

The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it – but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”

Vance Havner

Text

Acts 27:27-44

Topic

As the storm drives the ship closer and closer to shore and to destruction Paul and his companions experience God’s amazing providence in saving them and all on board

Title

“The Providence Driven Life”

Acts 27:27 Now when the fourteenth night had come, as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic *Sea*, about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land.

Acts 27:28 And they took soundings and found *it* to be twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found *it* to be fifteen fathoms.

Acts 27:29 Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come.

Acts 27:30 And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow,

Acts 27:31 Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved."

Acts 27:32 Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off.

Acts 27:33 And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored *them* all to take food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing.

Acts 27:34 Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you."

Acts 27:35 And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken *it* he began to eat.

Acts 27:36 Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves.

Acts 27:37 And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship.

Acts 27:38 So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea.

Acts 27:39 When it was day, they did not recognize the land; but they observed a bay with a beach, onto which they planned to run the ship if possible.

Acts 27:40 And they let go the anchors and left *them* in the sea, meanwhile loosing the rudder ropes; and they hoisted the mainsail to the wind and made for shore.

Acts 27:41 But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves.

Acts 27:42 And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape.

Acts 27:43 But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from *their* purpose, and commanded that those who could swim should jump *overboard* first and get to land,

Acts 27:44 and the rest, some on boards and some on *parts* of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land.

Introduction

We've come to the 'wreck' portion of the shipwreck. On board the doomed vessel were three who loved the Lord. One of them had been promised by God he would arrive in Rome to preach the Gospel. God further promised all two hundred seventy-six passengers they would live through the storm and shipwreck.

The believers knew that God was at work over-ruling all of the events to accomplish His will. Each of the three – Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus – could say with assurance,

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.

The word we use to summarize God working all things **together for good to those who love Him** is *providence*. The word derives from the Latin *pro* and *video*, which means *foresight* or *to see ahead*. It involves more than God just seeing ahead to what is going to happen. It involves His actively working to insure that His will be done.

We like Romans 8:28 but I don't think we always embrace the scope of it. Romans 8:28 doesn't simply mean "things will all work out." It means, "God is at work in everything." Whether it is the forces of nature like the Euroclydon wind or the free-will choices of men like the centurion and sailors God works **everything** in His creation **together for good to those who love Him**.

Commenting on the doctrine of providence theologian Millard Erickson wrote,

Providence in certain ways is central to the conduct of the Christian life. It means that we are able to live in the assurance that God is present and active in our lives. We are in His care and can therefore face the future confidently, knowing that things are not happening merely by chance.

A correct and complete understanding of providence is immensely practical in your walk with the Lord. To the extent you believe God's providence in all things you will experience His peace and you will expect His protection.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Since God's Providence Is At Work You May As Well Experience His Peace, and #2 Since God's Providence Is At Work You May As Well Expect His Protection.

#1 Since God's Providence Is At Work
You May As Well Experience His Peace
(v27-38)

No matter how turbulent the storm one man was at peace. Paul (and I'd include Luke and Aristarchus) had the assurance of God's presence and thus His providence.

Acts 27:27 Now when the fourteenth night had come...

Stop there for just a moment. Two weeks of turbulent, life-threatening seas must have seemed like an eternity. **Neither sun nor stars had appeared for many days** (v20). The only 'destination' in sight was destruction and death.

The storm was real but it makes for a great metaphor of the various trials we face. They can seem to last too long with no end in sight. The two-week long storm is interesting because in literature you will occasionally encounter the phrase, “the dark fortnight of the soul,” to describe an extended period of physical or emotional suffering.

Acts 27:27 Now when the fourteenth night had come, as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic *Sea*, about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land.

They technically were on a portion of the Mediterranean Sea called at that time the Sea of Adria. Whether they could hear waves breaking on the shore through the howling wind or by some other means the professional sailors **sensed that they were drawing near some land.**

That was both good and bad! Good because land is where you want to be; bad because their lack of control over the vessel meant they might break apart on the rocks.

Lack of control is what robs you of confidence. Precisely why you must understand that there is One in control.

Acts 27:28 And they took soundings and found *it* to be twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found *it* to be fifteen fathoms.

Acts 27:29 Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come.

It reminds me of Robert Shaw’s character in the movie *Jaws*. As he described the rescue of the sailors who survived both the wreck of the USS Indianapolis and the on-going shark attacks he said the waiting at the end was the worst time. He didn’t know if he would be rescued before he would be eaten. Even hopeful signs can breed fear in the storms of life unless you have a sense of God’s oversight.

Acts 27:30 And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow,

Acts 27:31 Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved."

Acts 27:32 Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off.

Crisis reveals character. A few of the sailors decided to try to save themselves and abandon everyone else. Paul discovered their actions and warned the centurion. He took swift action.

Wait a minute. I thought God had promised them they were all going to be saved? He did – but now we see that part of them being saved was to remain on the ship.

This highlights one reason we have trouble embracing the fullness of God's providence. He allows for the free-will actions of man. We cannot fully comprehend God's control and our free-will. It leads some to be more fatalistic, as if our actions have little or no meaning because everything is predetermined by God. Others conclude just the opposite: If man has free-will then nothing is certain and God is simply reacting rather than controlling.

Let me provide just one verse as an example of the working of God's sovereign control and man's free-will. It has to do with the death of Jesus.

Acts 2:23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;

God was in control; yet men acted freely and were held responsible. Providence is one of those biblical doctrines that we believe without fully figuring out. God is in control AND you have free-will AND **all things work together for good to those who love God.**

Notice next the peace experienced by Paul in the midst of the storm:

Acts 27:33 And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored *them* all to take food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing.

Acts 27:34 Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you."

Acts 27:35 And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken *it* he began to eat.

Acts 27:36 Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves.

Acts 27:37 And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship.

Acts 27:38 So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea.

You see God in control. They would certainly be saved. Yet they still acted prudently by lightening the ship. Providence doesn't teach "Let go and let God." We are to act obediently, responsibly, sacrificially, and wisely.

Let's be real: I'm sure some hairs fell out during the wreck! Paul was alluding to the statement of Jesus' that **the very hairs of your head are all numbered** (Luke 12:7). Jesus went on to apply it saying **Do not fear therefore...**

Then there was the way Paul ministered to them. They were not taking communion but Paul was described almost as if he were like Jesus breaking-bread with His disciples. It was as if Jesus were present in their midst.

Put those two things together and you see the very practical value of knowing God's providence. You have a sense of God's constant presence and an understanding of His personal care and concern for you. Thus whatever things are happening or happen you know that they are working together for good.

And that, when it is believed, leaves you experiencing God's peace. Providence is real and true and certain. You therefore may as well experience God's peace in the midst of your storm or storms.

- being changed to bring change -

#2 Since God's Providence Is At Work
You May As Well Expect His Protection
(v39-44)

Paul, Luke and Aristarchus were confident the storm would not kill them. But they were not out of danger. **The soldiers wanted to kill them!** Don't think badly of the soldiers. They were just doing their job. They were responsible for delivering all the prisoners to their destination either dead or alive. To let them simply jump overboard could put their own lives in jeopardy should they ever arrive in Rome.

Thus we see another aspect of God's providence in His protection of His beloved servants.

Acts 27:39 When it was day, they did not recognize the land; but they observed a bay with a beach, onto which they planned to run the ship if possible.

Acts 27:40 And they let go the anchors and left *them* in the sea, meanwhile loosing the rudder ropes; and they hoisted the mainsail to the wind and made for shore.

Acts 27:41 But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves.

Again I would emphasize the fact that the certainty of God's providence did not discourage them from acting with all their skill and experience.

At home; at church; at work; at school; wherever you are, give it your all and your best.

Charles Spurgeon said,

Brethren, my desire is *to do everything for the Lord in first-rate style*. We are all of us eager to do much for the Lord, but there is a more excellent way. With ringing trowel we strike away and build a wall, and girdle a city in six months: the aforesaid wall will be down in six days afterwards. It would be better to do more by doing less. Thoroughness is infinitely preferable to superficial area. It is well to work for God microscopically; each tiny bit of our work should bear the closest inspection.

Acts 27:42 And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape.

Acts 27:43 But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from *their* purpose, and commanded that those who could swim should jump *overboard* first and get to land,

The centurion acted with mercy rather than duty. While we might think it a no-brainer he was putting his own life at risk, or at least his career. Paul had made such an impression upon him through the storm that it touched his heart.

Theologians sometimes refer to this as incarnational ministry. Jesus was God incarnate – God in human flesh. He died on the Cross; He rose from the dead; He ascended into Heaven; He will return to the earth. In the mean time **we** believers are likened to His body on the earth. When we minister to people it is incarnational in the sense that

it is Jesus ministering to them through us as if He were still on the earth.

[Acts 27:44](#) and the rest, some on boards and some on *parts* of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land.

God protected them. Yes, they were shipwrecked. Yes, they were in the sea – and I’m guessing some could not swim. Yes, it was treacherous getting to shore. But He nevertheless protected them.

It’s another reason we have a hard time embracing the fullness of God’s providence. *His protection can seem so tentative!* One more gulp of storm-tossed seawater and you’re going down.

He protects you in the way best suited to bring Him glory. It may not seem that way in your storm or storms. But the Bible is clear: [All things work together for good to those who love God](#). You must conclude that God protects you as it best suits Him.

We see it with Job or Joseph. We marvel at those guys and what they endured all the time knowing the end of their respective stories. God was definitely protecting them for His glory.

Providence is no less real in your life as a child of God. It’s real whether I fully believe it or not. It’s real even though I cannot ever totally reconcile God’s control with man’s free-will.

To the extent I know it is real I will experience God’s peace and I will expect God’s protection.