

Acts 27 “Seeing God in the Storm”<sup>\*\*1</sup>

Current Series: “*The Gospel on Trial*” Acts 21-28

Main Idea: It’s vital that we learn to see God in the storm. We learn three important insights regarding the person of God in the storms of life, as demonstrated in Acts 27.

- I. God uses difficulties (1-12).
    - A. Paul headed for Rome (1-2).
    - B. Paul headed into trouble (3-12).
      1. There was stubborn wind (3-8).
      2. There were stubborn people (9-12).
  - II. God uses disaster (13-38).
    - A. Here’s how the world responds to crisis.
      1. Ignore the warning signs (11).
      2. Convince yourself you can handle it (12).
      3. Try to make the best of a bad situation (13-17).
      4. Take drastic measures (18-19).
      5. Lose hope (20).
      6. Stop eating (21a).
      7. Pray (27-29).
      8. If you can save yourself, do it (30-32).
      9. Begin to realize what’s really important (33-38).
    - B. Here’s how God’s kind of people respond to crisis.
      1. Face life as it is (9-10).
      2. Feel hopeless at times (20).
      3. Trust in God’s promises, not your feelings (21-26).
      4. Act on God’s promises (31).
      5. Think about the needs of others (33-34).
      6. Look for opportunities to bring glory to God (35).
  - III. God brings deliverance (39-44).
    - A. They lost everything.
    - B. They didn’t lose their lives.
- The Bottom Line: Enabled by grace, let’s resolve to see God in the storm.

This morning I want to begin with a very simple question, as we turn to Acts 27. The question? *Why is it there?* Acts 26 ends with the decision fixed that Paul must go to give a defense before Caesar in Rome, and in Acts 28 he makes it to Rome. So why does the Holy Spirit take forty-four verses in Acts 27 to show us how Paul got from Jerusalem to Rome? What’s the point of all the details about the ship he was on, and the crew, and the places the ship docked, and the storm at sea, and the grain tossed into the sea, and the shipwreck? Why did God give us Acts 27? Why *is it there?*

You’ll have the opportunity to discuss that question in community groups later today. It’s not an easy question to answer because Luke doesn’t tell us why. He just tells the story, about this trip, and storm. So, when the Bible does that, when it tells a story, whether it’s Noah’s flood, or David and Goliath, or Paul on a boat to Rome, here’s what we must do. *Look for God.* The Bible is God’s self-revelation, so look for God, specifically, what is God teaching us about Himself in this story?

That’s what we’ll do. I’ve entitled this morning’s message is, “*Seeing God in the Storm.*” Before look for God in Acts 27, let’s begin by reading about another storm.

*Scripture Reading: Matthew 8:23-27*

On April 23, 1968, a violent EF-5 tornado (that's the highest rated tornado possible on the enhanced-fujita scale; only 59 EF5 tornadoes have been documented in the United

---

\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For a previous look at this passage, see the Acts series preached at WBC in 2003.

States since 1950), ripped through our town. The twister actually touched down just across the Ohio River in Kentucky around 4 o'clock that evening. According to witnesses, "20 to 25 houses were reported destroyed and 100 or more damaged in the communities of Sunshine, South Shore, Flatt Hollow, Little White Oak, Siloam, and Schultz. It was described by residents as 'a huge upside-down funnel...a yellow swirling mass...a giant cone from top to bottom'".<sup>2</sup>

The tornado then crossed the Ohio River at a speed of 45 mph and hit a train and turned several cars over. Listen to the report as given by Tornado Talk:

"The storm then crossed Route 52 into the northwestern portion of Wheelersburg. In the Wheelersburg area, 7 persons were killed and 75 injured while about 550 homes were destroyed or sustained damage. Golf ball and baseball size hail and heavy rain were reported in this area. The majority of injuries and personal property damage occurred in a residential area on Dogwood Ridge Road (about 4 miles ENE of Wheelersburg). After leaving this community the storm skipped its way through a sparsely populated rural area to Gallipolis."<sup>3</sup>

This particular storm affected WBC in significant ways. One of the seven who lost their life was Mary Adkins, age 63, the wife of Pastor John Adkins who served as pastor of this church from 1936-1958 (when he died of a heart attack). Another who died was Anna Lou Armstrong (the sister of our missionary, Bob Litteral), whose husband was serving in Vietnam at the time. She was only 34 years old and left behind three small sons.

What's the worst storm you've ever experienced? Storms can certainly terrify us. It's interesting how many of our hymns use storm imagery to communicate biblical truth. That's because storms can teach us as well as terrify us. Haldor Lillenas wrote:

*The Bible stands like a rock undaunted 'mid the raging storms of time;  
Its pages burn with the truth eternal, and they glow with a light sublime.  
The Bible stand tho the hills may tumble,  
It will firmly stand when the earth shall crumble;  
I will plant my feet on its firm foundation,  
For the Bible stands.*

This morning we're going to experience a storm vicariously by pondering the description given by Luke of the tempest that Paul endured in Acts 27. I've never experienced a storm at sea, but some say that no storm is more petrifying. Acts 27 reads like a journal with a story-line that grips the imagination.

A Scotsman by the name of James Smith lived in various parts of the Mediterranean world and investigated its weather patterns and geography. He recorded his findings in *The Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul*. He concluded that the person who wrote Acts 27 was an eyewitness but not a sailor: "No sailor would have written in a style so little like that of a sailor; no man not a sailor could have written a narrative of a sea voyage so consistent in all its parts, unless from actual observation."<sup>4</sup>

The author of Acts, Luke, certainly fits the bill. He was with Paul on this trip, but writes from the perspective of a doctor, rather than a sailor. His intent isn't to give us meteorology, but theology. He wants us to see God in this storm, as we must do with any storm that comes raging into our lives.

So, what do we learn about God in Acts 27? Three important insights.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.tornadotalk.com/wheelersburg-oh-f5-tornado-april-23-1968/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.tornadotalk.com/wheelersburg-oh-f5-tornado-april-23-1968/>

<sup>4</sup> In James Boice, p. 410.

## I. Insight #1: God uses difficulties (1-12).

No one is exempt from difficulties in life, including (I should say *especially*) Christians. This was certainly true for Paul. In Acts 21 he was arrested for a crime he hadn't committed, and forced to go to prison. He made four court appearances, one before the Jewish Sanhedrin, two before the Roman governors Felix and Festus, and finally, one before King Agrippa. But none of these officials of justice used their power to set him free. Consequently, after more than two years of incarceration, Paul appealed to Caesar in the summer of AD 59. It's here that we pick up the story in Acts 27.

**A. Paul headed for Rome (1-2).** “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.<sup>2</sup> 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.”

Luke introduces us to some people who traveled with Paul to Rome. There was a centurion named Julius. There were also other unnamed prisoners. There was the ship's crew. And then there's *we*. We haven't seen “we” in the Acts narrative since 21:18, but apparently Luke has rejoined Paul. Some feel he was with Paul in Caesarea during the two-year imprisonment. Aristarchus also made the trip. This friend of Luke was part of Paul's team that took the benevolent offering to Jerusalem two years prior (20:4).

And so, the journey begins. The ship left Caesarea and headed for Asia Minor where it would land and where the passengers would board another vessel heading for Rome.

**B. Paul headed into trouble (3-12).** Luke mentions two dilemmas in verses 3-12.

1. *There was stubborn wind (3-8).* Listen as I begin reading (NIV), “The next day we landed at Sidon [indicating the ship made 70 miles that first day, but the smooth sailing didn't last for long]; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs.” This says something about Julius—he was a decent man. And about Paul—he had a winsome reputation. Is that true of us? What kind of impression do we make on people when we're traveling?

Verse 4, “From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us.” There's the first indication of trouble, but it won't be the last; note all the terms Luke uses to emphasize hardship in this chapter; instead of heading west the ship is forced to follow the coastline northward—note the map.

Verse 5, “When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia.” Apparently, that was the final destination for the first ship, so the travelers departed and searched for alternate travel westward.

Let's continue at verse 6, “There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board. We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus [note it took “many” days to make the 130 mile jaunt from Myra to Cnidus; remember they made it 70 miles the first day alone]. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone. We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea.”

Notice Luke's emphasis in that final statement. “We moved along *with difficulty*.” Hence, our point, God uses difficulties. Perhaps some extrabiblical information can help us appreciate just how difficult this experience was, for Paul, and Luke, and the others.

The prevailing wind at this time of the year was the west wind, which made a trip to the west quite challenging. Consequently, a sailing vessel had to employ a zigzag course. To complicate matters, consider the characteristics of this ship. At Myra they switched

boats and boarded a vessel from Alexandria, Egypt which was bound for Rome. Barclay comments, “She would be a corn ship, for Egypt was the granary of Italy. If we look at the map, we can see what a long way round she had to take; but the strong west winds made the direct journey impossible.”<sup>5</sup>

This was no small bass boat, either. A corn ship could be as large as 140 feet long and 36 feet wide. It was ideal for moving grain. It wasn’t ideal for enduring storms, however. It had no rudder like modern ships, but was steered with two great paddles coming out from the stern on each side—that meant this ship was hard to maneuver. Furthermore, there was only one mast, and on that mast a large, square sail, sometimes made of linen and at other times of stitched hides.

And don’t miss this. With that kind of sail, the ship couldn’t sail into the wind. Now we can appreciate more fully Luke’s observation, “We moved along with difficulty.”

Then came a second dilemma. First, the stubborn wind. The second?

2. *There were stubborn people (9-12)*. Verse 9, “Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Fast.”

The danger zone for sea travel on the Mediterranean runs from mid-September through mid-November. After that, travel on the open sea ceased until winter was over. Luke makes it clear it was already after “the Fast,” referring to the Day of Atonement, which in AD 59 fell on October 5.

Luke continues in verse 9, “So Paul warned them, ‘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.’ But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. 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.”

We may wonder why a centurion would even care about the travel input of a prisoner like Paul. But Paul was more than a prisoner. He was an experienced sea traveler. In fact, he’d been through severe storms prior to the one in Acts 27. 2 Corinthians 11:25 says he was shipwrecked, not once, not twice, but three times—and on one of these spent 24 hours clinging to a plank in the open sea until he was picked up or washed ashore.

Whether from direct revelation or from his previous sailing experience, we’re not told. But Paul made it clear that the ship would face great danger if it continued.

Fair Havens is a misnomer, for it wasn’t a “fair” place. James Boice suggests, “It must have been named by the Chamber of Commerce to try to get people to visit it.”<sup>6</sup> The crew said ‘no way’ to spending the winter in Fair Havens (not enough action in this town to suit the sailors). They proposed going another 40 miles to the port of Phoenix on the southern coast of Crete.

And so the centurion ignored Paul’s advice, and chose to follow the rationale of the pilot and ship owner. After all, time lost is money lost.

So ends the first scene, a scene marked by stubborn wind and stubborn people. Perhaps you’re thinking, “I thought you said God uses difficulties. I don’t see God working in this story.” Just wait.

## II. Insight #2: God uses disaster (13-38).

---

<sup>5</sup> William Barclay, pp. 181-2.

<sup>6</sup> James Boice, p. 411.

You may struggle with my word choice, to say that, God *uses* disaster. I could have used a stronger word, as in, God *decrees* disaster. That's what the Bible says in Jeremiah 11:17, "The LORD of hosts, who planted you, *has decreed disaster against you...*"

But rather than wrestle with the word choice, let's just take a look at it, for disaster is precisely what this ship sailed into in scene 2.

Keep this thought in mind as we read the following. Disaster, or crisis, reveals the truth about us. Crisis exposes us. Crisis uncovers what's really there, and what's not.

There's a marked contrast demonstrated in scene 2. We see two very different kinds of people, and two very different responses to crisis.

**A. Here's how the world responds to crisis.** Just look at the sailors. The sailors' response to the storm illustrates the world's response. This is how the person who doesn't know the Sovereign Lord personally reacts when a storm hits his or her life. This is what *we* will do even if we know Him, but He's not real in our lives. *Nine reactions.*

1. *Ignore the warning signs (11).* That's exactly what happened in scene 1 when Paul cautioned them against further travel. "Ah, we can make it!" they said. Why? Because when your heart is controlled by greed and self-sufficiency, you ignore the warning signs. The second reaction is related.

2. *Convince yourself you can handle it (12).* Who's afraid of a little bad weather? We're experienced sailors! We can handle it! We know what to do.

I'm using the term *reaction* because you don't think about reactions. They just happen. And they just happen because of the condition of your heart. We've just seen the first two reactions of the sailors, which got them into this mess. Now the third.

3. *Try to make the best of a bad situation (13-17).* Notice verse 13, "When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had obtained what they wanted; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete."

Can't you just hear the pilot and crew with their smug, "We told you so, Paul. Leave the sailing to the experts next time, okay?"? But their tune soon changed.

We're told in verses 14-17 (ESV), "But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land. <sup>15</sup> And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. <sup>16</sup> Running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the ship's boat. <sup>17</sup> 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."

Meteorologists call this a perfect storm. Violent fronts collided and caused hurricane-force winds and gigantic waves. The crew did all it could to keep the boat afloat. They wrapped ropes around the hull so the vessel wouldn't tear apart. They couldn't fight the wind, so they gave way to it and launched out of control into the open sea.

You'll notice Luke uses the term "we" in verse 16 in reference to who made the lifeboat secure. F. F. Bruce writes, "There were certain jobs which only trained members of the crew could carry out, but any landlubber could haul on a rope, and some of the passengers were pressed into service. 'With difficulty,' Luke says, probably remembering his blisters!"<sup>7</sup>

4. *Take drastic measures (18-19).* "Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. <sup>19</sup> And on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands."

Now those are drastic measures. When sailors of their own free will pick up their cargo and throw it into the sea, it's bad. That's their source of income. But when they

---

<sup>7</sup> F. F. Bruce, p. 509.

toss their tackle overboard, it's an act of desperation. But if you don't know the Lord, that's the best you can do, namely, *do the best you can do*. My friend, if you don't know the Lord, when disaster strikes, you truly have no one to turn to but yourself.

And this leads to a fifth reaction...

5. *Lose hope (20)*. "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." Luke says the clouds were so thick that for day after day after day neither the sun nor the night stars could penetrate the darkness. Consequently, they lost hope. Actually, Luke says they *abandoned* hope, and convinced themselves there was no way out of this mess.

Have you ever lost hope, my friend? I'll say it again. Crisis is a revealer. It reveals what we're hoping in, and whether that source of hope can produce. And if it doesn't?

6. *Stop eating (21a)*. Verse 21 begins with this simple statement (NIV), "After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up..."

Why hadn't they eaten? Have you ever been seasick? Kent Hughes says he once heard of a woman who became seasick while on a day-long sport fishing boat. The lady staggered to the captain, held out the keys to her new car, and said he could have it if he would just turn around.<sup>8</sup>

Multiply that by one hundred. These men had spent multiple days and nights in hazardous conditions, on a rocking boat, soaked by the rain, with no time to stop and prepare food, and most of their supplies were now drenched. They've abandoned their last trace of hope that they're survive this nightmare, and eating is the last thing on their minds.

Ironically, it's the very thing that's on Paul's mind, as we'll see momentarily. For now, let's skip Paul's speech in verses 21-26, and notice the seventh reaction.

7. *Pray (27-29)*. "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.<sup>28</sup> So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms. A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms.<sup>29</sup> And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come."

Sailors are typically known for a different kind of vocabulary. You know the situation is severe when sin-hardened men pray. It's interesting that these sailors survived 14 days of terror at sea, with no mention of prayer. But once they realize they're approaching land in darkness without means to steer clear of rocks that would take them to the bottom, *they dropped their anchors and prayed* (NIV).

Indeed, it's interesting to see what it takes to get people to pray. A bad report from the doctor, a broken relationship, a lost job. That brings the Lord's name to some people's lips, perhaps for the first time in years. After 9-11, many people in our nation started praying, and sadly, for many it didn't last. Did it for these sailors?

Friends, is prayer in a crisis a good thing? Yes. But it's no guarantee of true repentance. Often it simply means, "I don't like what's happening in my life. I want it to be different. Please make it different, God." But we define what different means. We really don't want what *God* wants for our lives. We still want to be God.

Beloved, God didn't send His Son into the world merely to patch up our lives. Jesus died on the cross to save us both from our sins *and ourselves*. To be saved we must repent of this idolatrous approach to life, and put our total trust in Him. It's not a "Give me what I want, God!" prayer, but a prayer of Spirit-produced, heartfelt repentance and faith.

---

<sup>8</sup> Kent Hughes, p. 333.

This brings us to yet another common reaction to crisis by non-Christians.

8. *If you can save yourself, do it (30-32)*. “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,<sup>31</sup> Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, ‘Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.’<sup>32</sup> Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship’s boat and let it go (ESV).”

Apart from God’s grace, there’s one subject that controls us when crisis hits. It’s been this way since Adam. It’s *self*. Think of yourself. Do whatever it takes to take care of yourself. If there’s only enough room in the lifeboat for ten out of 276, do whatever it takes to make sure I one of them.

And when a person doesn’t think that way, we consider that person a hero, for it’s not common. Self-first is the natural default.

I see one final reaction illustrated in the story. Crisis can help us do this...

9. *Begin to realize what’s really important (33-38)*. “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.’<sup>34</sup> 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.’<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves.<sup>37</sup> (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.)<sup>38</sup> And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.”

It’s significant to note the progression of what the sailors gave up in this crisis. First their cargo (18), then their tackle (19), and now their lifeboat (32) and grain (38). In a few moments they’ll cut their anchors (40), and shortly after that they’ll even abandon their ship (43). And for the first time in a long time (if ever), they’re beginning to realize something very important.

Life is more than *things*. We can’t take it with us. Indeed, we’ll leave it all behind, and gladly so, if we can just have a little more life. This is something many people refuse to admit until crisis strikes, and then they have to admit it.

There’s the world’s response to crisis. It’s our response, apart from grace. But thankfully, because of grace, there’s a different way to respond, as did Paul.

**B. Here’s how God’s kind of people respond to crisis.** Notice six reactions.

1. *Face life as it is (9-10)*. Back in verse 9, Paul gave this advice, “If we travel, there will be great loss.” He wasn’t being negative or pessimistic. He was facing life as it was. It was the storm season. The threat was real. God’s kind of people look at life as it is, not as they wish it would be.

What’s more, they...

2. *Feel hopeless at times (20)*. In verse 20 Luke says, “We gave up hope of being saved.” We did. The sailors did. The Roman soldiers did. The other prisoners did. *We did, too*, admits Luke.

Let’s set the record straight. Christians struggle, too! Christians get down at times. Christians can even feel hopeless. It’s okay to struggle, brothers and sisters. We’re not robots. We are weak and vulnerable. We can identify with our unregenerate friends, can’t we?

But there’s one eternally significant difference. If we’re in Christ, we do not struggle (as Paul put it in 1 Thessalonians 4:13) “as those who have no hope.” We belong to the God of hope (Romans 15:13). And because we do, we have the ability, through Christ, to exhibit a third reaction.

3. *Trust in God's promises, not your feelings (21-26)*. I want you to see how Paul did this in the section we skipped earlier, verses 21-26, "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.<sup>22</sup> Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.<sup>23</sup> For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship,<sup>24</sup> 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.'<sup>25</sup> So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told.<sup>26</sup> But we must run aground on some island.'"

This is basic, yet so vital. What did Paul do? He chose to trust in God's promises rather than his feelings. Remember the storm is still raging, but Paul announces, "I have faith in God that it will happen just as He said."

When in a storm we must believe what God has said rather than give way to our feelings. You ask, "That would be nice, if only God would speak to us in our storms."

Yes, it would be. And He has spoken! He has given us the Scriptures. Therefore, we must saturate our minds with His Word, especially His promises, and claim them. Promises like 1 Corinthians 10:13, Proverbs 3:5-6, and Hebrews 13:5. God is sufficient!

And know this. If we truly trust in God's promises, we'll also do this.

4. *Act on God's promises (31)*. Paul believed God who promised that everyone would survive. That being the case, he took action. When he learned that some of the sailors were trying to steal the lifeboat, he objected to the centurion. "We're going to make it!" he insisted, "All of us!"

And so, the captain cut loose the lifeboat. What do you need a lifeboat for that holds only ten people if God says He's going to save all 276 anyway?!

That's what I call contagious faith. Paul has inspired the pilot!

By the way, remember that this emergency situation happened in the first place because one man refused to listen to God's messenger. Likewise, the near catastrophe is averted because of what one man did. Paul believed God and stepped forward with a plan of action.

5. *Think about the needs of others (33-34)*. In contrast with the sailors who thought only of saving themselves, look at Paul. "You need to eat," he told his fellow-shipmates. He thought of others—and remember, the storm is still howling.

That's not easy to do, is it? To think of others when you're in crisis, that's not natural. That's supernatural. As is this final reaction...

6. *Look for opportunities to bring glory to God (35)*. I love verse 35 (NIV), "After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all." What boldness! Paul called out to God out-loud in front of Roman soldiers, prisoners, and hardened sailors, indeed in front of 275 people. Luke makes it clear he prayed *in front of them all*.

Paul's actions had quite an effect, too. Luke says, "They were all encouraged."

Joseph Parker observed, "Paul began as a prisoner. He ended as the captain." Wiersbe is right, "A crisis does not make a person; a crisis shows what a person is made of, and it tends to bring true leadership to the fore."<sup>9</sup>

Never forget this, dear friends. God uses difficulties and even disaster. He uses it to teach us, but also to reveal Himself through us to others. When in crisis, we must have our eyes open for opportunities to bring glory to Him.

---

<sup>9</sup> Wiersbe, p. 509.



### III. Insight #3: God brings deliverance (39-44).

Here's how He did it in this particular storm, verses 39-44, "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.<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup> The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape.<sup>43</sup> 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,<sup>44</sup> and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land."

It was Roman law that if a criminal escaped, his guard must undergo the same penalty intended for the prisoner. That explains the soldiers' intent. But what explains the centurion's intervention? Paul's example sure made a big impact.

Now, step back from the story, look at the end again, and what do we see? Two outcomes.

**A. They lost everything.** The ship went to the bottom. They lost it all. But...

**B. They didn't lose their lives.** Let the facts sink in. It's about 1,200 miles on a straight course from Caesarea to Malta, probably 1,500 miles by the route Paul's ship took. The final leg, the one that included the storm, included a distance of nearly 500 miles and took 14 days. As they fell on the beach at Malta that day, it's true they were miles off course from Rome. Their food supplies were at the bottom of the sea. They had lost everything except the clothes they wore. But they were alive.

Do you see the mercy of God in this?. The Lord spared 276 lives—including soldiers, prisoners, and hardened sailors—all because of Paul. God once told Abraham He would have spared Sodom and Gomorrah if but ten righteous persons could have been found. The world has no idea of how much it owes to the presence of Christians in their midst. Most are just like the passengers on this ship. God spared them and they went on with life, oblivious to the blessing of God's mercy.

There's something we need to remember about storms. The storms of life that hit the world hit God's people as well. Financial crises. Broken relationships. Diseases. We're not exempt. The storm hits us all. The difference is the response. And the response indicates the condition of the heart.

We can claim to believe in the Lord, but our response while in the storm shows whether our faith is real or deficient. When life gets hard, how do we respond? We've seen two kinds of response today, how the world responds and how God's kind of person responds. Look again at the two lists. Which represents you? Be honest.

My friend, know this. God brings deliverance. If you want to be delivered from your sin, you cannot save yourself. You must look to Him. You must *believe* Him. If you are in crisis right now, you don't have the strength to make it. But He does. Trust Him.

I read through our church records this week to see what happened when the tornado hit Wheelersburg in 1968. I wanted to find out how that storm affected this church, and specifically, whether it's possible these 54 years later, to see God in that storm.

Indeed, it is. This is what I found.

A month before the tornado, at the March 1968 WBC business meeting, a motion was made to hold a joint missionary conference with Grace Baptist Church, Minford, and Madison Baptist Church, on April 28 through May 5 (with Harlan Willis, who served

with Baptist International Missions in an Alaska Youth Camp; and with Raymond Creer, serving in Korea with BMM). I don't know if that conference happened or not, but I do know that the person who made the motion wasn't there. That person was Anna Lou Armstrong, who died from injuries from the tornado on April 26, two days before it was scheduled to start.

At our April 1968 business meeting, just two weeks before the storm, the deacons recommended to the church that we sponsor a Bible Class in Ashland, KY, with a view to its development into a GARB church. That motion was seconded by Anna Lou Armstrong.

Two weeks after the storm, on May 8, 1968, the WBC family met for our mid-week prayer meeting and business meeting. The records indicate that no treasurer's report was read, due to loss of some papers in the tornado. The deacons recommended, and the church approved, the establishment of the Anna Lou Armstrong Memorial Missionary Fund, and designated these initial recipients:

- \$100 – Wycliffe Bible Translators
- \$100 – Military Missions, Inc
- \$100 – ABWE: Roberts Hedrick, O&P fund
- \$120 – BMM: Korea fund, support for one leper's child for one year
- \$100 – Baptist International Missions, Harlan Willis, Alaska youth camp
- \$100 – ABWE, Doane Bible Institute, Philippines
- \$100 – BMM, Bible Institute Manaos, Brazil
- \$151.66 – ABWE, Regular Baptist Press of Brazil

And there was more. The May financial report indicates that \$1,208.66 was paid from the Anna Lou Armstrong Memorial fund to the above recipients, as well as a gift of \$100 to the Baptist Haiti Missions Society.

On the back of the page, I found a simple note, indicating that Mrs. Anna Lou Litteral Armstrong and Mrs. Mary Adkins went to be with the Lord in April 1968, because of a tornado that hit Wheelersburg at 4:05 on Tuesday April 23. The note concluded with these words, "Wheelersburg Baptist Church suffered a great loss in losing these God loving members. Our loss was God's gain." (Church clerk-Frances Williams)

The Bottom Line: Enabled by grace, let's resolve to see God in the storm.

**Closing Song: #353 "A Shelter in the Time of Storm" (all four verses)**

Community Group Discussion:

1. This morning we looked at Acts 27 in a message entitled, "*Seeing God in the Storm.*" What's the worst storm (a literal storm) you've ever experienced? Share with the person next to you when it was, and how you felt.
2. Listen to the audio Bible recording of Acts 27 (if possible, listen to Max McClean reading the Listens Bible NIV, available on the YouVersion app). After listening, discuss what stands out to you.
3. Acts 27 is one of the longest chapters in the book of Acts. Why do think the Holy Spirit guided Luke to include so much detail in this chapter?
4. What does the storm in Acts 27 reveal about Paul? What evidences of grace do we see in his life? What does the storm reveal about God?
5. Think back to a storm (a difficult time) in your own life. What did you learn about God in that experience? What truths about Him became important to you?