

In 1997 the big box-office hit... record-smashing... cinematic epic movie... told the story of the world's SECOND most famous shipwreck story. The Hollywood story line included some actual history... but it centered mainly around two fictional characters named Jack and Rose... as told through the soft lens cinematography. Jack... Rose... and Hollywood... made it look cool and acceptable to defy social taboos... and moral decency. ... But I don't want us to focus on that. Instead... I'd like to call your attention to the slow pace of the disaster... when almost everyone aboard had to live their final hours on earth... in horrifying terror.

At approximately 2:20 a.m. the stern of the White Star liner Titanic swung slowly upward toward the stars. Her lights went out, flashed on again, then went out for good. Only a single kerosene lantern flickered high in the aftermast. As her stern reached higher, a steady roar thundered across the water as every movable thing aboard her broke loose. Deck chairs slid toward the bow... as people wailed and hopelessly scrambled for safety... only to elude them.

For a long period of time... this movie about the world's second most famous shipwreck... depicted the slow-unfolding reality of the ship... as it eased into a writhing heap... with the bow gradually dropping deeper... and the stern rising higher. ...It took a while... but once *The Titanic* was absolutely vertical... with her three dripping propellers glistened in the darkness... And bodies were strewn across the water. For several minutes she stood poised upright... then she began sliding slowly under, until the sea closed over her stern with an audible gulp.

This Hollywood blockbuster won Best Picture at the Oscars in 1997. The visual effects were stunning. However... the movie Titanic... is anything but a profitable shipwreck story. We might learn a few historical details... and we might be entertained by having our emotions greatly aroused. But the world's most famous shipwreck story... is different. It is a profitable story that goes beyond history and entertainment.

A wreck of any kind is a terrifying experience... whether it be a train derailment... an automobile collision... or the crash of an airplane. But probably the most terrifying of all is a shipwreck... because of the prolonged agony that the passengers and crew endure. The other disasters are over far more instantly... by comparison.

Acts 27 is the tale of one of the most famous shipwrecks in history—where God allowed the Apostle Paul to experience his THIRD shipwreck. ... We don't know how prolonged the other two were... but Luke describes this one... while he was on his way to Rome... in great detail... Luke will show us that it was a few weeks of horrifying terror... every bit like the movie about the second most famous shipwreck... which happened in one night.

This morning... we have come to one of the best-told, most-detailed shipwreck accounts in ancient history — and certainly the most profitable to the hearer.

You know... Luke... who composed the Book of Acts for us under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit... tells us about a lot of remarkable things in the life of Paul. But they are short summaries of these events. In this chapter of his book however... Luke slowed down to a crawl... and gave us

detail upon detail. I had to ask myself... “Why?” Out of all the events that we have been studying here in Acts... what is so special about this story... for him to use so much valuable parchment (which was not cheap... as paper is today.)

When I was in seminary I was taught in Bible Interpretation class to take special notice whenever a story slows way down. There is always a reason. So I found myself wondering about today’s passage. Here is the reason that I have concluded – (with the help of several commentary writers.)

The Holy Spirit inspired Luke to slow down and have us linger with this story... because it serves as a very important reminder that the Christian’s life will not always be smooth sailing – even when we are in the will of God. We have a tendency to set wrong expectations about our life in Christ – that everything should be according to what we consider to be good. ... We even have supposed Bible teachers... who will tell you that there should never be any problems or difficulty... for the believer in Christ. I just want to scream – “Have you ever read the Book of Acts?” By their standard Paul must not have been a believer in Christ at all!

Even if you don’t watch those false evangelists on TV... we can still have in our minds this same false thinking. “Why am I suffering, God? Don’t You love me?” ... But God gives us a re-set to this... through our passage today. We will be given a picture of a believer's great trust... and of God's great care. ... And I won’t soft-soap this... It is a challenging lesson for every believer to trust God through all the trials of life... even through the most terrifying trials.

Since ancient times, writers have pictured life as a journey or a voyage. *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan is based on this theme, and so is Homer's *Odyssey*. We sometimes use the "voyage" metaphor in everyday conversation: "Smooth sailing!" or "Don't make shipwreck!" or "Sink or swim!" When a Christian dies, we might say, "He or she has reached the other shore."... Luke was certainly not writing a mere allegory... that did not happen... But the Holy Spirit led him to give us this exciting event to show how one man's faith can make a big difference for him and others "in the storms of life." What an encouragement to our own faith!

So... open your Bibles now to Acts chapter 27...

Acts 27:1-3

Having appealed to Caesar, Paul was put in the custody of a kindly Roman centurion named Julius and placed on an Adramyttian ship destined for Italy—the focus of his ministry dreams.

Luke reveals that the centurion was a member of Rome's elite Augustan Cohort. These soldiers were hand-picked and responsible to the Emperor himself. They were the special forces... the original "Green Berets"... "Delta Force"... and "Navy Seals" of the Roman Empire. ... I think Luke tells us this... so we would know why he has such authority on this trip... And then Luke shows us how much respect Julius had for Paul. This respect would be quite an endorsement for Paul (the prisoner.) And it will make more sense a little further down when they all start listening to Paul (the prisoner)... and taking his advice.

The respect Julius gave to Paul allowed him to take along his companions Dr. Luke (perhaps because Paul needed a physician) and Aristarchus... a devoted Christian brother from Thessalonica... who had been in the party accompanying Paul to Jerusalem over two years earlier.

Paul was treated so well that the next day, when they put in at Sidon, he was allowed to disembark and visit his friends there. ... Again... we are to see how uncommon the regarded was for Paul... by this prestigious Roman authority... Julius.

So far, so good. Now THAT is what we might expect for every Christian... who is in the will of God. Life ought to be problem free! ... But this is the end of it. From this point on... the voyage rapidly deteriorated.

Acts 27:4-6

After leaving Sidon they had to sail up and around Cyprus, rather than straight toward Italy in the west... because the winds were contrary. Normally a direct trip like this to Rome would take about five weeks... But direct flights were uncommon. ... So they had to skip and hop from one ship to another... that was headed in the direction that they wanted to go.

The was turning into an incredibly slow trip. The winds were contrary... so the ship had trouble staying close to shore... which was all a ship like this was built to do.

Julius transferred Paul and the other prisoners onto a much larger Egyptian grain ship. This one was 3 X larger. This one would be capable of venturing much further away from the shore for a more direct route to

Rome. It was a sturdy ship, but in high seas it still had definite disadvantages. Chief among its drawbacks... because of its square sail... it could not sail directly into the wind.

Acts 27:7-13

Once again... progress was very slow. They were losing too much time. The ship had to tack back and forth... zig-zagging their course.... from Myra to Cnidus (which is about 130 miles.) The pilot eventually was able to steer them... amidst much struggle... into Fair Havens.

Julius (the man in charge)... now had to decide whether to winter at Fair Havens... or set sail and try to reach the port of Phoenix... which was only about forty miles away. Fair Havens was a rather boring port... and the harbor was not ideal for wintering.

Paul was an experienced traveler. He had already survived two shipwrecks... and he admonished them to stay in Fair Havens. This voyage had already encountered adverse winds... which signaled the start of the stormy season.

Luke cues us in to this by mentioning that the fast had already occurred. The "fast" here refers to Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, which occurred around October 5 that year. Sea travel became more dangerous as winter approached. Shipping was completely closed down from around November 10... to as late as March 10... but sailing at this time in October was risky as well.

However... while they were deliberating... a gentle south breeze came up... the perfect wind for this vessel... They only needed to go 40 miles... so it did not seem like too great of a risk to the pilot and to Julius. *“Paul, you’re over-ruled...”*

Please take notice of something with me here. ... Favorable conditions... are not always the sign of God’s will. I often hear people say... *“Well look how well things are working out... God must want me to do this... or that...”* *“I know that God wants this... otherwise He would not have allowed these circumstances to be so favorable...”* But I say... *“Be careful! You cannot go by that alone! ... In this true-life analogy of the Christian life... that Luke is writing... we see that this was not the case for this voyage.*

Acts 27:14-20

You have to love Luke’s wording in verse 20... “no small storm.” This was a typhoon! He makes that clear by his other descriptions... such as “tempestuous wind...” from which we get our English word “Typhoon.” Northeasters are known to be extremely dangerous in this region, appearing suddenly with violent, whirling winds caused by a meeting of opposite air currents.

This one was so severe that the crew had to let the ship drift because it was impossible to steer it... and the wind drove it twenty-three miles to the south... to the island of Cauda.

It all started as a simple journey of 40 miles... with a gentle and perfect wind.

How many times have we been fooled by some seemingly encouraging conditions... and because we want to do something so badly... we understand the circumstances to be God's "go-ahead"... and so we plunge on ahead... even though God was actually trying to tell us otherwise. (In our story here... they did not listen to God's messenger... did they?)

Sometimes we get ourselves into some pretty ugly storms for the same reasons they did! *"This place is boring... I want to move on to someplace more interesting..."* Greed and impatience can get us into a lot of trouble. There may have been times when you have gotten yourself into such a storm... by listening to "expert advice." (Julius listened to the pilot. He was the expert!) But sometimes... even believers opt for the expert's opinion... over what they know is Godly advice... or direct from God's Word. *"Hey! The expert can't be wrong!"* *"My marriage has grown stale. The experts all say that the most important thing is for me to be happy. The circumstances are that my co-worker is showing an interest in me..."* (When I pastored in California... the drummer and the keyboard player on our worship team... used this as their justification. AND – they both wanted to still lead worship for us on Sundays...) *"As a Christian... I can marry an unbeliever... the experts all say that I can..."* *"Sex outside of marriage is a good thing... all the experts agree..."* *"Cheating and just a little lying... is a normal part of life..."*

LISTEN – we can avoid unnecessary storms in our life... by paying closer attention to God's Word... than supposed experts.

Look at verse 20 again...

Acts 27:20

The only way they could guide the ship was according to the sun and the stars. Not being able to see them for many days means that they had lost all knowledge of their whereabouts. They had been helplessly drifting before a howling gale in a turbulent sea without any idea where they were heading.

We will read a little later that it was for 14 days that this went on and on. Their ship would rise on a wave up... and up... climbing as high as a 20 story building... and then suddenly drop... with a loud THUD as it slapped against the water's low ebb. Then it would rise again. Each time... they would wonder if the next one would split the ship to pieces. Hope was gone.

Acts 27:21-26

The combined effects of seasickness from the endless tossing of the boat, and the sheer anxiety and apparent hopelessness of their position, combined not surprisingly to produce a serious loss of appetite: the men had gone a long time without food.

At this point of darkest despair, God's servant stood up before them. Paul the prisoner... on his way to trial in Rome... is also Paul the Pastor. So he brings a word of desperately needed encouragement to those who were staring death in the face.

By now... perhaps they were ready to listen to any words of hope. So Paul begins by noting that they should have listened to him back at in port at Fair Havens. This probably was not a haughty... censorious statement... but rather was intended to establish Paul's credibility... as he prepared to

give the crew some divinely revealed instructions. Paul "took over" the situation when it was obvious that nobody else knew what to do.

A crisis does not make a person. ... A crisis shows what a person is made of... and it tends to bring true leadership to the front and out in the open. Paul gently rebuked the centurion, pilot, and captain for ignoring his warning. Soon they would discover that God had spared all of them only because of Paul.

A messenger from the Lord had visited Paul and told him that the ship and cargo would be lost, but that all the passengers would be spared and cast on an island. Once again, the Lord gave him a special word of encouragement at the right time. ... This was not the first time the apostle experienced this special kind of assurance. In Corinth Christ came to him in a vision. Acts 18:9-10 records it this way: "*Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.*" ... Back in Caesarea... before this voyage... Christ actually stood with the apostle in the flesh. We read in chapter 23: "*The 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.'*" ... Later in Rome... according to 2 Tim. 4:16-17... Christ again stood with him.

God may have certain storms that He has you and I go through... but He never leaves us alone in it!

Acts 27:27-32

After Paul's encouragement... before God saved them all from the sinking ship... things got even worse. ... During the two weeks they had been at sea... the ship had been driven over 500 miles off course and was now adrift in the Adrian Sea. ... As the crew took soundings... they discovered that the water was getting shallower (from 120 feet to 90 feet)... indicating that land was near. ... From the roar of the waves, it appeared that the ship was headed for the rocks.

In a final effort the sailors cast off four anchors from the stern... and they held! ...The men desperately prayed for daybreak. ... Some of the sailors tried to escape in the ship's dinghy... under the pretense of laying more anchors... but Paul warned the centurion that unless all the men remained on the ship to help navigate a landing... all would be lost. Julius is listening to Paul now. ... So he gives the command and the soldiers cut the ropes to the life boats. Now everyone must stay on board.

Paul then encouraged them all to eat. They did, and their spirits picked up.

Acts 27:33-44

Another ho-hum day in the life of the Apostle Paul! What a man! And what a God! Not one soul was lost, and God's name was wonderfully glorified!

Are you in a storm? ... Does it look like your ship is about to go under?... Why are there storms and shipwrecks? ... Why did God not just allow the ship to make it safely to shore without wrecking? ... Why was the trial made so difficult for the crew and passengers? God... who controls the winds and waves... could certainly have made it much easier.

First of all, storms often come when we disobey the will of God. (Jonah is a good example of this truth.) ... But that isn't the only reason. Here... It was not Paul who was at fault... but Julius and the pilot. ... We sometimes suffer because of the unbelief of others.

Second, storms have a way of revealing our true character. Some of the sailors selfishly tried to escape, others could only hope for the best; but Paul trusted God and obeyed His will.

Third, we learn that even the worst storms cannot hide the face of God or hinder the purposes of God. Paul received a word of assurance... and that was all he needed.

Today, we are not likely to have visions... but we do have the promises in His Word to encourage us.

Finally, storms can give us opportunities to serve others and bear witness to Jesus Christ.

Eric Liddell, "the Flying Scotsman," who the 1981 movie "Chariots of Fire" was about... won the four-hundred-meter race at the 1924 Paris Olympics in world-record time. ... But his real heroics occurred twenty years later... in the Weihsien concentration camp in China. This missionary's faith and energy encouraged many of the eighteen hundred trapped in the camp's squalid conditions. "Uncle Eric" to children separated from their parents, he "organized activities, served as a teacher and a guardian for youth, and fulfilled the role of pastor until a brain tumor claimed his life in February 1945"

We know that whatever God allows to come our way, he loves us and will give us sufficient grace to endure and remain faithful to him.

Oswald Sanders put it this way:

When God wants to drill a man
And thrill a man,
And skill a man,
When God wants to mold a man
To play the noblest part;
When he yearns with all his heart
To create so great and bold a man
That all the world shall be amazed,
Watch his methods, watch his ways!
How he ruthlessly perfects
Whom he royally elects!
How he hammers him and hurts him
And with mighty blows converts him
Into trial shapes of clay which
Only God understands;
While his tortured heart is crying
And he lifts beseeching hands!
How he bends but never breaks
While his good he undertakes;
How he uses whom he chooses
And with every purpose fuses him;
By every act induces him
To try his splendor out—
God knows what He's about!