

Why Does God Often Wait Until the Last Minute to Rescue?

Acts 27:13-38

Pastor Jason Van Bommel, Forest Hill Presbyterian

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 27:20, ESV

Can you imagine being tossed by a storm on the open sea for 14 days with no food? Yesterday, we were forewarned of dire consequences to come from the centurion's decision to ignore wise, godly counsel and instead listen to the self-interested "expert" advice coming from the ship's owner and pilot. Well, today we see the very real and very dire consequences of this poor decision.

Once the storm starts blowing, we might wonder how long God is going to let it go before He intervenes. After all, I'm sure they learned their lesson and were very sorry. God isn't really going to let His faithful apostle go down in a storm in the Mediterranean Sea, is He?

How often do we suffer consequences from our own very poor decision-making? Then, how often do we cry out to God and get impatient when He's a little slow in rescuing us from our own foolishness? The truth is that God repeatedly saves us from ourselves, even though we don't deserve it. Another less comfortable truth is that God sometimes does not save His children from the consequences of their foolish decisions or from the reckless decisions of others around them. Of course, our eternal salvation is not in jeopardy, but real-life consequences from choices happen to believers all the time!

Still, when reading today's passage or living our lives, we may ask: Why does God so often wait until the last minute to rescue? Most of the time, we don't really know, do we? Trying to understand and explain all the reasons behind God's providence is beyond the ability of mere human beings. But if we look at today's passage carefully, we can see some patterns of God's wisdom emerge:

1. God wanted to draw attention to the wisdom of Paul's advice and warning, which the centurion ignored.
2. God wanted the sailors to come to the end of their own resources, so they would not steal the credit for the rescue or attribute it to one of their false gods.
3. God wanted to clearly show His saving power, at work in and through Paul's life and ministry.
4. God probably also wanted to clearly demonstrate Paul's innocence.

Why would God desire to do all of these things? First of all, to demonstrate His own power and glory. Secondly, to provide validation for the Gospel that Paul preached, so the Romans might hear the word and come to faith. Thus, we see God working for His own glory and for the furtherance of the Gospel. As God works for His glory and the Gospel's advance, we also see Him working to rescue and vindicate His people.

Heavenly Father, we need patience when Your providence does not move in the way we would expect or desire. We need faith to trust You when we do not understand Your ways, which is so often. We need confidence in Christ of our acceptance before You and of Your loving care for us. Teach us well, that we may learn from our poor decision, and save us from ourselves. We need You. In Jesus' name, Amen.