

- **Welcome everyone! This is Pastor Ethan and today is Sunday June 12th, 2022.**
- **We have entered the homestretch! Today we begin the 13th and FINAL section of our journey through the book of Acts! After today we will have three more messages to complete the actual text, and then one more as a retrospective to see the biggest themes and takeaways from this amazing history of the birth and first generation of the church.**
- **ONE of those big themes is a step by step trust in the providence- the sovereignty- of God.**
- **We've seen how these first believers- men and women alike- took each day a step at a time as they courageously walked in obedience to the Spirits leadership.**
- **This is the trust that sustained Paul through his trials in Caesarea, and it will be this trust that sustains him- and those around him- as he finally makes his journey to Rome.**
- **Spoiler alert- this journey is going to be very, very difficult.**
- **If we were to look at this story devotionally- as a metaphor of life- what Paul is about to experience could symbolize the power of God's hope in the midst of life's greatest storms.**
- **THIS IS A BIG SECTION OF TEXT- entire chapter 27. Much of it details the sea voyage across the Mediterranean, but in these details are several key principles we need to see.**
- **SO, strap in, place our trays and seats in the full and upright positions, and jump in as...**

† The journey begins

Acts 27:1-8 *When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. ² We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. (if looking at map, they start by moving north up the coast of Israel and then Syria) Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us.*

- **Aristarchus is one of the 'barely sung' heroes of the NT. We first learn of him and a man named Gaius when they were captured during the massive riot in Ephesus. Aristarchus was a traveling companion and friend of Paul, and would go on to be imprisoned with him in Rome. Church tradition holds that he was martyred by Nero. Aristarchus' name here reminds us that Paul was not a solo act. In virtually everything he did he was accompanied and supported by a courageous and supportive community of faith.**

³ *The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs.*

- **Evidently there was a community of believers in Sidon who helped Paul. Notable, because we have no direct evidence Paul had ever been to Sidon- this speaks to how the gospel has spread around the Mediterranean world, to many places Paul himself never traveled.**

⁴ *From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us.*

- **The LEE side of an island was the side protected by the island from prevailing winds. In this case they were sailing to the north of Cyprus, along the northern Med. Coast.**

⁵ *When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia.*

⁶ *There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board. ⁷ We made slow headway*

for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone.⁸ We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea.

- **Ok, lets cover some basic info about the trip.**
- **Autumn of AD 59.**
- **The trip to Rome, with ideal conditions- 5 weeks.**
- **NOT ideal conditions- late in season. Trips across the MED were typically not launched after mid-September, and were absolutely avoided from November to mid March. They're starting around mid-September! So, the trip was moving into a dangerous time of the year from the get-go.**
- **Told there were 276 people on board the ship-**
 - **Captain and crew, professional sailors**
 - **Ships owner. A few passengers, including Aristarchus and LUKE (we...).**
 - **Julius, the Roman commander and his soldiers**
 - **Prisoners**
 - **PAUL**
- **Paul was a prisoner, but not just any prisoner.**
- **Imagine you are Julius, or the boat captain, learning your job is to take Paul across the sea. What do you know about him, think of him?**
 - **First of all, he's a Roman citizen, being sent to Nero- but the word is out Festus and Agrippa thought him innocent- something mysterious about him.**
 - **Religious figure- man of faith, but unlike any other they've known. Seems all of Jerusalem is out to kill him, traveling under guard, and he appeared before BOTH Festus and Agrippa? WHO IS THIS GUY?**
 - **Paul is also respected. He is not seen as a security threat, or a person who would try to escape. As we just saw, Julius allowed him to leave the ship- likely under some guard- and seek out help from the community of believers in Sidon. Paul is seen as a person of integrity, peace... and as the journey unfolds he will increasingly be looked to for leadership, even though he is a prisoner.**
- **SO, the journey begins, and as conditions deteriorate Paul's becomes the...**

✠ **Bearer of bad news** Acts 27:9-12 *Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Day of Atonement. So Paul warned them,¹⁰ "Men, 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."¹¹ But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship.¹² Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbor in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest.*

- **It's now mid-October, which we know from timing of the Day of Atonement, also known as Yom Kippur- one of most holy days on the Jewish Calendar.**
- **Seas are getting rough, and here Paul speaks up for the first time. Meeting of the ships leaders- the captain, Julius, the ship's owner, and Paul.**
- **That Paul was included here indicates the respect these men have for him, plus he was an experienced sea traveler.**
- **SO, speaking from his personal experience, Paul basically said- uh, we need to port! We need to stop, or we are all going to be toast.**

- **But at least at this point, Paul's word's go unheeded. The Captain and Ships owners are motivated, likely financially, to get to a port where they could properly unload the ship, secure the prisoners, and spend the winter. Not to do so could have jeopardized the value of the ships cargo, not to mention the consequences they could face if the prisoners were lost.**
- **SO, they ignore Paul's wisdom and the worsening conditions, and proceed. Phoenix was a larger harbor and actually not far away- about fifty miles west on the coast of Crete. They believed they could make it... you know, just a three hour tour...**

✠ The storm **Acts 27:13-20** *When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. ¹⁴ Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the Northeaster, swept down from the island. ¹⁵ The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. ¹⁶ As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure, ¹⁷ so the men hoisted it aboard. Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Because they were afraid they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. ¹⁸ We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. ¹⁹ On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. ²⁰ When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.*

- **The situation rapidly becomes a worst case scenario. The drama here can't be overstated, as the crew is literally fighting for their lives. The 'sandbars of Syrtis' were a known feature, a combination of sandbars and shoals, and was sometimes called the 'graveyard for vessels'.**
- **They lowered the anchor in an attempt to give the ship some drag, but it doesn't help. In an attempt to lighten the ship, which would have been taking on water- they start to throw overboard cargo and the 'tackle' which would have been any spare rigging and equipment.**
- **Luke's statement in verse 20 is emotional- the sun and stars disappeared for many days, even as the storm continued to rage. The absence of the sun and stars wasn't just about darkness, it meant they couldn't navigate. They were utterly lost. They had no gear, no sun, no stars, and no hope. They were done.**
- **Friends, you may have been in a place like this. This may be where you are right now, or it may be for someone you know and love.**
- **It's encouraging, if we look, that scripture never whitewashes the reality of human suffering, hardship, and even desperation. God never asks us to pretend that things aren't the way they are, and God never says we will be spared life's storms- Paul's presence here demonstrates this. Most importantly, God never condemns us when we feel like there is no hope.**
- **In fact, it is places of total brokenness, when we are finally done fighting, that the mercy, grace, and even HOPE of God are often realized.**
- **It is also true that many people never recover from the loss of hope. On March 7th a person who had become a close friend came to the place where they saw no hope in their storm, and no way out. They ended their life. I had talked to them the night before, and I didn't see it.**
- **Church- it is a profoundly difficult thing to walk with people in the depths of their pain. It is a courageous thing to ask God to give us eyes to see, ears to hear, and the loving action to**

come alongside people, listen to them, and carry hope for them until just maybe, by God's Grace, they will be able to carry hope themselves.

- *A little less intense, but NO LESS ESSENTIAL is the call for us- as disciples of Christ- to be self-aware of how our actions and words impact those around us. We never really know what other people are going through, and what we say, where we say it, and how we say it, just might be the light of hope for a person struggling with hopelessness. Or, it may be one more stone pushing them away from hope and away from God.*
- *PEOPLE ARE VALUABLE, and they need to be valued.*
- *Friends- if you read Acts 27:20.. “we finally gave up all hope of being saved”... and in your heart you think- that's exactly where I am... you need to hear the rest of this story. You see, everyone on the ship, with the possible exception of Paul, concluded they were done.*
- *And yet... they weren't.*
- *At the darkest point of the storm, Paul speaks up again, and says... this time I have some good news...*

† **And now the good news... sort of**

Acts 27:21-26 *After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said:*

- *You can also translate this- ‘they had all lost their appetites’. They hadn't eaten because they wouldn't have been able to keep it down. So, on top of the total hopelessness Luke just described, the also were nauseated, dehydrated, and starving.*
- *This is where Paul gently reminds them—“I think somebody told you we should have stayed in port!”*

“Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss.

- *Paul MAY have been rubbing their nose in it, just a bit- he is human (smile). But more likely he is making a case here for his credibility, because he has something crucial to say- and no we see Paul moving to the center of these events, as the person keeping hope alive.*
- *His message? YOU ALL WILL SURVIVE.. but the ship is toast!*

²² *But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed.* ²³ *Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me* ²⁴ *and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’* ²⁵ *So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.* ²⁶ *Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island.”*

- *This is going to VERY difficult, but we will all make it through it.*
- *What was the source of Paul's courage? It was God's promise that he, and everyone with him, would make it to Rome.*
- *Subtle note her, but important. These men weren't going to survive because of Paul's faith. God had said, ‘Paul, this is what I am going to do. This is the reality- you all are going to survive, and you're going to Rome, no way around it.’ God's will here would have happened whether Paul believed it or not. What Paul's faith did was GIVE HIM COURAGE, as by this faith he believed that what God said was true was in fact what was already true!*
- *Christian culture- and a lot of teaching- tends to emphasize “by faith we move God do to things”... but if you look closely at the New Testament, we will rather see that FAITH is the gift by which we enter into and experience the GOOD OF WHAT GOD HAS ALREADY DONE.*

- **Paul doesn't sugarcoat the situation! The ship is going to be lost! We must run aground—we must CRASH. And yet... there is great hope. So take courage!**
- **It's often said that extreme crisis can make us religious, and this seems to be the case here, for as the situation worsens, we find the crew praying for daylight.**

✠ **Praying for daylight** Acts 27:27-32 *On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land. ²⁸ They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet deep. ²⁹ Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight.*

- **Basically, land is approaching fast, it's night and they can't see where they are going, so they drop all their anchors in an attempt to slow the ship.**
- **But the sailors have little hope this will work, because at the same time they try to abandon the ship.**

³⁰ *In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. ³¹ Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved." ³² So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it drift away.*

- **Paul has now gone from a person who was ignored to the one giving orders. Paul's hope and courage gives him the peace to be levelheaded when everyone else is panicking.**
- **It is here Paul speaks for the last time. In an incredible scene, God uses Paul to bring a renewal of hope.**

✠ **A renewal of hope**

Acts 27:33-38 *Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. "For the last fourteen days," he said, "you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food—you haven't eaten anything. ³⁴ Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head." ³⁵ After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat.*

- **Think about this would have been like! All hell is breaking loose... the ship is starting to come apart. In this most desperate moment, Paul tells them to eat.**
- **At his commands the remaining food was brought forth, and with the deck crowded with exhausted men Paul gives what might have been the most powerful testimony of his life.**
- **In the midst of the storm, with everyone watching him, Paul breaks a piece of bread and gives thanks to God.**
- **THE RESULT is that his courage spreads to everyone else on the ship.**

³⁶ *They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. ³⁷ Altogether there were 276 of us on board. ³⁸ When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.*

- **So now, all that is left is the shipwreck.**

✠ **The shipwreck**

Acts 27:39-44 *When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. ⁴⁰ Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. ⁴¹ But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf. ⁴² The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. ⁴³ But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and*

kept them from carrying out their plan.

- **Here at the end, when it seems they will make it to shore, all of a sudden the lives of the prisoners are in jeopardy. Fear of what would happen to themselves if the prisoners escape leads the soldiers to try and kill them. THEN, at great risk to his own life and career, Julius the commander prevents this massacre from happening- and he does so because of his great respect for Paul.**

He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. ⁴⁴ The rest were to get there on planks or on other pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land safely.

- **It's an incredible story. So, let's look at this through the lens of what we can learn- how we might be encouraged.**

✠ Lessons from the storm

- It is wise to listen to **WISDOM**

- **Early in the journey Paul had offered wisdom based upon his experience growing up and sailing on the Mediterranean. His wisdom was ignored, at great cost.**
- **WISDOM IS A GIFT, even though at times it's hard to hear.**
- **Scripture is a treasure trove of wisdom, and as we learn to humbly trust God, we will be less inclined to ignore wisdom, because we're fighting so hard to make things work the way we think they are supposed to work.**
- **In the midst of the storm, it is wise to listen to wisdom.**
- **Next, we see here the great lesson that our hope...**

- Our hope is not in the **SHIP**

- **Our hope is not in our ship- whatever your ship may be.**
- **Hear! Ships are great! They are good, useful, can bring lots of joy, practical use... our ships can make us feel secure. We can bless others with our ships. God will use our ships for his purposes and Glory**
- **The problem is when we let our ship become too important. Then the ship can become a source of pride, stress, and identity. We tell ourselves, "if my ship is exactly how I want it, then I'll be content, happy, and at peace." Sometimes we care too much about what other people think of our ship, or how our ship compares to other ships. We can get ship envy.**
- **Worse, when the weather does start getting rough, we tend to think- 'my ship is what is going to save me'. Make no mistake! Having a seaworthy ship is a good thing, but if our faith is only in our ship we can get into trouble- because life may bring some storms our ship simply cannot handle. And if our hope is only in our ship, we may conclude that we have no hope.**
- **But CHURCH! Ultimately, our hope is not in our ship. When we come to see, trust, the Good News of what God has already accomplished in Jesus Christ- what is already TRUE OF YOU in Christ, we may come to experience the hope, redemption, and peace of our Loving Father who has not left us alone.**
- **WHAT IS YOUR SHIP? But far, far more importantly, what is your source of Hope. WHO IS YOUR HOPE?**

- **CHURCH!** When your hope is the miracle that Christ gave his life FOR YOU, so he could place His life IN YOU, in order to express His life THROUGH YOU--- that is not just some spiritual concept- it is a source of incredibly practical power.
- The practical power of **CHRIST** in you
- What did we see in this story- specifically the dynamic between Paul and Julius?
- When we are living in dependence upon God, trusting him, and our lives are characterized by his nature, WE WILL have a positive influence on the people around us. MAYBE a life-saving influence.
- THINK OF IT. On this ship of 276 people, it's likely there were 3 believers. But we don't find these believers off by themselves, hidden in a room praying for deliverance, or seeking to save themselves while the ship goes to destruction. No- they are right there with these Roman soldiers, prisoners, and sea-hardened sailors.
- Because of Paul's consistent presence of courage, integrity, hope, and testimony- he imparted hope and courage that saved the life of everyone on board.
- FRIENDS, the simple and humble expression of Christ's character in our daily lives is a POWERFUL THING.
- It just may be that the most powerful attribute of Christ's nature in Paul was when Paul- in the midst of the storm- was thankful. When he expressed...
- The miraculous power of **GRATITUDE**
- For Paul, Luke, Aristarchus, and everyone on the ship, that night was the most extreme place of their human existence. Physically, emotionally, and mentally, these men were overcome with darkness.
- And there in that place of hopelessness, with everyone looking to him, Paul looks to his Father in whom He trusts and he gives thanks.
- That was the turning point. Immediately, Luke tells us, they were ALL encouraged, and began to eat.
- Friends- there is so much anger, fear, and hurting in our society- and in many churches. When the people in our circle of influence look at us, what do they see, what do they hear?
- For make no mistake- People are watching us, and some may be looking to us for hope. It may be our children, grandchildren, co-workers, employees, or friends.
- When a person looks to us and they see GRATITUDE, this is powerful thing. In the midst of the chaos of life, gratitude is a living testimony pointing toward the HOPE within us that is greater than the storms around us.
- End with this- In 1834 an English pastor named Edward Mote wrote a song that went on to become one of the beloved hymns church. His original title was "The Immutable Basis for a sinner's hope"... but we know the song's title by its opening line...

*My hope is built on nothing less- Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame- But wholly lean on Jesus' name*

*On Christ the solid Rock I stand, All other ground is sinking sand
All other ground is sinking sand*

When darkness hides His lovely face, I rest on His unchanging grace

In every high and stormy gale, My anchor holds within the veil

*His oath, His covenant, His blood, Support me in the whelming flood
When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay*

*On Christ the solid Rock I stand, All other ground is sinking sand
All other ground is sinking sand*