sought to be faithful to God, and now a dark cloud hides Him from us. We find it difficult, yea, impossible, for carnal reason to harmonize His frowning providence with His gracious promises. And yet here is what Paul knew was true -- God is true. His Word is sure. His faithfulness in every way is true and this precious truth expressed almost everywhere in the

Scriptures. Know for sure that His faithfulness is an essential part of the Divine character. God does not know how to be unfaithful to His people. In every crisis and every circumstance of life, over and over He has proved His faithfulness – you have seen and so have I. Paul did too and it gave strength to His soul. Paul was anchored to God’s faithful presence with him.

Second, Paul was anchored in God’s ownership of him. Notice what Paul called God here – not “my God” but the “God to whom I belong.” That’s not just semantics. It is not that Paul had God, but that God had him -- as His own precious possession. Like a bride belongs to her groom, Paul belonged to Christ. Like sheep belong to the shepherd, Paul belonged to Christ. “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.” (John 10:14–15, ESV) “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” (John 10:27–28, ESV) Like a child belongs to His father, Paul belonged to God.

Paul knew he belonged to God because he had been bought with a price, like the Apostle Peter said: “ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.” (1 Peter 1:18–19, ESV) And none of us, purchased by the blood of Christ, is a throwaway possession of God. As Zechariah said, we are the “apple of His eye.” Zephaniah tells us God’s heart toward His people: “The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.” (Zephaniah 3:17, ESV) In Christ, we are precious in the Father’s eye; Paul knew that.

Third, Paul was anchored in God’s purpose for him. Paul knew himself to be the bondservant of the Lord, the slave of Christ. Paul knew that God had a purpose for him, to stand before Caesar and to give testimony to Christ, to preach the gospel of the glory of God in the face of Jesus, His Son. Nothing could change that purpose – not this storm, nothing. And

Fourth, Paul was anchored in his faith in God’s promises to him. The reason that Paul was filled with courage, could keep his head when all around him men were despairing of life, is because he trusted God’s promises. He had a faith that was rooted not in himself and in his ability to

weather this storm, but in the promises of God, in God Himself. He was anchored to Christ by faith and that made all the difference in the world. God promised him that he must go to Rome to preach the gospel to Nero and he would.

This is the faith that anchored Paul's soul to Christ and which caused him to stand above all the others in this ship and it from this rock to which he was anchored that caused Paul to be able to tell them these words from the angel: God has granted you all those who sail with you. What does that tell us? Paul had been praying, not only for his deliverance in the storm, but also for the deliverance of all who were with him and God had granted his prayer. They would all live for Paul's sake. And Paul tells them: So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on some island. We are going to wreck, but we are all going to live.

Notice the effect that Paul has on them: "When the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms. A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms. And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go." (Acts 27:27–32, ESV) Paul is in charge here. Every mariner knows that the most dangerous time on a ship is when you are about to run aground. Clearly they were reaching land and since they were, they began to drop more anchors from the stern into the water. Some of the sailors thought it would be a good time to abandon ship and so they dropped the ship's boat into the water, pretending that they were going to lay out more anchors from the fore of the ship. Really they were going to make a run for it, hoping to make to the beach before they ran aground. But they couldn't get away with it. Paul knew what they were up to and under his direction, the soldiers cut the boat adrift, keeping the sailors on board. Paul was now the unquestioned leader.

"As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing. Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you." And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving



thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.) And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.” (Acts 27:33–38, ESV) Knowing the rigors of what lie ahead, Paul then took to caring for the needs of all on board, encouraging them to take some food so they would have the strength to endure. Blessing God and giving thanks to him, even in the midst of this storm, he gave them food, encouraged them to eat and encouraged their souls with his strength and hope. After they had eaten, they threw the rest of the provisions overboard.

“Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned if possible to run the ship ashore. So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that tied the rudders. Then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach. But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf. The soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape. But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.” (Acts 27:39–44, ESV) Finally the horrific voyage comes to an end, but not in the way that they were probably hoping. As they finally caught a glimpse of land, a bay with a beach that they did not recognize, they made plans to run the ship ashore. They cast off the anchors, set the rudder free and raised the foresail hoping to crash on the beach. Running aground on a reef, the ship began to break apart and the soldiers began to panic, believing that they must at least kill all the prisoners to prevent their escape. But the centurion, Juliius, stood in the gap for Paul and ordered the soldiers to stand down and ordered those who could swim to do it while those who couldn’t were to find something that was floating in the surf and ride it in. All of them, just as Paul had predicted, safely made it ashore.

Now, there are a lot of things that we can take from this text, but there is one thing that stands out to me, and I think probably for you too. I read this text and I say – I want a faith like Paul’s. I want a faith that anchors me to Christ in such a way that nothing can move me. I want that and I’m sure that you do to, but the truth about that desire is this – that kind of faith does not come by sailing on fair seas. It is forged in the crucible of hardship and trial. It is fashioned and refined, not in the midst of ease, but in the midst of the battle. Peter wrote: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also

rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” (1 Peter 4:12–19, ESV) Trials come to us in a variety of ways – in all sorts of ways.

Peter is talking specifically of the trials, the persecutions, that come as a result of faithfully following Christ, the trials that come as a result of choosing the path of obedience to Jesus Christ, the trials that come as a result of earnestly pursuing God’s call upon our lives, the trials that come as a result of faithful adherence to the Word of God, the persecution that comes with living a bold and loving life in the name of Christ, the persecution that comes from unwavering commitment to Christ, from unwavering commitment to the gospel, from living courageously and worthy of your calling in Christ Jesus. God makes us to pass through the testing fire of trial not because He hates us or purposes evil toward us, but because we are His beloved, because He deeply loves us and wills our purity and our joy. He wills our purity and our joy. God uses trial for His name’s sake in us to purify us, to burn away unbelief and to strengthen and harden our faith. He alone knows the depth of our sin, the extent of our self-trust, the shallowness of our joy. So the Lord graciously sends trials to test our faith. He uses trials to burn away love for this world and its ways and to stoke in our souls an increasing love for God, reliance upon Him, and a longing to see Him face to face. He uses trial to burn away the desire to please men and to instill an ever-increasing desire to please God. As we suffer on behalf of the gospel, as we join with our Savior in suffering unjustly at the hands of sinners, it gives us a window on the far greater suffering that He endured to redeem us. That draws our hearts into a deeper love for Him and makes us willing to suffer whatever we must for His sake. And our endurance of suffering for Christ’s sake becomes a pledge to us of the reality of our belonging to Him, the reality of our union with Him. That reality causes our hearts to rejoice assuring us that we belong to Him and do truly love Him.

Paul had a real, practical, battle-hardened faith because he was anchored in God’s presence with him. Paul was anchored because he knew that God was with him. Paul’s faith was anchored in God’s ownership of him. Paul was anchored in God’s purpose for him. Paul was anchored in his faith in God’s promises to him. I want that kind of battle-hardened faith.

If we want to stand out in a time of trial from those who do not know the Lord, if we hope to make a difference in their lives with the gospel, we've got to have a daily walk of seeking God before the trial hits. If we daily seek God and His wisdom during normal times, when a storm hits, we will be different than those in the world, because we know and trust our God. There is a reason why we live in this day, in this city, in this country. There seems to be a palpable darkness settling over this country. And more than ever we must shine as a light in day when it seems like darkness is having the upper hand.

In times of trial and hardship, it is then that some people are especially open to spiritual things. When life is out of control, and nothing seems to be working, people are open to hear about a God who is in control. We should not hesitate to be bold to tell them about the true and living God and the eternal life that He offers them through His Son, Jesus Christ and to give them an example of what faith in Christ does in a person's soul.

Spurgeon says it right when he says: God is wonderful in His design and excellent in His working. Believer, God overrules all things for your good. The needs-be for all that you have suffered, has been most accurately determined by God. Your course is all mapped out by your Lord. Nothing will take Him by surprise. There will be no novelties to Him. There will be no occurrences which He did not foresee, and for which, therefore, He has not provided. He has arranged all, and you have but to patiently wait, and you shall sing a song of deliverance. Your life has been arranged on the best possible principles, so that if you had been gifted with unerring wisdom, you would have arranged a life for yourself exactly similar to the one through which you have passed. Let us trust God where we cannot trace Him...There is no more blessed way of living, than the life of faith based upon a covenant-keeping God – to know that we have no care, for He cares for us; that we need have no fear, except to fear Him; that we need have no troubles, because we have cast our burdens upon the Lord, and are conscience that He will sustain us.

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