

Paul's Journey to Rome, Part 2

Scripture: Acts 27:27–44

Code: 1800

INTRODUCTION

Acts 27 describes one of the shipwrecks that the apostle Paul experienced. Also it illustrates leadership in crisis. It describes a man who came through a tremendously stressful situation with all the abilities any great leader must possess.

REVIEW

I. THE PASSAGE

A. The Start (vv. 1-8)

B. The Stay (vv. 9-12)

C. The Storm (vv. 13-26)

As the ship continued to be driven by the storm, the struggle to stay afloat had caused the crew and prisoners to neglect eating for two weeks. They didn't know where they were or the direction they were going. In the midst of the storm, they were without hope of ever being saved. Nevertheless, with God's credibility at stake, the apostle Paul assured the men on the journey that they would be saved (v. 24).

LESSON

D. The Shipwreck (vv. 27-41)

1. The calculations of the crew (vv. 27-28)

a) Reconstructing the distance (v. 27) "When the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the sailors deemed that they drew near to some country." Fourteen days had passed since they left Fair Havens in Crete and now were being driven about Adria, the center of the Mediterranean Sea. That was the only knowledge they had about their whereabouts. "Driven up and down" gives the idea that they had no idea what direction they were going. At midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land perhaps because they could hear the sound of the surf pounding on the shore. The distance from Clauda, their last known destination, to Malta, where they ended up, is about 470 miles. F.F. Bruce tells us that Mediterranean navigators have indicated that such a ship in a wind storm would have drifted approximately thirty-six miles every twenty-four hours (Commentary on the Book of Acts [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], p. 514). It would therefore have taken them about thirteen days to be driven from Clauda to Malta. And if you add one day of travel from Fair Havens to Clauda, you come up with exactly fourteen days of travel (v. 27). Navigational information corroborates the biblical text. Since the ship was already fourteen days on the open sea, it was probably only a few miles from the entrance of the harbor at Malta. Today that harbor has been renamed St. Paul's Harbor. b) Sounding the depths (v. 28) "[They] sounded, and found it twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little farther, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms." To verify that they were approaching land, they dropped a line weight with lead into the sea to determine the depth. They found they were at twenty 20 fathoms (120 feet). A little later they verified that the water was getting shallower.

2. The fear of the crew (vv. 29-30)

a) Their plan (v. 29) "Fearing lest we should fall upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day." Since they were in the black of night and unable to see, they were in danger

of hitting the coastline. There was real cause for panic, so they dropped four anchors from the stern of the ship. Since they anchored the stern, the driving force of the storm kept the bow pointed toward the shore. They eagerly awaited daybreak so they could see how close the shore was, cut the four anchors, and be driven onto shore.b) Their panic (v. 30)"As the sailors were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under pretense as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship."The crew was so panicked they were going to abandon the ship in complete darkness, in the middle of a storm, and then try to make it to shore in a dinghy. They had no idea where the shore was and didn't even know what was on the shore itself. Perhaps they thought it would be better to hit the rocks in a dinghy than in a lumbering ship. They tried to make it appear as though they were dropping anchors over the bow, but were actually dropping the dinghy into the water.

3. The foiling of the plot (vv. 31-32)

a) The wisdom of Paul (v. 31)"Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved."However their irrational plot did not work because Paul was alert and caught them. God wanted everyone on that ship saved. Going through the proper chain of command, he notified the centurion. By this time, the centurion was willing to believe anything Paul said because everything else he said had come to pass. Also it would have been disastrous for the whole crew to abandon ship because there would be no skilled seamen left when daybreak came to make it safely to shore.b) The decision of the centurion (v. 32)"The soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off."The centurion heeded Paul's words but then went one step further: he commanded the soldiers to cut off the ropes holding the dinghy and let it fall in the water. They could have used it to get to shore later on, but would now have to swim to shore. The centurion must have felt cutting the dinghy was the only way to stop the crew.

4. The encouragement from Paul (vv. 33-35)

a) Strength (v. 33)"Paul besought them all to take food, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing."In a sense Paul was now in total command of the ship. Everyone was looking to him for the next instructions. He urged them all to eat--since they had not eaten in over fourteen days. They would need energy for the hard work that lay ahead. If they ever expected to get to land, they were going to have to regain their strength.b) Safety (v. 34)"I beseech you to take some food; for this is for your health; for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you."The Greek word translated "health" (s[ma]oterias) means "deliverance," "preservation," or "safety." In Scripture it refer to both physical deliverance and spiritual salvation, but here it simply refers to their physical well being or safety."There shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you" is an old Jewish proverb that refers to safety and security (1 Sam. 14:45; 2 Sam. 14:11; 1 Kings 1:52; Luke 21:18).c) Service (v. 35)"When he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken it, he began to eat."Here are two great keys to serving the Lord--prayer and a good breakfast! It's a balanced meal of spiritual guidance and physical nourishment. Since Paul assured that everyone would survive the shipwreck, there was no excuse not to have a good breakfast. Here we see the balance between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man: it was God's responsibility to save the people and Paul's responsibility to have everyone eat and be strengthened. By eating first, Paul set the example for the others to trust God and then eat.

5. The good cheer of the passengers and crew (vv. 36-37)

"Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some food. And we were in all in the ship two hundred and seventy- six souls."

Everyone was so captivated by Paul's courage that they too began to eat and have hope.

6. The lightening of the ship (v. 38)

"When they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea."

They had already jettisoned a great deal of cargo (vv. 10, 18- 19), but kept some for ballast to keep

the ship weighted down. By this time any cargo would have been unnecessary because they now planned to beach the ship and needed it as light as possible. Most of the cargo had probably been soaked with salt water anyway.

7. The destruction of the ship (vv. 39-41)

a) Sailing into a creek (v. 39)"When it was day, they recognized 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."The day dawned and they saw land but still didn't know where they were. The "creek with a shore" most likely refers to a beach that comes off the island of Malta and empties into the bay. Their intention was to head for the creek and run aground onto the beach.b) Making toward shore (v. 40)"When they had taken up [cast off] the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore."They allowed themselves to be driven solely by the wind and sea. They loosed the undergirding they had used to tighten the ship earlier (v. 17) to give some measure of steering and then hoisted the mainsail so the wind would drive them toward shore.c) Running the ship aground (v. 41)"Falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the bow stuck fast and remained unmoveable, but the stern was broken with the violence of the waves.""A place where two seas met" (Gk. dithalasson) is difficult to translate. It could be referring to a shoal or reef. Also, in the middle of the bay there is a small island called Salmonetta, which intersects with the island of Malta to form a sand bank between the two currents. Perhaps the ship got stuck in that sandbar. It may have been they assumed the island was an extension of the mainland. The bow stuck in the sandbar a good distance from the shore and with the waves smashing against the stern, the ship was dashed to pieces.

E. The Safety (vv. 42-44)

1. The counsel (v. 42)

"The soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out and escape." The soldiers were deathly afraid of losing their lives in the shipwreck, but they were equally afraid that the prisoners might escape. The traditional Roman discipline was that any soldier who allowed his prisoner to escape would then be responsible for serving out the prisoner's sentence. The soldiers wanted to kill the apostle Paul and the rest of the prisoners to prevent that from happening.

2. The commandment (vv. 43-44a)

"But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose, and commanded that they who could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land; and the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship."

The centurion rushed in at that point to save Paul and the rest of the prisoners from a violent death. The prisoners should have been eternally grateful to Paul for being in their midst because without him, the centurion might have granted the soldiers' request for execution. The centurion's command was for everyone to jump into the water and swim to shore. Those who couldn't swim were to grab onto the floating debris and eventually make their way to shore.

3. The confirmation (v. 44b)

"And so it came to pass that they all escaped safely to the land."

Two hundred seventy-six men jumped into the water, and two hundred seventy-six people met on the shore! The first thought those men must have had was that the God Paul worships is faithful to His word. God not only established His own veracity, but also established the credibility of the apostle Paul. Over and over again, God has kept His word.

a) Isaiah 40:8--"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand forever"

(cf. 1 Pet. 1:25).b) Isaiah 55:10-11--The Lord said, "As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not there, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." God's Word is and will always be fulfilled.c) Matthew 5:18--Jesus said, "Verily

I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." God's Word is reliable.d) John 17:17--Jesus said to the Father, "Thy word is truth." God allowed each person on the ship to see that He was in complete, sovereign control. As He has done so often in the history of His revelation to mankind, He used predictive prophecy to establish His divine authority. When He says something will happen and it does, it proves that God is who He claims to be. One of the greatest proofs that God is the author of the Bible is the fulfillment of prophecy. Some of those prophecies, such as in this passage, have been fulfilled and some are being fulfilled today, that the convincing may continue to go on.

II. THE PRINCIPLES

Acts 27 describes true spiritual leadership exemplified in the life of the apostle Paul. But what specific qualities enabled him to be such a dynamic leader?

A. A Godly Leader Is Loved

This is what separates godly leadership from leadership in the world. True spiritual leadership does not mean you will be loved by everyone at all times. It does mean that a man who leads for God will be beloved because of his integrity. In verse 3 we saw that Julius allowed Paul to go to the believers in Sidon and refresh himself. Paul primarily taught doctrine and was involved in many spiritual matters, but he went to them for his physical needs. Because they loved and appreciated all he had done for them, they were happy to serve him in that way.

Some people assume that to be a strong leader, you must eliminate people's love for you. They think that to be a leader, you must do away with any hint of vulnerability because it shows you are weak. But that is not true! True godly leaders are loved because they lead with care, humility, and approachability (1 Pet. 5:1-5). If you are not leading in that way, you are not being led by the Holy Spirit because He generates a love for the leader in the hearts of people. Even though church leaders aren't perfect, there must be an irresistible quality that makes them easy to love.

1. Titus 3:15--Paul told Titus, "All that are with me greet thee. Greet them that love us in the faith." Paul knew that people loved him, even though he was a disciplinarian. When something needed to be said, he would state it in no uncertain terms, even to the apostle Peter (Gal. 2:11). When there was an issue to be dealt with, he dealt with it in a strong and firm way, but was no less loving. In spite of his failures, there was an irresistible quality that made him lovable. Jesus, the strongest leader who ever lived, was so loved that words cannot express it.

2. 1 Corinthians 13:1--Paul said, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding bronze, or a tinkling cymbal."

3. 1 Timothy 4:12--Paul told Timothy, "Be thou an example ... in love."

4. 1 Timothy 6:11--Paul also said, "Thou, O man of God ... follow after love."

B. A Godly Leader Never Quits

Paul was suffering from sickness yet still pursued his objectives. If he was sick in Sidon, you can imagine what he must have felt like on board ship. He had been fourteen days without food, fighting the storm, yet he never quit. And that doesn't count his other shipwrecks and hardships (2 Cor. 11:24-33).

From a human standpoint, you have to wonder how Paul could go through imprisonment, trials, murder plots, sickness, and shipwrecks and yet not want to quit. The physical pain alone would be too much for almost anyone to endure. He simply didn't know the meaning of the word quit. It's been rightly said, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going" and, "It isn't the size of the man in the fight, but the size of the fight in the man." The apostle Paul was that kind of a man.

C. A Godly Leader Uses Good Judgment

True leaders make practical, wise decisions. While they were in Fair Havens, sailing was now in the dangerous season, and Paul knew it was not wise to leave the port (vv. 9-10). Paul knew God wanted him in Rome (cf. Acts 23:11), but never lost his sense of practicality. He never became

foolish or presumed on God but trusted Him to work out His will at the best time.

1. Psalm 19:13--King David said, "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins."

2. Matthew 4:8-10--The devil tried to tempt Jesus to sin when he took "him up into an exceedingly high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Begone, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord, thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." Jesus the Messiah knew He would ultimately inherit the kingdoms of the world. But Satan thought he could seduce Jesus into presuming on God and taking them ahead of schedule. However Christ elected to wait on God's timetable. In his other temptations, Satan tried to jump ahead of God (vv. 3-7). But Jesus could not be forced to presume on something that had already been promised to Him at the right time.

Many people presume on God to the point where they're leading others down a primrose path only to find a dead end. Many pastors have gotten into monumental building programs and spending large amounts of money, but are caught breaking the law. They assumed the end justified the means, but in the end, they lost their sense of sanity and practicality. What they needed to do was allow God to accomplish what He wants in His own time.

D. A Godly Leader Speaks with Authority

The apostle Paul knew what he was talking about. He said, "I exhort you to be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul, thou must be brought before Caesar; and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me" (vv. 22-25).

Paul spoke with extreme boldness. A leader must speak with authority. And his authority comes not from himself but from the Word of God. James Montgomery Boice, pastor of the historic Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, said, "What is required of the minister? Clearly the first and essential requirement is a joyful and total commitment to the absolute authority of God's written revelation.... Since belief in the Scriptures as the infallible and authoritative Word of God has declined in the life of the Church generally, it is not surprising that the eloquence and power of the proclamation of this Word have diminished also. What is the result? It is well put in this description of a panel discussion involving a rabbi, a priest, and a Protestant minister. The rabbi stood up and said 'I speak according to the law of Moses.' The priest said, 'I speak according to the Church.' The clergyman rose to his feet and said, 'It seems to me....'" ("The Great Need for Preaching," Christianity Today [20 Dec. 1974]: 7- 9).

Unfortunately, that's what's happening in Christianity today. The true spiritual leader knows the Bible and stands on its authority. There would have been no comfort for the crew if Paul said, "Well, fellows, it seems to me that we just might make it"! True spiritual leadership is authoritative.

E. A Godly Leader Strengthens Others

When Paul said, "Be of good cheer" (v. 25) and "I beseech you to take some food" (v. 34), everyone was encouraged by his words (v. 36). A strong leader always strengthens others. We see that illustrated in 1 Samuel 30. First David was strengthened by God (v. 6) and then he was able to strengthen others (vv. 9-10, 16- 20).

F. A Godly Leader Has Unwavering Faith

Paul said, "I believe God." That was how he lived his life. Similarly Abraham "staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God" (Rom. 4:20).

G. A Godly Leader Demands Obedience

A true leader never compromises. Paul said, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved" (v. 31). The crew tried to get away but Paul in effect said, "You either do it God's way or you will pay the consequences." The church is in desperate need of leaders who call people to obey God's Word.

H. A Godly Leader Leads by Example

When Paul wanted the men to eat, he ate first (vv. 34-35). Leadership by example is a common theme in the New Testament (e.g., 1 Pet. 5:3; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thess. 1:5-6; 2 Thess. 3:6-9; 1 Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:7).

CONCLUSION

Aside from those features of leadership, you also have the promise that God will always fulfill His will. A leader knows the balance between God's absolute promise and his own responsibility. He knows God will fulfill His will, and yet remains very practical and wise. He balances the sovereignty of God and his own practical efforts. He has a hearty breakfast to do his work, but also prays for strength and guidance. This passage teaches the providence of God in protecting His leader, but you can also see the characteristics of true spiritual leadership. It is my prayer that should God place you in a leadership position, you will accept that responsibility--as Paul did--and manifest the characteristics of a true godly leader.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What does Acts 27 illustrate?
2. Nothing is more critical in the world today than the need for strong _____.
3. What has the world recognized that the church has not?
4. How has God consistently manifested His will throughout redemptive history?
5. The only true leader is the one who handles _____ well.
6. How does the historical, navigational information concerning the course of the ship corroborate the biblical text?
7. What does the term "sounding" mean in verse 28?
8. Why did the crew drop four anchors from the stern of the ship (v. 29)? What was their real intention (v. 30)?
9. Why was Paul concerned that no man jump ship prematurely (vv. 31-32)?
10. Why did Paul encourage the men to eat? How long had it been since they had eaten (vv. 33-35)?
11. Describe the meaning of the old Jewish proverb that Paul refers to in verse 34. Use Scripture to support your answer.
12. Why did the crew jettison the rest of the cargo (v. 38)?
13. Explain the events leading up to and including the destruction of the ship (vv. 39-41).
14. Why did the soldiers want to kill the prisoners (v. 42)?
15. How many of the passengers survived the shipwreck (v. 44)?
16. Give examples from Scriptures describing how God's Word can be trusted.
17. One of the greatest proofs that God is the real author of the Bible is the fulfillment of _____.
18. What separates godly leadership from worldly leadership?
19. True or False: To be a strong leader, you must eliminate people's love for you.
20. True leaders make _____, _____ decisions.
21. How did Jesus respond to Satan's ploys to presume on God (Matt. 4:1-11)?
22. True or False: A leader's authority should come both from his own ingenuity and from the Word of God.
23. How did King David display his leadership abilities as recorded in 1 Samuel 30?
24. Leadership by _____ is a common theme in the New Testament?

Pondering the Principles

1. Godly leaders are loved by people because they show they care and are approachable. Are you a spiritual leader in your church, home, or family? Do those around you sense that you care for them?

If not, take time right now and ask the Lord to make you the spiritual leader he wants you to be. Of the following verses, commit one to memory and ask God to make it a part of your leadership abilities: Titus 3:15; 1 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Timothy 6:11.

2. Greatly lacking in the church today are leaders who speak with authority. A true spiritual leader knows the Bible and stands on its absolutes. As a spiritual leader, where does your authority come from? Does it come more from your own ingenuity or the Word of God? Read 1 Corinthians 1:17; 2:1-5 and 2 Corinthians 4:2 and determine whether you are communicating the truth of God or something of your own devising.

3. One of the greatest keys to leadership is that it must be done by example. People will follow only those who lead by example, both by their attitudes and actions. Do people desire to follow you because of the example you set? Read the following verses and ask God to manifest in you the characteristics of a godly leader: 1 Peter 5:3; Philippians 3:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-9.

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