

SERMON NOTES
Acts 27-28
“The Impact of Faith in a Crisis”

Intro:

- On our recent trip to the UK, Beth and I planned to drive from SW Scotland to Cambridge, England in one day – about 250 miles or so
- *Then we saw something on the map called the Yorkshire Dales – where James Herriot practiced veterinary medicine on All Creatures Great and Small*
- It was more or less on our way to Cambridge and would be a very scenic route across England

- **SHOW PICTURE # 1 FROM GOOGLE MAPS**

- You can see the highway at the top of the map going from Sedbergh east to Hawes and then eventually to a 4-lane expressway that would take us south to Cambridge
- *In the UK they have something called roundabouts – that are sometimes easy to navigate and sometimes a little confusing*
- In a roundabout in Sedbergh I took what I thought was the continuation of Hwy. A684
- *But the road became narrower even by English standards*

- **SHOW PICTURE # 2 FROM GOOGLE MAPS**

- *Then we came to a small town called Dent, which was not even on our map*
- So we did not know that we were no longer on Hwy. A684
- *In fact, as you can see – there is no road into or out of Dent worthy of being included on a map*

- Going out from Dent, the road narrowed to a one-lane road with either stone walls or hedges on one or both sides

- **SHOW PICTURES 060 AND 061**

- *By now it is clear that we are no longer on a highway and we are lost*
- We are crossing England from West to East in 2nd gear on nothing more than a country lane narrower than most American driveways

- *Having no idea where we were or where we were heading, but not wanting to go back 45 minutes to where we had come from – we decided to keep going and make an adventure of it*
- **SHOW PICTURE 063**
- It gets worse
- *After travelling another 30 minutes or so on roads like these, we came to this:*
- **SHOW PICTURE 064**
- *That's right – a gate*
- *Were we on private property – were we at a dead end – would we have to backtrack an hour to get back on the highway?*
- *At the gate we met a farmer, who said to us: You're lost, right?*
- *How could you tell?*
- *Where are you headed?*
- *Cambridge*
- *You're joking, right? (Not an encouraging comment)*
- *No, we need to get to Cambridge tonight*
- *You can't get there from here – You could go back to A684*
- *Is there a way to Ingleton south of here to get onto A65?*
- *Well, yes, you could go through several gates and up over the top on a road like this and then get on Hwy. A65 and head east to A1*
- *So Beth opened the gate, and I drove thru, and then she closed the gate, and we drove on – enjoying the scenery and sheep and cows*
- **SHOW PICTURE 066**
- *These are the reason why every half-mile or so we came to another of these*
- **SHOW PICTURE 067**
- *Are you familiar with the one-lane downhill and uphill road at Scott County Park?*
- *We traversed the Dales for 2 hours on a road similar to that*

- **SHOW GOOGLE MAPS PICTURE # 1**
- *As you can see, there's not a whole lot of civilization from Dent south to Ingleton*
- *During our 2+ hours or so of meandering in the Dales – during which we covered all of about 19 miles – we have now seen parts of the Yorkshire Dales that few Brits have seen*
- *Not all of our trip to the UK was that adventurous*
- **SHOW PICTURES 093, 098, 101, 086 one after another (3 seconds each)**
- *Here you can see us enjoying a leisurely afternoon of what is called punting down the River Cam with Peter and Jill and Juliann, with us allowing Peter to do all the work*
- **STOP SHOWING PICTURES**
- *The Apostle Paul's sea voyage from Caesarea to Rome was anything but leisurely and peaceful*
- *He and 275 others had an unplanned adventure that became a life-threatening crisis*
- *In fact, there was a point during the storm at sea that those on board gave up all hope of being saved*
- *It was at this point of lost hope that Paul's faith and courage shone brightly, and though he was a prisoner – he was the one who provided the leadership and encouragement needed to survive the ordeal*

I. TO JERUSALEM AND ON TO ROME

- *Toward the end of his 3rd missionary journey, Paul spoke these words in his farewell to the elders of the church in Ephesus:*

Acts 20:22 - 24 (NIV) ²²“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. ²⁴However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.”

- *Just as Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem where he would be nailed to a Cross, so also Paul set his face to go to Jerusalem to face imprisonment and suffering*

- And just as Jesus was arrested and falsely charged by the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem, so also was Paul
- *And just as Jesus endured a series of trials in Jewish and Roman courts, so also did Paul*
- But whereas Jesus was silent as a Lamb before his accusers, Paul was not
- Paul defended His Gospel in front of a Jewish crowd at the Temple courts, and to the Jewish Sanhedrin, and to the Roman governor of Judea – Felix – and again at Caesarea to Festus and King Agrippa
- *Rather than entrust his fate to the rulers of his own Jewish people, Paul – a Roman citizen by birth – appealed to Caesar for justice*
- *Ironically, this appeal prevented Paul from being set free*

Acts 26:32 (NIV) ³²Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

- Paul had written the Roman Christians of his longing to visit them
- *And Jesus had told Paul that he would testify in Rome*

Acts 23:11 (NIV) ¹¹The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, **“Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”**

- *But Paul could not have anticipated that he would go to Rome as a prisoner and would arrive there only after a harrowing sea voyage that nearly cost his life*

II. STORM AT SEA

- Paul was transferred to the command of Julius, a Roman centurion of the Augustan Cohort of Imperial Command, who proved to be a decent man of kindness and integrity who cared for Paul admirably well
- *Paul was accompanied by his companion, the physician Luke, and also by a Thessalonian brother in Christ – Aristarchus – who may have been allowed to accompany Paul only by serving as his slave*
- *They traveled from the Eastern Mediterranean toward modern day Turkey – and there at Myra of Lycia they boarded a grain ship that was headed from Alexandria in Egypt toward Rome via Asia Minor*

SHOW BIBLICAL MAP OF PAUL'S JOURNEY

- Due to adverse wind conditions, they hugged the coastline and then headed for the lee side of the island of Crete – landing at Fair Havens
- *By now it was after the Day of Atonement in early October when sailing the Mediterranean became hazardous*
- Paul, an experienced seafarer, warned the centurion about the dangers of travelling that late in the season

Acts 27:9 - 10 (NIV) ⁹Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Fast. 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.”

- *But just as Phoenix, AZ is a popular winter home now – so also Phoenix, Crete was regarded as a much more favorable place to winter than Fair Havens, and so the centurion was persuaded by the pilot and the ship's owner to press on westward*

SHOW BIBLICAL MAP OF PAUL'S JOURNEY

- When a gentle south wind began to blow, they decided to head out
- *But before long, a wind of hurricane force – called “The Northeaster” blew them away from the island of Crete and out to sea*
- They experienced a brief respite on the lee side of the small island of Cauda 23 miles south of Crete – *where they made their lifeboat secure and passed ropes under the ship to reinforce the hull and lowered a sea anchor and threw most of the grain cargo and some of the ship's tackle overboard*
- The great fear was that the ship would either be broken apart by the hurricane or else it would be blown south onto the Syrtis sandbanks off the coast of Libya where many a ship had met its doom

STOP SHOWING BIBLICAL MAP

- The ship was driven by the raging storm for 14 days and nights – with neither sun nor stars to guide them – and this in the day before GPS or even compass and sextant
- *Most of the 276 people on board had not eaten during those 2 weeks due to seasickness and stress and fear*
- They were exhausted / hungry / weak / fatigued / overcome with fear / and were at the point of giving up all hope of being saved

- *It was at this point – when all seemed to be lost – that Paul stepped up to the role of leader to bring encouragement and hope and wisdom to the crew*
- Remember, Paul was just a prisoner of Rome
- *Paul was NOT the official chaplain of the ship*
- He was not nearly as well-known or well-respected yet as someone like Billy Graham in our era
- **This was not a group of Christians going on a mission trip to Rome with the Apostle Paul as the acknowledged spiritual leader – this was a grain ship carrying some grain and some prisoners to Rome under the authority of a Roman centurion and a pagan captain and pilot – of the 276 people on board, probably only 3 were Christians: Paul, Luke and Aristarchus – a prisoner, a physician and a slave**
- But there was one thing that set Paul apart from the rest: *not his position or status or occupation or professional calling – but rather – his faith and his strength of character and his trust in God’s Sovereignty*
- ***A Spirit-filled Christian filled with the Spirit and Life and Courage of Jesus will rise to the challenge in adverse circumstances***
- *How did Paul gain leadership influence and credibility in a time of crisis in spite of his lowly status as a prisoner?*
- ***Paul became an agent of hope in the midst of a hopeless situation***
- **Paul’s courage and calm as an agent of hope were rooted in his faith in God’s character and Sovereignty**
- *Paul believed in a God who controlled the wind and the waves*
- Now, in this situation, God did not still the storm and calm the waves
- *The storm raged on for 14 days*
- But God controlled the storm and the outcome
- **Because Paul believed so strongly in the Sovereignty of God, he could look beyond the bleak situation and anticipate the good to come out of it**
- Now this does not mean an exemption from suffering and hardship
- *God did not exempt His Son Jesus from suffering and even the death of the Cross – nor did God exempt Paul from suffering and eventual martyrdom*
- To say that God is in control is not to say that things always turn out as we would wish

- **What makes Christian hope so indomitable is that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ assures us that not even Death can defeat us**
- ***And if you can face down Death with hope and courage – then you can face down anything with hope and courage***
- **That Hope gave Paul this kind of confidence and attitude:**

2 Corinthians 4:8 - 11 (NIV) ⁸We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.

Philippians 1:20-21 ²⁰I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

- ***To live is Christ and to die is gain – pretty tough to intimidate a man with that hope***
- **If you believe that God is in control and that to live is Christ but to die is gain – then that hope will be a source of courage that will rise to any challenge or crisis**

Acts 27:21 - 26 (NIV) ²¹After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: “Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. ²²But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. ²³Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me ²⁴and 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.’ ²⁵So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. ²⁶Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island.”

- ***Having given hope and encouragement to the crew, Paul then kept everyone on the ship together***
- **On the 14th night of the storm, the ship finally approached land**
- ***As the sailors took depth soundings, they feared crashing against a shoal or rocks or a reef – and so they let down the four anchors and prayed for daybreak***
- **At this point, some of the sailors planned to escape in the lifeboat in the dark of the night**

- *But Paul intervened and told the centurion to keep the sailors on board or else the rest of the passengers would not be saved*
- **Then just before dawn, Paul took charge again to encourage everyone to eat**

Acts 27:33 - 36 (NIV) ³³Just 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. ³⁴Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.” ³⁵After 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. ³⁶They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves.

- *Paul’s relationship with the Lord gave him the strength, the calmness, the wisdom, the courage, and the leadership abilities to function as the strategic and inspirational and spiritual leader for the entire crew*
- **Paul’s faith made a significant impact on a crew of hardened pagan soldiers and sailors in a time of crisis – not because he was a missionary or an apostle – *but because he was a man of God and a man of faith***

III. SHIPWRECK & MINISTRY ON MALTA

- **After eating their meal of bread, the crew lightened the ship further by discarding the rest of the grain cargo into the sea**
- *At daylight they noticed a bay with a beach, and they cut loose the anchors and set sail for the beach*
- **But the ship became grounded on a reef some distance from shore – and the pounding surf began to break the stern into pieces**
- *The soldiers feared that the prisoners might escape – in which case the soldiers would be sentenced to death – so they planned to kill the prisoners before they could escape*
- **But the centurion Julius wanted to spare Paul’s life, so he prevented the soldiers from doing so**
- *Julius instructed those who could swim to jump overboard and swim to shore, while the rest were to find planks or pieces of the ship in the water and use them to get to shore*
- **And just as God had promised Paul – everyone reached land safely**

SHOW BIBLICAL MAP OF PAUL’S JOURNEY

- **Once on shore, they discovered they were on the island of Malta – an island 18 miles long and 8 miles wide and located 58 miles south of Sicily**

- The Maltese natives showed the stranded party much kindness and hospitality

STOP SHOWING MAP

- *Paul – ever the servant-leader – was gathering some firewood for the fire on this cold and rainy day – when a poisonous viper latched onto Paul’s hand and presumably bit him*
- The islanders figured this must be divine justice – a criminal escaping death at sea only to be killed by a poisonous snake
- *But Paul shook off the viper and suffered no ill effects*
- Then the islanders figured he must be a god instead to survive a viper bite
- The leading official on the island was a man named Publius, whose father was suffering from dysentery and a high fever
- *Paul prayed and laid hands on him and healed him of his illness*
- And then Paul – perhaps with Luke’s help – healed many other sick Maltese people
- *They spent the 3 months of winter on Malta before setting sail for Italy*

IV. ARRIVAL & MINISTRY IN ROME

SHOW BIBLICAL MAP

- After a layover at Syracuse on the island of Sicily, and a stop at Rhegium on the tip of Italy, they finally landed at Puteoli, about 75 miles from Rome
- *They would finish the journey by land*

Acts 28:15 The brothers and sisters in Rome had heard we were coming, and they came to meet us at the Forum on the Appian Way. Others joined us at The Three Taverns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.

- The Forum of Appius was 43 miles from Rome, and the town of Three Taverns was 33 miles from Rome
- *So eager were these Roman Christians to meet Paul, that they traveled that far to accompany him on the rest of his journey to Rome*
- *The word for “meet” in verse 15 is a technical term in Greek for the official welcome of a newly arrived dignitary by a deputation of city officials going out to greet him and escort him back into the city*

- It is the same word used by Paul in I Thessalonians 4 describing the Rapture and Second Coming

1 Thessalonians 4:16 - 17 (NIV) ¹⁶For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to **meet** the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

- When Paul finally arrived in Rome, he was placed under house arrest for 2 years
- *He lived in a “hired dwelling” paid at his own expense, large enough to accommodate a large group of people, and he was placed under the care of a soldier and chained to his guard – probably by the wrist*
- This guard would probably work a 4-hour shift
- *How would you like to be a non-Christian Roman soldier chained to the Apostle Paul for 4 hours every day?*
- *Talk about a captive audience!*
- *Paul was free to talk about Jesus all day long, and the guards were stuck with him for hours at a time*
- While in chains in Rome for 2 years, Paul had many opportunities to proclaim Christ to Jewish leaders, Roman guards and officials, Roman Christians, and most probably with Caesar himself
- *Luke ends Acts without telling us the outcome of Paul’s imprisonment*
- But piecing together what we know from other sources, it is believed that Paul was released after 2 years, that he went on another missionary journey – perhaps reaching as far as Spain – that he wrote Titus and I & II Timothy, that he was imprisoned again, and that he was executed in Rome under Nero about 64 AD
- *Paul’s 3rd missionary journey ended in 57 AD – followed by 2 years of prison in Caesarea, a 6-month journey to Rome as a prisoner, and then 2 more years of house arrest in Rome*
- Paul was a missionary at heart and by divine calling – yet he was kept out of commission for nearly 5 years
- *Were those wasted years – years Paul spent feeling sorry for himself?*
- **Paul trusted the sovereignty of God and made the most of every opportunity to proclaim Christ – whether as a free man or as a prisoner**

- Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians were written while Paul was imprisoned and unable to carry on his missionary activity
- And Luke ends Acts with these words:

Acts 28:30 - 31 (NIV) ³⁰For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. ³¹Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

- *The last word in the Greek text of Acts is the word meaning: **unhindered***
- Paul was in chains – but the Gospel was going forth **unhindered** in the capital of the Roman Empire
- **God was in control**

V. APPLICATIONS FOR US

(1) Following Christ: Adventure / Suffering / Fullness of Life

- *Life with Christ is sometimes hard // sometimes uncomfortable // sometimes exciting // sometimes scary // sometimes discouraging // sometimes painful // sometimes perplexing – but never dull and boring*
- **Even in prison – Paul’s life had meaning and purpose**
- Christ does not promise to deliver us from all our troubles and heartaches – *but he does promise to give us an abundant life in all its fullness – and he delivers on that promise for all who are willing to abandon themselves to His cause*

(2) Faith at Work: Spiritual Leadership in the “Real World”

- We often think of spiritual leadership as something that is for pastors and missionaries and church leaders – or we think of it as something that we do at church or perhaps also in a Christian home
- *Paul exercised spiritual leadership not only when he was teaching in a church or synagogue or preaching in a marketplace or fulfilling his spiritual duties as a missionary and evangelist and church-planter*
- **Paul exercised spiritual leadership as a lowly prisoner and ordinary passenger in a real world life-threatening crisis at sea**

- ***Wherever there is danger // wherever there are challenges // wherever there is trouble // wherever there are problems // wherever there are vulnerable people who are needy or scared or feeling powerless – there is an opportunity for men and women of faith to be spiritual leaders and to make a significant impact in a crisis situation***
- **The darker the situation – the greater the opportunity for men and women of faith to act as agents of hope as witnesses of the risen Christ**

(3) Hope for the Journey – Confidence in God’s Sovereignty

- ***It is human nature to panic when things spin out of control – whether a storm at sea or a stormy marriage or a troubled economy or a financial setback or a wayward child or a gross injustice or a health crisis or the loss of a loved one***
- **At times like that we need an anchor for the soul**
- ***Why do couples give up on their marriages? Why do addicts return to their addictions? Why do the unemployed give up looking for work?***
- ***They lack hope for the journey***
- **When circumstances turn against them, they have no anchor for the soul to give them hope for the journey**
- **What provides that anchor for the soul?**
- ***Trust in God’s character // trust in God’s sovereignty – that He is in control of the wind and the waves and storms of life // trust in God’s Hesed love – His unfailing lovingkindness and tender mercies – trust that the heart of the Almighty is good and kind***
- **Trust in the Risen Christ – that Jesus lives and reigns as Lord of Life and Lord of all – that all the enemies of our soul have been defeated by the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus – that Death does not have the final word – that wherever the risen Christ is present, there is always hope of newness of life**
- ***Confidence in the Bible as the Word of God – that what the Bible teaches us about God and about life and about suffering and about the meaning and purpose of life and about God’s Providential Care and about eternal life – that all of it is true***
- **If you have confidence that God is good and God is in control even when life seems to be spinning out of control – then you can be an agent of hope and a spiritual leader, and your faith can make an impact in a time of crisis**

(4) Proclaiming Good News in Bad Circumstances

- *Paul was in chains – and he could have responded with self-pity and resentment and bitterness -- yet instead he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ boldly and **unhindered***
- **Paul refused to be hindered by his chains**
- How about you?
- *Is there something hindering you from devoting yourself fully to living for Christ and serving Christ and telling others about Christ?*
- *Are you waiting for a change in your circumstances – or for God to do something for you first? Are you wallowing in self-pity and resentment – waiting for God to fix your situation so that you can then live for Him and serve Him?*
- **Or will you choose to live by faith – and refuse to be hindered by your chains – and not let anything hold you back from living wholeheartedly for the One who loved you and gave His life for you?**

Prayer

“I Walk by Faith”