

Paul had been arrested in Jerusalem when the Jews in the temple attempted to beat him to death. He'd shared his conversion account with them and with the Roman governors in Caesarea, as well as with King Agrippa II. He escaped a second assassination plot by appealing to Rome. We don't know what charges were issued against him for the king and governor both thought he was innocent. Paul knew he would go to Rome, for Jesus had appeared to him and told him as much (Acts 23:11ⁱ). He had also written to the church in Rome telling them how he longed to visit them (Romans 1:11ⁱⁱ). Now Rome is paying his way to fulfill his desire.

¹ 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. ² 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. Acts 27:1-2 Once again we see Luke as a historian, and who apparently made the trip with Paul, (see "we" in the text) give a very detailed account of the ports, actions, and conversations. The centurion, Julius, belonged to an elite unit of the Roman army. He was given the task of seeing this small group of prisoners safely to Rome to stand trial. Paul was able to have Luke and Aristarchus accompany him. They must have paid their own passage or accompanied Paul as his servants. Their fellowship no doubt comforted Paul on the difficult journey that lay ahead.

³ The next day we put in at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for. Acts 27:3 They sailed from Caesarea to Sidon. It is unusual that Julius would have treated Paul so kindly as to let him visit friends. Paul could have easily escaped and that would have left Julius to be tried for any crime charged against Paul. Paul must have impressed Julius as an extremely trustworthy person. Perhaps Julius heard of Paul's conversion while on the way to Sidon and may have even seen the scars Paul bore for testifying of Jesus as the Messiah and Savior of the world (Galatians 6:17ⁱⁱⁱ). The church in Sidon was surely glad to see Paul, and probably gave him any assistance that he needed.

⁴ And putting out to sea from there we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. ⁵ And when we had sailed across the open sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia. Acts 27:4-5 To the lee of Cyprus would have been the northern shore where the waters were calmer. Paul passed his home shores of Cilicia and landed at the port in Myra. A western text tells us that it took two weeks thus far. Here the group going to Italy had to disembark and look for another ship.

⁶ There the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy and put us on board. ⁷ We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, and as the wind did not allow us to go farther, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone. ⁸ Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea. Acts 27:6-8 Julius found a ship from Alexandria that was bringing

grain to Rome. Most of the grain consumed in Rome came from North Africa. The working class in Rome was kept from revolting against the upper classes by the distribution of free bread. Augustus assumed that as long as they were kept from starvation and were entertained by the coliseum, they would be satisfied. It worked so the tradition continued. It increasingly became a major expense for Rome.

The grain ship made its way along the coast and then heading south rounded coast of Crete to the southern side of the island. With great effort they made it to the port called Fair Havens.

⁹ Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, ¹⁰ saying, "Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives." Acts 27:9-10 In late summer, the winds from the northeast made sailing dangerous. The Fast that Paul refers to is the Day of Atonement. In AD 59 that fell of October 5th. Everyone knew it was too dangerous to try to get to Rome. The question was where to spend the winter. Paul told them they should stay put, that if they went out to sea they would lose the cargo and endanger their lives. He had sailed this route numerous times on his missionary journeys, but more importantly, he had the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

¹¹ But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. Acts 27:11 This is a situation we all deal with at times in our lives. Do we listen to the so called "experts"? Or should we listen to the Holy Spirit and godly advice from people who walk with the Lord? I sympathize with the centurion. I have too often gone with the world's wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:20^v; 2 Corinthians 1:12^v). After all, they know more about it than I do. I assume that my inclination must be wrong. I second guess that check I have from the Spirit and learn the hard way that God knows better than the experts.

¹² And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there. Acts 27:12 Phoenix was a port further to the west on those southern shores of Crete. The directions the port faced meant that large waves would not enter. It would be a much safer place to spend the winter, or so they thought.

¹³ Now when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to the shore. ¹⁴ But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land. ¹⁵ And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. Acts 27:13-15 A south wind would keep them close to the shore and out of danger from being blown out to sea. It looked like it was going to be alright until the winds shifted and the northeaster wind caught the ship and their worst fears were realized. The NIV calls this a hurricane force wind (Luke used a Greek word from which we get our word

typhoon). They were driven out to sea at this treacherous time of year. All they could do was let the wind carry them wherever it would. (Show map here.)

16 Running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the ship's boat. 17 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. Acts 27:16-17 With a little protection from the wind by the island Cauda, they were able to secure the lifeboat and then put rope supports under the ship. Luke gives the interesting detail that it appeared the direction they were going would cause them to run aground, so they lowered something to slow them. ESV says it was the gear. NIV calls it the sea anchor. Whatever it was, it did the trick and slowed them enough so the wind would cause them to miss the shallows. The crew would have been in near panic mode, knowing that these conditions often resulted in all being drowned at sea.

18 Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. 19 And 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 no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned. Acts 27:18-20 To lighten the ship and cause it to ride higher on the water they began tossing the cargo. This was a desperate measure. People had paid for those goods and expected them to arrive safely in Rome. The ship's tackle went next. That meant they no longer expected to find a port. The storm lasted for days causing everyone to give up hope.

21 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. 22 Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. Acts 27:21-22 Paul wasn't just saying, "I told you so." He was establishing the fact that he was led by God. He desperately wanted to help them by telling them what God had told him. No one would drown. The ship would be lost, but they would survive.

23 For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, 24 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.' 25 So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. 26 But we must run aground on some island." Acts 27:23-26 Paul explained why they should take heart. He had an angel visit him with a message from God. I've always thought this was Jesus, who in the Old Testament is called the angel of the LORD (Genesis 22:11-12^{vi}; Exodus 3:2-4^{vii}). But the text does not identify the angel. Angel in Greek simply means a messenger. This was a messenger of *the* God to whom Paul belonged and whom he worshiped. That is a rich description of Paul's relationship to God. He belongs to Him and worships Him. Paul's letter to the Corinthians declares that we are bought with a price, referring to the blood of Jesus. So we should glorify God with our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:20^{viii}). Is this how you would describe yourself? If a friend gave their life so you could live, how would you honor them? Jesus did more than that. He paid your

sin debt with His own body. That is the price He paid for you because of His great love for you. How are you going to respond to that? It isn't just a story. It is an eternal reality. One day in heaven we will stand before Jesus and review how we responded to His loving sacrifice for us (Romans 14:12^{ix}). What should we do about that today?

The angel told Paul that God granted him all who were with him. It sounds like an answer to Paul's prayers. Paul knew he was going to Rome. Jesus had told him that when he was in Jerusalem (Acts 23:11^x). He could be sure that God would keep His word and get him to Rome, but Paul's concern was for the crew. He apparently had prayed that they all be kept safe as well. That is the love of Christ flowing through him.

Paul used the revelation to comfort the men on board. He is doing what he encouraged others to do at the beginning of the second letter to the Corinthians. Comfort others with the comfort with which God comforts you (2 Corinthians 1:2-4^{xi}). Be God's instrument to encourage and comfort others when life is tough. We live in a fallen world and some of our greatest lessons come through times of great pain and stress. If you want comfort and encouragement, sow it into the lives of others. Paul declared that what God told him would come to pass exactly the way God said it would.

²⁷ 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. ²⁸ So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms. A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms. ²⁹ And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. Acts 27:27-29 It had been another 14 days since they left Fair Haven stuck in this storm blowing them toward the coast of North Africa. The sailors may have heard the sound of crashing waves in the distance. Something caused them to start checking the depths. The first depth was 120 feet. The next was 90. They were nearing shallow water so they quickly let down four anchors and prayed for daylight. They were hoping they could run the ship into a beach if possible and were fearful the shore would be rocky.

³⁰ 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, ³¹ Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved."

³² Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go. Acts 27:30-32 The sailors made a plan to escape with the lifeboat and leave everyone else on the stranded ship. They pretended to be putting anchors out in the front with the boat. Paul saw through their scheme and warned the centurion. It appears the sailors didn't believe Paul but the Romans did. Soldiers cut the lifeboat loose and it drifted off.

³³ 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. ³⁴ 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." Acts 27:33-34 Trying to stay alive, they hadn't stopped to eat. Now, Paul again encouraged them to eat to gain strength for what lay ahead. He reiterated his promise that they would not drown, adding that they

won't even come to any harm. (Jesus used the expression that not a hair of our head would perish in Luke 21:18^{xii}). I wonder if some of those sailors became believers after surviving this.

³⁵ 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. ³⁶ Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. Acts 27:35-36 Paul gave thanks to God for the food and started eating in front of them. Then they followed his example and were encouraged by Paul's faith that they were going to make it to shore. Sometimes our faith that everything will be fine encourages others to trust God as well (1 Peter 2:12^{xiii}).

³⁷ (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.) ³⁸ And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea. Acts 27:37-38 They knew they had to get the ship over any rocks between them and the shore, so they threw the grain they were hauling overboard. If the ship rode high enough in the water it might ride above any rocks or coral. This was the last desperate act to survive.

We'll continue the account after Easter. I promised I would tell you about an amazing archeological discovery regarding this account. A former crime scene investigator, Robert Cornuke, was in a very similar situation when he started thinking about this narrative. Only in his situation there were hippos and crocodiles between him and the shore. He was rescued by another boat but couldn't stop thinking about this passage we have read. Is it possible those four anchors were still there, off the coast of Malta? He read the text carefully and studied the descriptions, including those in the western text. There is a bay called St. Paul's Bay on Malta, but it doesn't fit the description. Searching the island and assisted by the help of local fishermen, he finally found the one spot that best fit the Biblical description. Diving off the coast he found a large lead anchor that was twisted and jammed into the rocks. But where were the other three?

Malta has severe punishments for not reporting antiquities. When he asked around about any divers possibly finding something similar, he didn't get much of response. Finally someone took him aside and explained that the anchors indeed had been discovered long before by the earliest divers who caught groupers for restaurants that catered to tourists. One anchor was still intact in a person's backyard. Another had been turned into diving weights. The anchors matched the description of those carried by first century grain ships. We can't be a hundred percent sure, but the details leave me convinced that those are very anchors left by the grain ship of Acts 27. (See The Lost Shipwreck of St. Paul.)

Luke has been very careful to give us the details. The miraculous rescue reminds us of the account of Jesus asleep on the disciples' boat as they headed to shore where he would meet the demoniac (Mark 4:37-40^{xiv}). That was an outreach to the Gentile region of the Decapolis. The man who was freed from the demons would be the first Gentile missionary to tell those Greek cities about Jesus (Mark 5:19-20^{xv}). Paul is on his way to Rome. He will testify to the whole Roman guard and then be free to continue reaching Gentiles who never heard of Jesus (Philippians 1:13^{xvi}). There is a similarity.

When we step out in faith, there will be trials. We will face spiritual and even physical resistance. But if God is in the boat with us, we'll get through it all. God doesn't promise an easy passage, but He does promise to keep us to our destination (Philippians 1:6^{xvii}). Our course is set for our eternal home, to the place that was made for us (John 14:2^{xviii}). The journey is often rough, but we are never alone. We fix our eyes on the One who promised He would never leave us, and we walk on right through the waves. Should you take your eyes off Him, you will sink, and when you do, just look up, for His hand will be there to save you (Matthew 14:28-31^{xix}). Don't forget that!

Questions

- 1 Why do you think Julius trusted Paul?
- 2 What do all these details tell us?
- 3 Have you experienced Julius decision at Fair Havens?
- 4 What human efforts were made to save their lives?
- 5 Why was Paul able to take command of the situation?
- 6 Though Paul was already told he was going to Rome, why did he need more encouragement?
- 7 Why did the angel say God had "granted you all those who sail with you"?
- 8 How did Paul pass on God's comfort? How can we do the same?
- 9 How did Paul encourage them while they were anchored?
- 10 What account in the gospels is similar? How?
- 11 What archeological evidence do we have of this account?

ⁱ **Acts 23:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ The following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome."

ⁱⁱ **Romans 1:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—

ⁱⁱⁱ **Galatians 6:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

^{iv} **1 Corinthians 1:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

^v **2 Corinthians 1:12 (ESV)**

¹² For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you.

^{vi} **Genesis 22:11-12 (ESV)**

¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

¹² He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

^{vii} **Exodus 3:2-4 (ESV)**

² And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.

³ And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned."

⁴ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

^{viii} **1 Corinthians 6:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

^{ix} **Romans 14:12 (ESV)**

¹² So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

^x **Acts 23:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ The following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome."

^{xi} **2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (ESV)**

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,
⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

^{xii} **Luke 21:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish.

^{xiii} **1 Peter 2:12 (ESV)**

¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

^{xiv} **Mark 4:37-40 (ESV)**

³⁷ And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling.

³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

³⁹ And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

⁴⁰ He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?"

^{xv} **Mark 5:19-20 (ESV)**

¹⁹ And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."

²⁰ And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.

^{xvi} **Philippians 1:13 (ESV)**

¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

^{xvii} **Philippians 1:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

^{xviii} **John 14:2 (ESV)**

² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

^{xix} **Matthew 14:28-31 (ESV)**

²⁸ And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

²⁹ He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.

³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me."

³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"