

“Saved From the Shipwreck”

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## Opening Prayer

Good morning, hope you folks are doing well out there! God is still in control, He is still at work, and He will most certainly see us through all of this. Praise the Lord that in the midst of crisis that we can still place our hope in Him. As we continue to endure all of this stuff, our focus in church (house churches?) is that of joy and hope. Two weeks ago we looked at how Christ set us captives free, last week we talked about how He killed death, and this week we are looking at how God’s great plan can see us through even the scariest of times. This week we are talking about one of the times that Paul was shipwrecked in the book of Acts. We should recognize that this recount out of Acts has hope for us, as by God’s hand Paul and the whole crew were saved even though it was terrifying for a time. Sounds very familiar to what we are going through now... the Coronavirus, political garbage, and worldwide outlook may be bleak, but we know very well that the Lord will take us home no matter what happens here.

Depending on who you ask, this final section in the book of Acts recounts either one of Paul’s journeys or only journey to Rome. The evidence is somewhat unclear as to how many times Paul went to Rome, but the general consensus is that Paul dies in Rome by the Emperor’s hand in chains. It appears that when He wrote the book of Romans that he had not been there yet, and that when he writes 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy he is about to be put to death. (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:6-8 talks about him being poured out, having finished the fight, etc.) Outside of those guesses, we aren’t entirely sure. With that being said, we get a great picture of Paul’s journey to Rome in the latter part of Acts.

To give you the short overview, Paul is accused of spreading Christianity by the Jews in Judea, and he is imprisoned by the Romans for a while to keep the peace. Then later Paul appeals to the Roman Emperor because he is a Roman citizen, and off they take him to Rome. On his way to Rome, which is well documented by Luke in the later half of the book of Acts, Paul at one point tells the captain of the prisoner ship that a shipwreck was coming. (This happens right before our reading for today.) In Acts 27:9 reads “When considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast was already over, Paul began to admonish them.” Basically, it was getting to close to winter to sail safely, and they decided to keep sailing anyways against Paul’s wishes. This brings us to our reading for today, where they do indeed shipwreck.

The whole incident starts off pretty innocently in verses 14-15: “But before very long there rushed down from the land a violent wind, called Euraquilo; and when the ship was caught in it and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and let ourselves be driven along.” This should

bring to mind the famous Gordon Lightfoot song "Edmund Fitzgerald." Sailing the high seas during certain points of the year is more dangerous than others, and unfortunately for Paul and the whole prisoner ship, they end up in the worst case scenario. The response of being violently tossed about is that they do what they humanly can. They brace the ship up with cables (vs. 17), they jettison the cargo (vs. 18), and they get rid of even the extra rigging with their bare hands. (vs. 19). This is desperate stuff, and they go a long time without food in the midst of great storms. I don't claim to know much about the high seas or sailing, but what I do know about Lake Superior (basically a sea in itself right?) is that the winds in November are horrendous and downright dangerous for any sized ship. For these folks, they are caught in it and the options are not good. In verses 22-24 Paul steps up suddenly, and gives hope to these hopeless men.

"Yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.'" In the middle of a hopelessly lost situation, Paul now has the ear of the commanders. These men are all believers in some god. Being a group almost certainly of Greeks and Romans, they understood very well that some higher power controlled their fate... so why not trust the word of the guy who had accurately predicted the mess they were in? An interesting point should be made here regarding those on the ship with Paul. There were 276 total people aboard. Of those, Paul and probably at least one other person with him (likely Luke who recounts the story) are believers. The vast majority would not have any inkling even who Jesus is, let alone be following Him. By the end of this insane voyage no doubt many would be.

As they continue to be beaten about in the water, they approach some land and reckon rightly that they are probably going to run aground. Paul again encourages them in verse 34 by saying "Therefore I encourage you to take some food, for this is for your preservation, for not a hair from the head of any of you will perish." Pretty bold words on their own, but again this is coming from the same man who had already predicted the mess they were in. Having said these encouraging words, in the time when it was probably most scary for them (they hadn't eaten in several days and they had seen that soon a shipwreck was coming... that is when it is the most dangerous for obvious reasons), Paul then does something very strange. In verse 35 he takes Communion in front of them. "Having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to eat." Then they too are encouraged and also eat, before then throwing out the last of their cargo, their food.

In the morning, after they had gotten rid of the last of their provisions, they came across an island and decided to run the ship aground on a beach they had seen. Unfortunately, they instead ran into a reef off shore, and everyone ends up having to swim or float to the island. In verse 42-44 we see this play out in an amazing way where everyone survives off this prison

ship. “The soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none of them would swim away and escape; but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, and the rest should follow, some on planks, and others on various things from the ship. And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land.”

The island that they ended up being shipwrecked on is the island of Malta, which is located south of the island of Sicily in the Mediterranean. While there Paul performs a couple of miracles, heals some folks (including the ruling official’s father), and they get well honored. Eventually, they set sail again and off Paul goes to Rome where he will eventually be executed by the emperor. It is marvelous and fascinating, and it should give us hope today as we endure even more time in quarantine.

Beloved, there are many parallels to the situation of being on a doomed ship and what we (at least what we feel like) have endured over the past few months. If you turn on the news it is easy to have your hopes dashed. It is frustrating and scary and we wonder what is going to happen next. The people on the prison ship with Paul had no hope. They could stay on the ship and probably drown, or try and swim away in treacherous waters and probably drown. For the prisoners being brought to Rome it was likely just an earlier death. Yet in this trial God reigned, and for us He still reigns. Paul ultimately was still executed in Rome as a martyr, but he recounts many times how he knows where he goes. We too know where we go. What do we have to fear, we have the Lord on our side. In the middle of their struggle on that ship they took communion, and all of them were encouraged. This morning, while we are still in the middle of our struggles with the Coronavirus and quarantines and the hardships of 2020, we will do the same. Of those 276 people on that ship, only a couple knew what the Lord could do. Afterwards we should again remember that many more probably took stock in Jesus’s name.

Beloved, Jesus will see us through. We are going to be here next month and next year. This morning as we take Communion, as we continue to weather this storm, I invite you to take respite with me in the hope we have in Christ. God is still in control, and we can place our faith squarely in Him. Let us pray.

### **Closing Prayer**