

# ONLY PORT IN THE STORM

ACTS 27:13-44 JUNE 26, 2016

Would you join me in turning to the book of Acts. Our text is going to be chapter 27, verses 13-44.

On October 29, 1867, the RMS Rhone was sailing off the coast of the British Virgin Islands. Another passenger ship, the RMS Conway, was with her. Since her maiden voyage two years earlier, the Rhone had made quite a name for herself. She was an innovative ship. It had a bronze propeller, only the second one ever made. She had an iron hull. On board there was a sophisticated boiler system that helped power a compound steam engine.

That day in October, a category 3 hurricane hit the area. At first, the passengers and crews weren't worried. The Rhone had survived several severe storms before and had been called "unsinkable" by some. So, all the passengers from the Conway were transferred over to the Rhone. "As was normal practice at the time, the passengers in Rhone were tied into their beds to prevent them being injured in the stormy seas."

But the storm did not relent and the Rhone struggled to get away. Her anchor was caught and had to be cut free. The crew fought to find a way to safety and were only 250 yards from shore when the second half of the hurricane hit, the winds suddenly shifting to the opposite direction. The captain was swept overboard. The ship was crushed on rocks and split in two. Cold sea water rushed into the boilers, causing them to explode. "Of the 146 people originally aboard, plus an unknown number of passengers transferred from Conway, only 23 survived."<sup>1</sup>

Our passage this morning is the description of Paul's 4th shipwreck as he made his way to stand before Caesar as a prisoner of Rome. It's a compelling story on its own, but it also serves as a powerful illustration of the spiritual condition of this world. You have a large group of people, different backgrounds, different social status, different circumstances, all together on this great ship. But the ship is *not* going to make it where they want to go. It's a doomed voyage from the beginning, not because of bad luck, but because of bad choices. The ship is going to be lost. All the cargo is going to be destroyed. They will be subjected to a storm that none of them have any hope of surviving on their own. It's a typhoon that lasts at least 2 weeks.

In the midst of this disaster, we see Paul the Apostle, calm and confident. He stands up and says, "I know the God who is *greater* than the storm. I know that *I* am going to make it to Rome because the Lord has promised me a hope and a future. And I know that God will save *you* from this certain death you're facing *if* you will go His way." And so this story becomes a great picture for us of how we can minister the good news of salvation to a lost and dying world - a world that has no hope apart from the rescue of Jesus Christ.

Going through these verses we can learn some principles about the *plight of the lost sinners* and about our *position of the Lord's servants*.

As we open up the story in verse 13, we take a look at the plight of the lost sinners in this world and the first thing we find is that they've been **duped**.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RMS\\_Rhone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RMS_Rhone) <http://www.ba-bamail.com/content.aspx?emailid=10244>

**Acts 27:13-15 - <sup>13</sup> When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained *their* desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete. <sup>14</sup> But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon. <sup>15</sup> So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let *her* drive.**

Here's what had happened leading up to this verse: Paul and some other prisoners are being transported from Caesarea to Rome. The centurion had found a large ship that had freight and passengers that would take them the last leg of the journey. The problem was the first part of the trip had taken so long that now they were well past the safe sailing season. After a lot of difficulty they had finally made it to a harbor, but it wasn't a very exciting city to be in. The officers had a meeting to talk about what they would do for the winter. Paul had been invited. He was a very experienced traveller. Paul said, "We need to stay here. If we try to sail further, we're all probably going to die." But, the ship's captain and crew and the owner said, "No, let's try to get to a bigger and better harbor. We'll make up some time, we'll find a spot with much better nightlife."

Despite the warning and the good sense they allowed themselves to be tempted out into danger. They set sail and at first the wind blew softly. They supposed that they had obtained their desire. It reminds us of the very first mistake made in human history. Eve, there, in the Garden of Eden, had been warned to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God had told Adam, "If you eat of this, you're going to die." But there, Eve was duped by the serpent, she was drawn out by the desirability of the fruit. And so they gave into temptation, plunging the human race into disaster.

This ship was *caught* and, from here on out, was totally under the power of the storm. And, as we see what happened, it's almost as if this storm is toying with this ship, tossing it up and down the sea, bringing it upwards of 500 miles off course.

No one sets out on the voyage of life hoping to end in shipwreck. Yet, that is the ultimate fate of all mankind apart from the intervention of God to rescue us. It becomes clear very quickly that this ship is not going to make it to Italy. It may have been a powerful ship with a strong crew and experienced captain. It may have had important passengers and cargo. But none of that mattered. The storm was going to claim all of that and there was nothing any of them could do about it.

If you're not a Christian here this morning, the Bible says that your life is like this voyage. You may be a titan of industry or a person with power in your community, you may be the hardest worker in the crew, but you've been duped by sin. You're not really free, in fact you're held captive by the Devil. And your deceitful heart is leading you not toward life but toward death. And you can not and will not overcome death. It is going to claim you as its own because, like the rest of us, you are a sinner. And the wages of sin is death. And, like the people on the ship in our text, you are absolutely **defenseless** on your own.

**Acts 27:16-20 - <sup>16</sup> And running under *the shelter* of an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty. <sup>17</sup> When they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship; and fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis Sands, they struck sail and so were driven. <sup>18</sup> And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next *day* they lightened the ship. <sup>19</sup> On the third *day* we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands. <sup>20</sup> Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on *us*, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up.**

They tried a lot of things, but none of it mattered. Each measure they took to save themselves proved to make no difference at all. They tried securing things, they tried lightening the ship. They tried to maneuver their way out, but the storm kept beating them and beating them until, finally, all hope that they would be saved was given up. They had been duped, they quickly saw they were defenseless, and then they started to become desperate. First throwing extra cargo over. Then the tackle used to sail the ship. In a moment we'll see them dump everything they had left, the food, their belongings, all of it. But none of these efforts mattered. They were absolutely hopeless in the clutches of this storm.

You know, no man can beat the system. The system being sin, death and judgment. The Bible says that it is appointed for every man to die and then comes judgement. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There is *none* righteous, no not one. Look at this ship: All their preparation, all their strength, all their experience, all their ingenuity was useless against this storm. They were doomed from the moment they set sail. If you're not a Christian, that's the condition of your spiritual life right now. Duped, Defenseless, Desperate and Doomed. But, praise be to God this is not just a story about the plight of the lost sinner, more importantly, it's a story about the *position* of the Lord's servant. Because God had 3 of His men on that ship in that storm. They were led by Paul, but Dr. Luke was there. Aristarchus the Macedonian was there. These were men who knew God and were used by God to bring help to the lost and to tell them the way they could be saved.

Now, for we Christians here today, we want to pay special attention to the way that Paul and the other guys carried themselves, because they accomplished an incredible work for God, resulting in the saving of hundreds of lives and, I suspect, many souls as well. So, as we see them acting, we want to apply those principles to our own faith.

First of all, we should notice that Paul and Luke and Aristarchus **got involved** in the situation. We actually passed up the first example already in verse 19. It said, "On the third *day* we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands." We see them getting involved in the effort *personally*. Paul and his fellow believers didn't just sit back and watch the dying die. Paul knew that he wasn't going to die in this storm. Jesus Christ Himself had appeared to him 2 years earlier to say, "You're going to get to Rome and you're going to preach to Caesar." And so, I think these 3 Christians had a strong confidence that they were going to make it through this storm somehow. But that promise and confidence didn't lead them to an indifferent attitude. They weren't happy to watch the dying die. Rather, realizing that the lives of the people around them were at stake, they got involved on their behalf. They didn't sneak into the lifeboat and jump ship. They didn't sit below and enjoy the fact that all these pagan sailors and soldiers were about to get what they deserved. They grabbed a barrel and chucked it over. They got involved to try to stabilize the ship.

Our God is a God of unfailing compassion. It is *that* grace and compassion that made a way for *us* to be saved, and so it is grace and compassion that should define us. William Barclay said, "Unless a man's Christianity makes him *kind* it is not *real*." We're to get involved in God's effort to save through acts of compassion. In verse 21 we see that Paul did not *only* get involved by helping, but he got involved by *preaching* as well.

**Acts 27:21-26 - <sup>21</sup> But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. <sup>22</sup> And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. <sup>23</sup> For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, <sup>24</sup> saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought**

**before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.’<sup>25</sup> Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.<sup>26</sup> However, we must run aground on a certain island.”**

I find it remarkable how he starts out. He says, “I told you this would happen and this is all *your fault*.” Wow Paul! I thought we were supposed to bring ‘good news’. The Gospel *is* good news, but it’s only good news if it follows the explanation that we have been found guilty and are sentenced to death. Paul *accuses* them and he accuses them fairly. He points out their guilt in the situation. It was their own choice that got them where they were. And Paul says, “This is just a total disaster.”

What a fitting word for all of humanity apart from Christ. It’s a disaster. But, Paul’s God, the God of the Bible, can bring rescue to the ruined and hope to the hopeless.

We see another significant activity of Paul. He didn’t just get involved, he **graciously interceded**. Notice what it says there in verse 24. The angel said, “you’re for sure going to make it to Rome and God *has granted you* all those who sail with you.” Meaning that Paul had been praying for these people around him and asking God to save them. The captain, the crew, the soldiers, the other prisoners. People who had disregarded him before. Pagan men. Men who would, in a few verses, be willing to kill him to save themselves. These people Paul was asking God for. In the midst of the storm he was finding time to pray and to say to the Lord, “Please save these people!” And what’s remarkable is that the Lord said, “Sure! You want it, you got it!” We want to have great prayers for the lost around us. God is not miserly. He’s not the kind of God who says, “Well Paul, I’m planning on saving you three guys but the other 273? I don’t know if it’s in the budget.” The question is whether it is within our hearts to give that kind of intercession. Let’s be those people. People that show the kind of abundant grace toward the lost that God has shown to us.

**Acts 27:27-32 -<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come.<sup>30</sup> 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,<sup>31</sup> Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.”<sup>32</sup> Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off.**

Here we see that not only was Paul getting involved and generously interceding, he was **giving instruction**. And, as they got closer to their wreck, we see him giving that instruction more and more. He said, “This ship is going to sink, you *can* be saved, *this* is what you must believe, here is what you must do.” And it’s helpful to see here that he was willing to give instruction, even when some did not believe and even when it would mean he would have to say some unpopular things. I’m guessing he didn’t make too many friends among the sailors when he exposed their plan. But to Paul, the saving of a life was much more important than being popular. He wasn’t going to withhold the truth just because it might upset people who were trying to go their own way. Paul, the prisoner, gives more instruction in verse 33.

**Acts 27:33-38 -<sup>33</sup> 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.**

**<sup>34</sup> 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.” <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves. <sup>37</sup> And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship. <sup>38</sup> So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea.**

It's important that we note that part of Paul getting involved and interceding and giving instruction was not only to address the spiritual things, but the physical things as well. The Christians here showed care for the health and hunger of the people on the ship. Obviously, the life and death element was the most important, and that was the issue that Paul primarily addressed, but the physical needs were also needful. Paul said, “You guys need to eat, and let *me* serve it up for you.” As we seek to save souls we can also nourish the body, addressing the physical *and* spiritual needs.

Also, we want to remind ourselves that our faith should leave people encouraged. It says in verse 36 that they were all encouraged and took the food. Yes, Paul had accused them of guilt. Yes, he had asserted that there was one way and *only* one way they could be saved, but he also showed them compassion and gave them hope. They saw that Paul wasn't just saying things to make them feel better, it was clear he really believed what he was saying and that his belief made a difference in his own life. He had a true and living hope and so they were encouraged. As we minister, we must remember that Christianity is about love and hope, not discouragement and fear. Yes, people need to know they are guilty and that there is only one way to salvation, but that message is to be presented as the good news of hope.

**Acts 27:39-41 - <sup>39</sup> 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. <sup>40</sup> 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. <sup>41</sup> 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. <sup>42</sup> And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape. <sup>43</sup> 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, <sup>44</sup> and the rest, some on boards and some on *parts* of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land.**

Paul and the other Christians were in an incredible position to make a big difference in the lives of these people. They saved these lives. I'm sure, on the beach many of the them came to Paul and said, “Your God saved my body, will He save my soul?”

You know, the Lord did a lot to reach these 273 people. People who did not deserve to be saved, yet they were loved by God and His desire was to save them. Notice all the things He was doing: He was sustaining the ship. Sustaining their bodies. Working in the heart of the Centurion. Working in the storm. Bringing guidance and help to Paul. Keeping the ship from capsizing. So many things and more. We could see them under three major headings.

First, the Lord gave them a **course**. It was very clear they weren't going to make it where they wanted to go. Their poor choices had doomed their voyage. But then, in verse 26, Paul explained that there was a way out. There was a *certain* island. And, you know, the Lord drew them to that

island. The storm was pulling them up and down the sea, tossing them around like a dog with a tennis ball. But God drew them toward that *one certain* island. When we think about the lost condition of mankind, progressing toward death, the Bible declares that there is a certain island where life can be found. Christ and *only* Christ is the safe shore. He stands alone as the certain island of salvation. But notice that there was room enough on the shore for each and every person on the ship. Anyone who was willing to swim to that beach or float there if they had to, they would be saved. God was strong enough to save each one.

But then we see that the Lord gave them a **choice**. Paul was telling them authoritatively, “This is what you must do to be saved.” And it’s clear that some believed and some did not. It came to a head in verse 30. The centurion believed. The sailors did not. Paul then explained, “Look, you can do this the way God has said or you can die. That’s the choice.”

It’s remarkable that people reject the message of the Gospel, but many do. They take a look at the free offer of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and decide they do not believe. In the mean time, they seek to save themselves. They’ve got some other plan to come through the storms of life or escape death. The problem is, we do not get to set those terms, God does. I’m not sure why these sailors thought that they’d be able to make it in the skiff through this hurricane, but it does illustrate the kind of mentality that so many people have about spiritual things. They rely on some other plan to row their way out of the storm. “I’ll row into heaven in a boat of good works. I’ll row through purgatory or karma or reincarnation or whatever else and get myself to that safe shore.” But that is not the way and you can’t make it through your own strength. But if you will choose to go God’s way, there is more than enough supply not only to make it through death, but to experience His presence and supply in life.

In fact, that’s a third major category of God’s activity in this passage: He gave them **care**. He brought hope when they were hopeless. He brought a rescue plan when they were doomed. He brought them food when they were hungry. He gave them boards when they couldn’t swim. He cared for them personally, down to the very hairs of their heads. These men who were not disciples of Christ, were not lovers of God, were not good people, who had brought this all on themselves, God says, “But I love them and I will make a way.” And that is what God has done for every man, woman and child throughout human history.

And to accomplish this, God did a lot of supernatural things, but He also put His people in position. They’d have to experience the storm too. They’d have to put their hands on the work and get involved and intercede and instruct, but think of the rich return on that investment. Hundreds of lives saved. Souls saved. A testimony built that continues to minister thousands of years later. Paul and Luke and Aristarchus didn’t hit the beach with any worldly possessions, but they brought hundreds of lives with them. Christians, that’s what we want for our arrival to the shores of heaven. We want to be in a position where we have the opportunity to bring lives with us as we minister the Gospel.

If you are not a Christian, you need to know two things: You are headed for shipwreck. But God loves you and He is working earnestly to save you. Believe Him. Turn to Him. Go His way not your own. And become a person who then is used to rescue others.