

## "Do not be afraid"

### Acts 27:1-26

**27:1** 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. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us.

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

**9** Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Day of Atonement.[a] 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.

#### The Storm

**13** 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[b] 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.

**21** After they 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. **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."

I had been reading Acts in my daily Bible study. Recently, I had just reached chapter 27.

First of all, let me explain a little bit about chapter 27. This is a record of an adventurous voyage written by Luke, a Christian who happened to be a doctor. Therefore, it is a record based on Luke's own experience, not fiction written based on someone's imagination. Luke was accused by the Jews of trying to kill Paul through their hostility against him. I won't go into the details regarding the Roman provincial governors, but in the end, Paul appealed to the Romans, claiming that he was innocent and didn't commit crime. The Roman soldiers were to escort him back to Rome to meet the Roman emperor. At that time, ships were used to transport prisoners. The convoys were not dedicated government vessels, but private transports used to carry goods at the time. The number of prisoners escorted to Rome at this time was 276, including Paul. The ship was a large wooden sailboat, and it was probably quite large. The ship was driven solely by the wind in its sails and the force of the wind pushing it forward. Naturally, the sailors had to know where they were sailing by the shape of the land, and they had to judge how much further they could go depending on the direction of the wind and the strength of the wind. In the days before the invention of the compass, navigation was based solely on experience and knowledge of the land, the stars, the moon, and the sun. As a result, traveling, whether by land or sea, was far more dangerous back then than it is today. Today, safe travel is taken for granted, but travel in those days was unimaginable, and travel was "naturally dangerous."

There were Christians aboard the ship who accompanied Paul. One person we know for sure is Aristarcho. The other was Luke, the author of Acts.

Luke wrote Acts in the second person, using the expression "we". In other words, among the 276 people aboard, we know that three of them were Christians. This means that the majority of the remaining passengers were unbelievers.

After setting sail for Italy, the sailors and captains gradually moved the ship forward based on the condition of the land, wind, and other factors.

**4 From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us. 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. 9 Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Day of Atonement.**

The changing of seasons from autumn to winter brought risks to the voyage. The winds were whimsical and Luke notes that the voyage ahead was "perilous". When it became clear that there was danger ahead, Paul stood up and offered some advice.

**9 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.**

Paul's advice was that the upcoming voyage would not only be a burden to the ship, but would also endanger the lives of everyone, including Paul himself.

Paul had a lot of experience journeying by land as a missionary, but he likely didn't have much experience with navigation by sea. However, he likely was given the knowledge and judgment of a "semi-professional" who had gained knowledge through experience.

But the Roman centurion trusted the sailors and captains with the navigators and captains, who did not heed Paul's advice.

This isn't entirely unreasonable. Paul was just a prisoner at this time, and compared to those with hands-on experience, he was just a complete amateur. Therefore, it was not unreasonable for the Roman centurion to listen to the opinions of the navigators who had experienced a hundred battles.

It is important to recall the distinction between amateurs and experts.

The opinions of those who are called experts must be respected. Positions endowed by God should also be accepted as such. The Bible does not teach that if you received a gift from the Lord, you don't have to listen to the opinions of experts.

However, when we are backed by faith, it is possible for the Lord to give enlightenment about His will as a special gift.

We should listen to and understand the opinions of the world's experts. But at the

same time, Christians are given the intelligence to understand the opinions of experts, to criticize them correctly, and to discern the truth.

The advice of an elder on a matter should not be disregarded because he does not have a professional theological education. The opinions of the elders should be accepted and heard in the church, as should those of the pastor.

Why did Paul not speak in the name of God at this time? The reason Paul did not say that my advice was backed by God Almighty was because to the majority of people it was just a "picture-perfect" idea that they could not accept, and also there is a time for everything. The time for acceptance was when their trust in what they thought they could rely on was completely destroyed and they were forced to accept Paul's belief in God's existence and God's power.

The Roman centurion, based on the opinion of the navigators and captains, pushed ahead with the ship, but still, disaster struck.

**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.**

**13 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.**

As Paul predicted, the ship was completely out of control. Luke wrote that a violent storm was blowing so violently that their last hope of being saved was now coming to an end.

Luke, a Christian, felt that the light of hope was fading from his heart as well. But only one person, Paul, had a glimmer of hope.

Have you ever experienced the loss of all hope for life? It is possible for God to take away something that one had been relying on in order to make one ask more of Him. Every support for life is a gift we receive from the Lord. There are no exceptions. They are all gifts from the Lord.

But if, at some point, we are made to realize that nothing on earth can be relied upon, and we can see a path to simply turn to the Lord, isn't this the perfect opportunity for further growth in faith and for further blessings to be added to our lives?

This is what Paul said:

**21 After they 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. 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."**

The hope that Paul was given is available to all Christians. Still, there are times, as was the case with Luke, when the light of hope that should have been given to Christians seems to have been swallowed up by the despair that confronts us. We see this happen many times throughout the years of our lives.

No matter how little hope we find in earthly things, we are blessed if we can confess that we have an unquenchable hope in Christ.

This is what Paul said in his letter to the Romans chapter 8:

**35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?**

**36 As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."**

**37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.**

**38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, [b] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

This promise is given to all Christians.

Even for Paul, he was not told how or which island he would arrive at.

Trust in the Lord does not mean that we are secure because everything is known. What is not known is the Lord's will, which the Bible discloses to us as the sole standard of faith and life, but for us there are many things that belong to the Lord that are still hidden from others.

Besides the angel's words to Paul, "Do not be afraid," there is more we should pay attention to.

It is found in verse 24: **God has given you all the people who are in the same boat with you.**

It's unclear what this means at first. Did Paul feel any guilt about the 276 people including himself? He was not being held accountable for any public responsibility.

He was not responsible for the lives of all of them.

I think this is where Paul's prayer is hidden.

Paul probably prayed for the protection of the lives of everyone aboard the ship, including himself.

On board the ship were the sailors of the transports, as well as centurions, Roman soldiers, and the rest were prisoners. They were probably a group of criminals with no idea what kind of criminal records they had. They were all people who did not care what happened to each other as long as they could save their own lives.

That is probably why the sailors were looking for an opening and trying to escape. (verse 30)

When the ship was about to break down, the soldiers wanted to kill all the prisoners, including Paul. If they had let the prisoners go, they would have been told by the Romans to take responsibility, and possibly even their own lives would be at danger.

But Paul did not think so. This is because the Lord desires that all men repent and come to salvation. However, the so-called "salvation of all people" that ultimately all human beings will be saved is not a teaching derived from the Bible, even though it is rooted in human desire.

In any age, we should pray to avoid encountering dangerous journeys. But in any age, blessed are those who are prepared to pray, intercede, and confess what they believe about God for the multitude who are not Christians. The Lord thus granted Paul's request.

When Paul spoke the words of the angel and shared God's promises, I don't think everyone took them seriously. But by destroying the things that each one of them had relied on in order to convey the presence of the Almighty God who sustains all things that come to pass, the temporary illusion of security disappeared, and only the hope that truly remains forever was presented for all to see.