

TIME'S A-WASTIN'

ACT 27:1-12 MARCH 17, 2021

Before COVID kept many people working from home, the commute was a regular part of daily life. From 1980 to 2020, commute time increased just about every year.¹ In 2018 research found that the average American would spend a full 9.4 days of their year commuting to work.² Interestingly, the same data showed that Americans spend only 7.9 days taking care of their family.

Admittedly, my commute is pretty short, but usually I don't mind a drive. But, if I find myself on a drive and see the dreaded "flagger ahead" sign, man does my mood deteriorate! There's nothing that feels, to me, *more* like wasted time than that.

The closing pages of Acts focus mostly on Paul's voyage to Rome. From the human perspective, it takes forever, costs too much and nearly claims several hundred lives.

Now, we know that Jesus Christ *wants* Paul to get to Rome so that he might act as a witness to the people there and to the Emperor himself. The same God, by the way, Who speaks and it is done, the God who commands the wind and the waves, Who can calm any storm and deliver His people instantly to the further shore, *He* wanted Paul in Italy. Isn't it interesting, then, that He put the apostle on this trip where so much time seems wasted? Especially after more than 2 years of his life had already been "wasted" sitting in a jail cell.

Of course, as Christians, we know the time is only wasted from the human perspective. We love this story. We are so thankful that we have this incredible record of sailing and shipwreck, of miracles and ministry, which has been read by countless millions for thousands of years. As the saga unfolds we can be sure there were *other* people who were very happy that God "wasted" Paul's time on this ship: Like the 273 other passengers who otherwise would've been lost in the sea, but for Paul's presence. Also, the many who would be healed and evangelized on the island of Malta once the apostle washed up on shore. We can't begin to calculate how many lives and souls have been saved because Paul's time was "wasted" on this crossing.

As we start out with him, we can see this voyage as an analogy of life. Paul would be sailing to a great city he hadn't been to, one out further than he had ever gone, where he would stand before the throne of the king. On the ship he was surrounded with all sorts of people, some who were happy to be headed toward Rome, some who would give anything to avoid it. People of every class and background. Some were Christians, most were not. But there they all are, heading toward the horizon, facing troubles, choices and questions together.

In the first part of our text a theme that comes across is the *difficulty* of life's voyage. And in the second part we see the *defiance* of the lost voyagers. And we see how the Christian brings aid throughout, even when we also face dangers, struggles and setbacks.

Acts 27:1 - When it was decided that we were to sail to Italy, they handed over Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion named Julius, of the Imperial Regiment.

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2019/10/07/nine-days-road-average-commute-time-reached-new-record-last-year/>

² <https://www.policygenius.com/blog/how-much-time-americans-waste-on-the-daily-grind-each-year/>

“When it was decided.” Decided by who? Not by Paul, but by the Roman officials. At the moment he was at the mercy of the governing authorities around him. He had been waiting for quite some time for what was next in his service to the Lord. Finally he gets some traction, they book him a ticket, but it’s not first class or even coach, he’ll be traveling as a prisoner.

We will not always have the deciding vote on the flow of our lives. Things, both small and great, happen beyond our control. But we can be sure that *nothing* is outside God’s charge or care. This was, undoubtedly, *not* the way Paul would’ve chosen to get to Rome, but he wasn’t pouting about it or letting it ruin his attitude or testimony. He persevered even under these much-less-than-ideal circumstances. After generations of autonomy and liberty, it seems like our society is going to start constraining us more than before. I don’t mean this as a prediction, just as we look around we see a loss of some of the freedoms we used to have. And, as Christians, we may be facing a new level of friction than we’ve known before. But, we can still persevere, still be full of joy and keep a hopeful heart, because our faith is not dependent on circumstances, but on the *Lord*, Who never fails.

On this trip we’ll find he has a bunch of different people around Paul. There’s Julius, a revered and important centurion. The boat will, naturally, have a bunch of sailors on board. Some merchants, too. We’re also told that there were a number of other prisoners being taken along with Paul. We don’t know their particular cases, but it’s probable some or many of them were being transported to their execution in the gladiatorial games.³ There are a few *other* people with him, too:

Acts 27:2 - ²When we had boarded a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, intending to sail to ports along the coast of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us.

What a joy to have Dr. Luke back on the scene. He will go through a lot with Paul, ultimately being there with him at the very end about 7 years later when he is beheaded.⁴ But it’s not just the dynamic duo, we see another familiar name: Aristarchus. We’ve seen him before in Acts. He had been with Paul in Ephesus and his trip to Jerusalem. A good and faithful man.

These fellows give our first example of how Christians can give aid and support in the journey of life. Neither Luke nor Aristarchus *had* to take this trip with Paul, they volunteered. Some speculate that the only way they would’ve been allowed to tag along would be to do so as Paul’s slaves, and that they would’ve had to pay their own way on the trip. We’re not sure. But they do demonstrate for us that Christians are meant to support one another, serving one another, out of love and compassion. And, we are not to stingily cling to our material resources, but put them also into the Lord’s service.

They also show that, in ministry, things often get worse before they get better. They’re doing a good thing, a good service to their friend and the Lord, but they’re going to suffer a lot in the mean time.

Acts 27:3 - ³The next day we put in at Sidon, and Julius treated Paul kindly and allowed him to go to his friends to receive their care.

It’s pretty remarkable that he gave Paul this amount of liberty. Remember: If a Roman lost a prisoner, he’d forfeit his own life. So, maybe Julius had become a Christian. At very least, it’s clear he and Paul had an understanding, respectful relationship. Which shows that Paul wasn’t an antagonist toward him. He wasn’t rude or bitter toward Julius. As always, he was full of grace.

³ See Robertson & J. Vernon McGee

⁴ 2 Timothy 4:11

We also see these Sidonian Christians ready to help the apostle in his time of need. Though Paul hadn't been *mistreated* in Caesarea, he wouldn't have changes of clothes, money for the road or some of the other comforts that we might take for granted. Here, on very short notice and with a very short window of opportunity, they were ready to give of themselves so that he could be helped.

While we can't always count on the world and the powers within it to treat us so kindly, we *should* be able to count on one another. The Christian church is a family and we want to be ready to take care of one another. In this case, they couldn't do *much* but they could do *something*. Sometimes we feel inadequate to deal with the huge problems that affect our world, but remember: Even a cup of cold water given to a fellow believer moves the needle of eternity.⁵

Acts 27:4 - ⁴When we had put out to sea from there, we sailed along the northern coast of Cyprus because the winds were against us.

The voyage is hard. They would have small sections of relative ease, but on the whole it's going to be a struggle. As an analogy of life we see that, on the one hand, everyone is in it together. But, you've got people with *very* different mindsets on board. Some are there because it's their duty. Some are there because they're trying to make a buck in trade. Some are prisoners there, not wanting to go at all. And then there are 3 on board whose goal in life is to honor God and do His work. All of them encounter headwinds and tailwinds. All of them are going to suffer along the way.

If God cares so much for us and gives us jobs to do in His Kingdom, why not just give us smooth sailing all the time? Why not *exempt* us from the difficulties of life, like He did in the land of Goshen?

Well, for one thing, the Lord wants us *among* the lost so that they might be saved. He also wants to show His strength through our weakness. And, as I said before, the Christians' suffering in this passage leads to evangelism and healing and all sort of impact that has shaken the world for the last 2,000 years. One example: The way in which Luke chronicles this story, with all the detail, is a major proof for the authenticity of his work as a historian. We don't *need* this account to believe the Doctor's other chapters, but these verses give a great amount of validity to the book as a whole.

Acts 27:5 - ⁵After sailing through the open sea off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we reached Myra in Lycia.

So, at the first they had contrary winds, now they were able to cross the open sea. I imagine the helmsman and the others thought, "Glad we got through that!" Remember on *Apollo 13*, there's that moment after liftoff where the center engine switches off for a minute. Tom Hanks says, "Looks like we just had our glitch for this mission." Having no idea what is *really* in store for them.

The leg of the trip in verse 4 was tough, the one in verse 5 a bit easier. The Christian life is full of headwinds and tailwinds, discoveries and losses, battles and rests. We can't predict what tomorrow holds, but we can rest assured that the Lord knows and He is with us and that we can trust Him.

Acts 27:6 - ⁶There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board.

⁵ Matthew 10:42

We'll be told later that this is a cargo ship bringing grain to Italy. I imagine that the crew were more of the salty sort, like the fellows on *The Deadliest Catch*. You see, sea travel was already tough, these guys would have to go from Egypt to Rome delivering grain safe and dry. They're already very late in the season, so much so that a ship like this would be offering extra bonuses and insurance for those willing to take the trip.⁶ One source adds:

*"It was a sturdy ship, but in high seas it had definite disadvantages. It had no rudder like a modern ship but was steered by two great paddles extending from the stern...Chief among its drawbacks was that it could not sail into the wind."*⁷

Acts 27:7-8 - ⁷Sailing slowly for many days, with difficulty we arrived off Cnidus. Since the wind did not allow us to approach it, we sailed along the south side of Crete off Salmone. ⁸With still more difficulty we sailed along the coast and came to a place called Fair Havens near the city of Lasea.

It was slow going. To the merchants and soldiers on board this would've been more than a setback. For them, time was money. Paul had been in a *years long* period of slow going in his life. And yet, for the Christian, time isn't money. We can be content and abound in all situations. Our mood and choices aren't supposed to be determined by the circumstances of life. Remember: We're meant to live on a higher level, fulfilling a higher purpose. The old adage is one Christian says to another, "How are you doing?" He replies, "Pretty good, under the circumstances," and the first says, "What are you doing under there?" Our minds and our hearts are to be set on things above.

So, yes, life is full of difficulties, but we remind ourselves that we are on a very different trip than the grain merchants or the condemned gladiators. The slow sailing simply gave Paul and his friends more time to minister to the hundreds of lost people around them. And it gave the Christians time to be together to sing and pray and talk about the Lord. In fact, some scholars think that during Paul's 2 years in Caesarea, Luke would've been able to do a bunch of research for his Gospel.⁸ Think of the *wonderful* things he would've been able to tell Paul that the apostle hadn't heard before! The slow going of life can be absolutely *full* of spiritual richness for the Christian.

Acts 27:9 - ⁹By now much time had passed, and the voyage was already dangerous. Since the Day of Atonement was already over, Paul gave his advice

In these last 4 verses we're going to see the defiance of the lost voyagers. Here we're reminded that with each day that passes, the trip becomes more dangerous for unbelievers. We don't know if we have 50 years or 50 days left on the earth, but sooner or later, the trip comes to an end. And, for the unsaved, every day spent is one day closer to death. Luke puts the trip on a calendar for us, the Jewish Day of Atonement would've been late September. But there's a good devotional thought for anyone who may be listening who isn't a Christian: *Atonement has been made*. John tells us that Jesus "Himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins."⁹ He was sent to take away our sins and give us everlasting life. But He doesn't save anyone who isn't willing. And every day you spend, every beat of your heart, brings you that much closer to death, and then comes judgment. Like this ship in Acts, you are headed for a wreck and the *only* way of escape is through Jesus Christ, the Savior.

⁶ *The Life Of Claudius 18:1-2* https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Suetonius/12Caesars/Claudius*.html

⁷ Kent Hughes *Preaching the Word – Acts: The Church Afire*

⁸ *Coffman Commentaries On The Bible*

⁹ 1 John 2:2

Paul was a seasoned traveller. He maybe had the most experience of anyone on board, at least with shipwrecks. By this time he'd already been in 3!¹⁰ Here was his advice:

Acts 27:10 - ¹⁰ and told them, “Men, I can see that this voyage is headed toward disaster and heavy loss, not only of the cargo and the ship but also of our lives.”

Paul hadn't received a prophecy, he is using common sense here. But I find it very interesting that he seemed to think that it was a *real* possibility that they might all die. What about Jesus sending him to Rome? I think on the one hand he could rest in that calling, but on the other Paul knew life is unpredictable. In the Bible we have multiple examples of believers dying *early*. Ananias and Sapphira, some of the Christians in Corinth. We also have examples of believers dying *late*. King Hezekiah. We have a lot of insight into world history and present happenings and God's plan for the future, but on the individual level, our lives can be unpredictable. So, we should trust the Lord, investigate and concentrate on what He's revealed in the Bible, exercise sanctified common sense and make the most of the opportunities before us.

Like this ship, our world is on a collision course with disaster. Even in the unbelieving world we see people talking about climate change wiping us all out, or the *next* pandemic that has more like a 40% fatality rate, maybe another American civil war or an atomic attack somewhere. Nasa is always trying to scare us with meteors coming into our orbital path. What's going to happen and who is going to save us?!? Well, Christians have real answers and we can share them and, along the way, like Paul we should be *wise*. Paul was wise. He had knowledge and experience and compassion and so he tried to give them aid in the form of helpful advice.

Acts 27:11 - ¹¹ But the centurion paid attention to the captain and the owner of the ship rather than to what Paul said.

I can imagine Julius coming below deck and saying to Paul, “Come up with me to a meeting.” Then they're talking there, Paul gives his suggestion. The captain goes, “...who's this?” “Oh, this is one of our prisoners. He's got some ideas about how you should sail your ship.”

Despite Julius' respect for Paul, in the end he was more persuaded by the experts and entrepreneurs. They thought they could pilot their way out, grit their way out, *somehow*. They had no plan, they were flying in the face of the facts, but they were unwilling to admit they'd been beaten.

The Christian perspective will often seem foolish and out of place to unbelievers. That doesn't mean it's wrong. One example: The Christian says, “If you dismantle the family, society will crumble.” Some unbelievers around us scoff at that, they say we're old fashioned or out of touch. And so they press on into their own plan and what happens? Society starts to crumble. Because they're sailing into the difficulties of life and their ship doesn't even have a rudder!

Acts 27:12 - ¹² Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided to set sail from there, hoping somehow to reach Phoenix, a harbor on Crete facing the southwest and northwest, and to winter there.

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 11:25

Fair Havens was a sleepy little port. No night life. Phoenix, on the other hand, had much more to offer for a few months shore leave.¹¹ And the majority voted for that, and as is so often the case, the majority was wrong. They were hoping to *somehow* make it to that safe harbor, but with no plan and no protection from the storm that was waiting for them. But luckily there were some Christians on board, giving the right perspective. And when that was ignored, the Christians were *still* there, willing to intercede on their behalf.

John Phillips points out how fortunate they were that they had Paul on the ship, not Jonah. The crew of the ship headed to Tarshish had said, “What are you doing asleep?” Jonah was checked out. Not Paul. He left that meeting and went down below to pray for their salvation and because of it, every life was going to be spared, *despite* their foolish decision to sail on.

So we see God’s people on the ship, mingling graciously among all these other souls. We see them supporting one another, staying contented even when it seems time is being utterly wasted. We see them acting wisely and patiently. Doubtless Paul and his friends were bringing the Gospel to soldiers and sailors and those facing the lions’ mouths. There was nothing wasted about this time. And no matter what setbacks or difficulties you may be facing, as a Christian, none of it needs be wasted. You’ve got opportunities to minister, people to intercede for, time to grow in your depth of love for the Lord, chances to support your brothers and sisters. Make the most of your trip.

¹¹ Hughes