



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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### The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 27:1-44

Acts

"Through Many Dangers"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are continuing our study in the book of Acts and we're coming to the end of it. We're in chapter 27, so we have another chapter to go. We're going to cover the entire chapter this morning, all 44 verses, but I'm not going to read all 44 of them. I'm going to read from verse 21 through 44, but I want to set the context of the passage before I read.

It is about Paul's voyage from Caesarea to Rome. It doesn't end with his journey to Rome. It ends before that, that is concluded in chapter 28, but much of the chapter is about his experience on the sea and the storm that the ship passed through. Much of it deals with the journey across the sea from Caesarea first to the isle of Crete and there, things were fine. Paul warned them, though, not to go on because the storms threatened. They didn't listen, they went ahead anyway with their journey. The storms came and so Paul and those on ship spent a number of days tossed about by the stormy sea. Then we come to verse 21 and read:

When they had gone a long time without food, then Paul stood up in their midst and said, "Men, you ought to have followed my advice and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this damage and loss. Yet now I urge you to keep your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night an angel of God, to whom I belong and whom I serve, stood before me, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and

behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.' Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on a certain island."

But when the fourteenth night came, as we were being driven about in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors began to surmise that they were approaching some land. They took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms; and a little further on they took another sounding and found it to be fifteen fathoms. Fearing that we might run aground somewhere on the rocks, they cast four anchors from the stern and wished for daybreak. But as the sailors were trying to escape from the ship and had let down the ship's boat into the sea, on the pretense of intending to lay out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, "Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved."

Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and it fell away. Until the day was about to dawn, Paul was encouraging them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have been constantly watching and going without eating, having taken nothing. Therefore, I encourage you to take some food, for this is for your preservation, for not a hair from the head of any of you will perish." Having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all, and broke it and began to eat. All of them were encouraged and they themselves also took food. All of us in the ship were two hundred and seventy-six persons.

When they had eaten enough, they began to lighten the ship by throwing out the wheat into the sea. When day came, they could not recognize the land; but they did observe a bay with a beach, and they resolved to drive the ship onto it if they could. And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea while at the same time they were loosening the ropes of the rudders; and hoisting the foresail to the wind, they were heading for the beach. But striking a reef where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground; and the prow struck fast and

remained immovable, but the stern began to break up by the force of the waves.

The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners so that none of them would swim away and escape; but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, and the rest should follow, some on planks and others on various things from the ship. And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land.

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you again for this opportunity to come together on this Sunday morning and to read the text of Scripture, your inerrant Word, and then to spend time considering its meaning. That is a great privilege, Father. This is how we are built up in the faith. This is how we are strengthened in the faith. This is how we grow in our knowledge of you as we study your Word, as we contemplate it, and then as we seek to apply it to our lives. We look to you, Father, to bless us to that end.

We look to you to teach us and instruct us and build us up in the faith. You have not only privileged us with your Word but you have given us a divine teacher. We have the third person of the Trinity to guide us in our thinking and to enlighten our minds and apply the text in the myriad of ways in which it can be applied to each and every person here and I pray for that. So, Lord, empty our hearts and our minds of the cares of the day and of the week and help us to put all of that aside and think very clearly about this text of Scripture and how it applies to us. It reminds us of what life is like and it reminds us that you are sovereign in all of the affairs of life, and that should give us great encouragement.

It should encourage those who are wrestling with various difficulties of life, and we know as we look at this list of prayer requests that we have in our bulletin that there are many who are

struggling with great issues, and we pray for them. We pray that you'd give healing and that you'd give encouragement. You see all things, Father. Everything is laid bare before you and you know our circumstances far better than we do, and you know the needs that your people have. I pray your blessings upon them. Encourage them. Encourage them in this time that we spend together.

Bless us this evening as we return to this place and we worship the Lord and remember His death for us and remember that He's coming again. We are going through days of great political crisis in our nation and our thoughts are oftentimes focused on those, and yet the reality is whatever happens in this age is nothing compared to what is to come. The day will come when your son will return and He will put all things together. He will establish justice on the earth. His kingdom will be glorious beyond our imagination, and that is coming and it is a certainty, and we look forward to that. So, Lord, comfort us with that.

And as we worship this evening around the Lord's table, may we remember that as we reflect upon His first coming. Told us to do that until He comes, which means He will certainly come, and we look forward to that day.

Father, bless us now as we sing our final hymn. Prepare our hearts for our time of study together. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] Human life has often been described as a voyage across a stormy sea. Like Homer's *Odyssey* about a man's long voyage home through dangers, storms, and shipwreck, Christians have made similar comparisons to their experiences. John Newton in his hymn, "Amazing Grace," wrote: "Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come; 'tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home." Newton, as you know, was a sailor in his youth. He experienced the dangers of the sea and recalled them in that hymn in order to describe his life and God's saving action in it.

We find the same thing in our text in Acts 27. It's a true adventure on the high seas. F. F. Bruce described Luke's account as a small classic in its own right. Wasn't written as an adventure story. It was recorded to explain how Paul arrived at Rome. It is a true story but a story also that illustrates the Christian life through the apostle's experiences, and it is a story that gives us an example of a Christian's response to hardship. Paul shared the peril of the sea with other men. His life was threatened by soldiers. When he finally arrived safely to dry land, he was bitten by a poisonous snake. Christians don't escape hardship and hazards in this life, but it is in times of great distress that character is developed.

And it is in times of great distress that character is made known. Paul's character and his leadership are seen here in this text. He never gave up hope. He showed courage in crisis. He gave wise counsel and he became a blessing to all on the ship, both Christians and pagans alike, and we learn a great deal from that. But the great story of Acts 27 is not Paul; it is God, it is His power and His faithfulness. He told Paul earlier that he must be His witness in Rome and God's Will cannot be thwarted. So again we see here as we have seen throughout the book of Acts, as we see throughout the Bible, the mighty hand of God, the invisible hand of His providence working out His will for His servants.

The sailors worked feverishly but fruitlessly against the sea. They gave up all hope of being saved and yet all were saved because God willed it. This chapter is a small slice of Paul's life. It is filled with action and in that sense it is hardly typical of our lives. At the same time, it is very accurate, a very accurate picture of what our lives are like because the Christian life is a journey. We are pilgrims and our lives are filled with many challenges that are beyond our control, but God is in control and is guiding us through life's perils just as He guided Paul's ship over the deep and stormy sea.

The chapter divides into three major sections, the journey from Caesarea to the island of Crete; secondly, two weeks in the storm at

sea; and then finally the shipwreck on the isle of Malta. Paul has spent two years in Caesarea following his arrest in Jerusalem. He had received no justice there, and so using his right as a Roman citizen, he made his appeal to Caesar to be tried in Rome, and Acts 27 gives his voyage to Italy.

It began well enough. Paul was put in the custody of a Roman centurion named Julius who was very kind to the apostle. He allowed Paul to take some of his friends with him. Luke is one, we know that because the chapter begins in the first person. Luke writes, "It was decided that we would sail from Italy," so Luke is with him and that means Paul has his physician. Also, Aristarchus, a Christian from Thessalonica, came along. When they arrived in Sidon, which is just up the coast from Caesarea, Paul was allowed to disembark and visit the Christians that were there, which not only indicates something about this Roman centurion, his kindness toward Paul, but it indicates something about Paul himself.

There was something about Paul that commended him to this Roman. He saw something in his character, I think. He saw that he was a man full of joy, it made him stand out. There was something about Paul that endeared him to this man. He was a man evidently with a winsome personality. Paul was not some hardened kind of individual who did not have a kindness about him. I think he did very much and that seems to be indicated in the treatment that he received from this Roman centurion, so he was given certain privileges, certain benefits. He was allowed to disembark and visit the church there in Sidon.

Well, from Sidon they sailed around the northern coast of the island of Cyprus along the southern coast of Asia Minor or Turkey as we know it to the town of Myra, and there they changed to another ship that had come from Alexandria, Egypt, and was going to Italy. Egypt was Rome's granary, and the ship was loaded down with grain. We know that because of the description that's given of it in verses 7 and 8. Luke describes it as traveling slowly and with difficulty to the

island of Crete, but they finally arrived there at a place called Fair Havens, midway along the southern coast of the island, and they stayed there for a number of days.

From there, things took a turn for the worst. It was October. We know that from verse 9 where Luke writes that the feast was already over. He's referring to the feast of the Day of Atonement, which takes place in late September/early October. From the middle of September to the middle of November, the Mediterranean was not safe to travel. This was the dangerous season. The sailors, of course, knew that but they didn't want to wait out the winter in Fair Havens. There was a more convenient place about 40 miles west on the coast, the town of Phoenix, and they wanted to go there.

Well, Paul warned against doing that. We read in verse 10 his counsel, "Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives." Paul knew what he was talking about. He was an experienced traveler. He had crossed the Aegean many times. He had traveled thousands of miles on sea. He'd even experienced shipwreck and was in the open sea for 24 hours, hanging onto a plank of wood until he was either picked up or washed ashore. "A night and a day I spent in the deep," he wrote in 2 Corinthians 11, so he was a seasoned traveler.

He had experience on the sea to the extent that he had even seen the loss of a ship and no doubt the loss of life, and he was afraid that the same thing would happen on this voyage, and so he warned of it. But sometimes people want something so badly that they ignore common sense and they do it anyway. The ship's officers were like that. They ignored Paul's advice, and you can just imagine what must have taken place in the conversation as Paul gave this warning. They must have looked at each other and thought, "Well, who is this man to be counseling us on how to navigate and sail these seas? He's just a Jewish preacher. What does he know? We're men who've grown up on the sea, this is our business."

They had to convince the centurion, Julius, of that, and they were able to do that, that they were the authorities and they knew what to do. So Julius gave the order to head for Phoenix. Circumstances seemed to favor that decision. There was a gentle breeze from the south. But circumstances are never an adequate guide for the decisions of life. They can indicate one thing that is contrary to wisdom and that was the case here. Circumstances were no good guide because storms on the Mediterranean can spring up unexpectedly, and that is just what happened as they traveled west along the southern coast of Crete.

A gale blew down from the northwest over the mountains, and if you know anything about the island of Crete, the central part is a mountain range, a rather steep range, and these gales came from the northeast and they swept down the southern coast of those mountains, stirred up a gale that drove the ship out to sea. Luke calls it a typhonicos wind, a whirling typhoon of wind. The sailors called it Euraquilo and it seized the ship, A. T. Robertson says, like a great monster. Drove it out to sea. The sailors fought against it. They tried to find shelter behind a small island but they couldn't, so they reinforced the ship by passing ropes under the hull to bind it together and hold it against the waves.

They dropped an anchor to act like a brake to keep the ship from sailing south across the Mediterranean to the quicksands of Syrtis on the Libyan coast of North Africa, which is a site, an area, that sailors were in great dread of because of the danger of those great sandbars. But the storm didn't let up, so they jettisoned the cargo and the ship's tackle, but things only got worse. For 14 days, they fought the wind and the waves without knowing directions. The storm hid the sun and the stars, Luke writes in verse 20, so they couldn't navigate. The ship was leaking. The sailors didn't know which way to go, and gradually, Luke writes, they abandoned all hope of being saved.

It's hard to imagine what that must have been like, particularly landlubbers like us, at least like me, who've spent very little time on

the sea or in boats, but you get a sense of it, this ongoing battle, continually fighting against an unrelenting storm, beaten by winds, riding over rolling mountains of ocean, experiencing seasickness and sleepless nights for two weeks. It wasn't just a gale that blew up in the afternoon and into that evening, this is two weeks – half a month of constantly fighting this storm, these waves, without any sense of where they were going. The sun and the moon were blotted out. They had no idea of their course, of their position on the sea.

It was after many days of this that Paul stepped forward to give needed counsel. He'd been silent since Crete, but the crew was in despair and he had encouraging words. He began by reminding them of the advice that he had given earlier when he warned them not to sail. He wasn't scolding them, he was showing that his advice was worth listening to. They knew that now. They were ready to listen, and so with the spray in his face and the howling wind around his ears, Paul must have shouted above the roar of the storm his counsel and his good news. We read it in verses 22 through 25:

"Yet now I urge you to keep your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.' Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told."

Well, that last statement in verse 25 is a great statement of faith, and it is a very good definition of faith, "I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told." What is faith? It is believing just what God has said. Faith is not believing what we hope to be true, it is not believing what we feel to be right. Faith is believing in God's objective Word. It is believing in His promises. It is trusting and resting in them, and based on that, Paul had hope. He had no other reason for hope. The circumstances were hopeless, and I can imagine how Paul might have lost hope as he is on this ship. He's not

a sailor and he looks at these sailors and this captain and these men who were experienced in the sea, and they've given up hope.

Well, who is Paul to have any hope if the sailors, if the authorities, the men who have experience and knowhow in storms and the sea have given up all hope? He had every reason to despair along with them, but he didn't. Not because Paul was just a positive person. You know, there are people like that. They hope against hope. We like to be around them. They give us encouragement. They're just positive type people. Well, I think Paul was a positive person, he was a man with great hope, but it's not because this was just the kind of personality that he had. He had hope because he had the promise of God.

The Lord had sent his messenger and Paul believed him. He believed the Word of God and on that basis, Paul, who was no sailor, could tell these men of the sea to keep up their courage and not be afraid because the Lord of the sea had spoken, and that same Lord has spoken words that should encourage us when our lives take on a pattern similar to those two long weeks on the sea. Nothing the sailors did could change their course, nothing the sailors did could change their circumstances. They were at the mercy of the wind and the waves, and our lives can become like that.

Storms come. Maybe they come with a report from a doctor, the diagnosis of your condition is serious, cancer has been discovered and surgery is necessary. Many have gotten that kind of news. We pray for them on our prayer list. And who hasn't thought about getting that kind of news? The older you get, the more you think about those things. Or perhaps it's when a parent gets a phone call late at night with the news that his or child has been in an accident and the news isn't good. That's happened. What parent doesn't fear getting that kind of phone call? There's nothing that a person could do. This storm has come into a person's life, it just hits like a whirlwind, and you are helpless.

You can't change it, you can't reverse it, you can't turn the clock back and make it not be, it just is there and you are just carried along, it seems, by the circumstances. The pain, the sorrow, the difficulties, they will end when they end, meaning that we can't change them. We feel helpless in the midst of them. They just seem to have a life of their own like this storm at sea.

But they don't, not really. They end when God wills it, and it is that fact that gives hope. Our hope is in the fact that God wills what takes place. Nothing just happens in this life. Circumstances just don't occur that take over and carry us along. God is the God of circumstances. He is in control and he has not left us in the dark, either. We are not drifting along without the sun and the stars to navigate. We have His promises, we have His Word, and it is light, it is true, it gives direction.

That's what Paul had, and based on the sure promises of God, he had hope. Paul could take encouragement and Paul could give encouragement because he knew the Word of God, he knew the promises of God. Secondly, Paul knew that he belonged to God and really, this is part of that first point that I just make, he knew the Word of God. Well, he knew because he knew the Word of God who he was and his relationship to God, but if we could make a second point out of it, it is this: that he knew that he belonged to God. Verse 23, when he speaks of God, he describes Him as "the God to whom I belong." In fact, in Ephesians 1:18, Paul calls the church God's inheritance.

Isn't that an amazing description of the church? The God of the universe, who owns all things – all things. He creates them all. Everything that exists or ever will exist is created by God, by His fiat, brings it into existence, He sustains it all, and yet what He considers His inheritance, His special possession, is the church, it's the people of God. So we are something that He will not forget.

Many years ago when I was living in Jerusalem, I bought my wife a ring that she desired. It was a silver ring. It wasn't terribly

expensive. It was kind of an interesting ring. She liked it, came home with it, and she decided to keep it safe and so she put it somewhere. Problem is she forgot where she put it and that was 10-15 years ago. She still doesn't know where it is but frequently she'll think about that ring. It's not an expensive ring, it's not a significant ring, but she wonders where it is. She still thinks about it.

Well, if someone will think about and be concerned about some minor, insignificant object, what will God do with his inheritance? He'll never forget us – never. We're described in that way, we're described in many ways, as God's possessions, the church is the bride of Christ, it is the object of His unconditional and eternal love, He protects us and He blesses us as a husband is to protect and bless his wife. We're described as His children all through the New Testament, and a parent doesn't discard his or her child; parents care for their children. And we're called His sheep. Jesus is the good shepherd. A shepherd doesn't neglect his sheep. He leaves the 99 to find the one lamb who has strayed and brings it back.

We are the possession of the Lord God. Believers in Jesus Christ belong to Him because He bought us at the infinitely high price of His own Son's precious blood, and we can be assured that having paid that infinitely high price for us, He will never neglect us, He will never forget us. "You have been bought with a price," Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:20. We're not our own, we don't belong to ourselves, we don't belong to anyone else but the Lord God. We are His, and so we are secure. We are under His constant care.

Paul knew that and knew that God would not abandon him to the sea. He had assured him that He would not do that on more than one occasion, He assured him of that on this occasion, and that was good news not only for Paul but for all on board.

Thirdly, Paul describes himself as God's servant. "An angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me." As God's servant, Paul knew that he had a mission. The Lord had assured him of that many times and in many ways, but He had told him that he

must be His witness before Caesar. Couldn't be His witness before Caesar if he sank in the Mediterranean. He'd assured him that he would be safe, and like George Whitefield, Paul knew that we are immortal until our work is done. So Paul could keep up his courage and he could tell others to keep up theirs and not be afraid. "This thing will end," he was saying. "This will not be the death of anyone on this ship."

"But," he said, "we must run aground on a certain island." When everyone had given up in despair, Paul showed himself to be a leader because he believed what God said. He had faith in God's Word. That gives stability, that gives courage, that builds character. That's how it occurs, through reading, studying, understanding, believing the Word of God.

So they continued on, and on the 14th night about midnight, Luke writes in verse 27, the sailors began to surmise that they were approaching some land. Evidently, they could hear the waves breaking on the shore. Knowing that they were entering shallow water, some of these sailors panicked and they tried to escape in the small boat on the ship. Paul caught them. They were doing it on the pretense of letting down anchors, but Paul knew what was going on and prevented them from doing that because without these sailors, the ship could not have been properly beached. As he told the centurion in verse 31, "Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved."

So by Paul's diligence or by the providence of God, Paul saved all on board. Then at dawn, he encouraged them to take some food. The crew and the passengers hadn't eaten in days. They had been using their time, their strength, all of their energy to fight the storm. They needed to keep up their strength to survive, and so Paul urged them to do that. He then prayed before this whole company, 275 of the passengers and crew. He then broke the bread and Luke writes in verse 36, "All of them were encouraged and they themselves also took bread."

Paul is a great theologian. We can say, I think, that Paul is the greatest theologian to have ever lived. He was a man of great courage. He shows that here, he shows that in many other places as we have seen in the book of Acts as he went courageously into unknown regions and faced all kinds of dangers and went through all kinds of difficulties. He's also a man of common sense. That's not said of most theologians or at least not all theologians or preachers, for that matter. He was a man of common sense, he was wise. He knew what to do in a crisis, and he knew what to do in a crisis and he stood firm in a crisis because he was a man of God, and we wonder, "Well, how can I become a person like that?"

"When everything is disintegrating around me, when the world is in chaos, when things are slipping away and people are losing courage and perspective, how can I stand firm and not be swept away with them?" The answer is to do what Paul did, be the kind of person that Paul was. Paul was a person who knew God's Word and knew the Lord, and as we know God and as we grow in our relationship with Him, as we know His Word, as we study it, as we learn it, as we obey it, as we walk with Christ, obedient, faithful, day by day, we develop. Gradually over time we grow, we mature, we become wise, we become people of character, we become like Christ.

That's the goal God has for your life, to conform you to the image of His Son. Well, Paul was like that. He was Christlike. He was selfless. He served the whole ship, the believers and the unbelievers. He encouraged them, he instructed them, and in doing that, he got them ready for the final moments.

Strengthened and encouraged, the sailors tried to drive the ship toward the shore but it ran aground on a reef and began to break up. Seeing that the prisoners might escape, the soldiers planned to kill them. Some have thought that these prisoners were headed for the arena and the gladiator games, and so they were expendable, these soldiers thought. They certainly wanted to kill them before they made an escape. That was at least their plan. But the centurion, Julius,

prevented the killing because of Paul. Luke writes in verse 43 that wanting to bring Paul safely through, he kept them from their intention.

So because of Paul, because of his presence, because of the centurion's fondness of Paul, he spared the lives of all of those prisoners. Had nothing to do with the prisoners but to save Paul, he saved them, and instead he commanded all who could swim to jump overboard and the rest to follow any way that they could. It was every man for himself. Some swam, some held onto planks, but everyone arrived safely at shore. That's how the text ends, verse 44: "And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land." Just as God had promised, the ship and cargo were lost, but every man was saved, which proved the truth of God's Word and shows once again that God is sovereign.

In fact, this passage is a good one on both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man and how those two principles work together, and that's helpful because it's often argued that if predestination and unconditional election are true, and that salvation is God's sovereign work, then there can be no human will and no responsibility. So questions are asked like if God's absolutely sovereign, why should we pray? After all, if He's ordained the future, why pray about the future? And if election is true, why witness? Why go out and give the gospel if God has chosen a people for himself, they're going to be saved anyway?

Well, both of those principles are taught here in Acts 27. Paul witnessed and Paul prayed. He prayed before he gave – as he gave thanks for that bread, and I'm sure that he prayed, he thanked God for those soggy pieces of bread that they had, but I'm sure he did other things as well, that he prayed for the voyage as it came to an end that it would end safely. He claimed the promise of God and he prayed that all would be saved just as God had promised all would be saved. And we have an indication here of how these two principles relate together, our responsibility and God's sovereignty.

Simply put, God uses means to accomplish His ends. He determines the end. That is clear in a number of passages in the Bible, but it's very clear from Ephesians 1:11. I don't think it can be stated more plainly than it is there, where Paul writes that God works all things after the counsel of His Will. All things, not some things. He works all things after what? The counsel of His Will. But the God who ordains the end also ordains the means to that end. Notice verses 22 through 24. Paul told the men on the ship that there would be no loss of life because an angel of God told him that, God revealed it. This was a word from God; therefore, it must be true.

He's talking about the future, he's talking about what God has planned, what God has ordained. It must stand. But notice also Paul's response to that in verse 31. After preventing the sailors from leaving the ship, he said, "Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved." Now, since Paul knew by divine revelation that all would be saved, why didn't he simply reason, as he saw these men going over the side in this small boat, "Well, obviously, some will be saved by leaving the ship and some will be saved by staying in the ship"? He didn't do that because he knew that their salvation would happen in the ship. It was the means of their ordained deliverance from the sea.

And his warning was the means of keeping them in the ship that would be their salvation. If they had listened to Paul's warning earlier, when they were in Crete, they would have avoided all of this. The ship and its cargo would have been saved. They didn't do that, and it was all lost. When they did finally listen to Paul and obey, they were all saved.

Now, the same is true in spiritual things. God has not only chosen people for salvation, He has chosen them to salvation through faith. It's not apart from faith. And they believe when they hear the gospel. Evangelism is God's means of drawing His elect to Himself and the elect respond. Those who don't respond are not elect. They choose not to believe. They disregard the Word of God, they

disregard the warnings of God, and they are lost like the ship and its cargo. The God who ordains the end ordains the means to the end, whether it is saving sailors from the sea by a ship or saving souls from perdition by the gospel, and we can apply that same principle to all areas of life.

If you want to grow as a Christian, if you want to have wisdom as a Christian, then avail yourself of the means that God has given. You have not because you ask not, James says. You want wisdom, pray for it. You want to grow in the faith, then study the Word of God. But don't say something like, "Well, if God wants me to be a scholar, then He's ordained it and I'll be a scholar, so I'm just going to sit down and watch the football game. I can become a scholar that way." If that's what you do, God's not ordained that you be a scholar. If you're to be a scholar, if you're to be a fruitful Christian, a knowledgeable Christian, then you will do it because God has ordained that you will study the Word of God, and you're responsible to do that.

God is sovereign, the Bible teaches that, and man is responsible, the Bible teaches that, and those who listen and obey, who use the means that God has given, they are blessed. Acts 27 gives us an example of that. It gives an example of the two principles working together, and it gives us a great illustration of the Christian life. It is like a voyage across a stormy sea. We should expect that.

The other day I read a quote by the British writer of a generation ago, F. B. Meyer, who wrote, "If I am told that I am to take a journey that is a dangerous trip, every jolt along the way will remind me that I am on the right road." Don't be surprised if you are cast onto a sea of trouble where you feel helpless and seem to be driven about by the circumstances. Christian life is sometimes like that. But don't despair, either.

God is the God of circumstances. He is in control. Doesn't promise smooth sailing. Doesn't promise that we won't lose our possessions. Those on the ship lost everything. But the events of

Acts 27 show that God will take care of us. He will be faithful to us. He will bring us through many dangers, and ultimately we can say He will bring us safely to heaven's shore.

Paul gives us an example of what we're to do in the meantime, of what we are to do in those dangers, and very simply put, it is believe the promises of God. He could say, "Keep up your courage" because God's angel stood before him and gave him a promise. Earlier in Jerusalem when his life was in danger, when he faced those trials before the Sanhedrin and then before the Roman governors, the Lord stood at his side and told him, "Take courage," and gave him the assurance that he would survive all of that to be His witness in Rome.

Years before that, before Paul ever became the apostle, when he was still a Jewish rabbi, Matthew writes that when the disciples were on the Sea of Galilee in a terrific storm, battered by waves and wind, the Lord came to them, walking on the sea. The disciples weren't sure what it was they were seeing. They were terrified by the sight until He said, "Take courage, it is I. Do not be afraid." In storms, that is Christ's message. Take courage because He's with us.

That was one of the last promises that He gave before ascending into heaven. Christ told his disciples, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age," and that is always true for us. That is why we can always take courage. Sometimes that promise is all that a person has. That assurance that He is with us is the plank of wood that he or she holds onto in their sea of trouble. When all that a person can do is wait and all that a person can do is trust, it's remembering what He has said, that through it all, He is with us, and so we're to take courage. That's all we may have, but that, I would say, is enough because God is faithful and God is able. His Word is true and His Word is sufficient.

Storms that God brings into our lives are times of testing. They're times that are difficult. We never wish them upon ourselves but they come, and through the difficulty our faith is proved and it is made to grow. In that way, we become useful to others. This is not

the first crisis that Paul went through. Paul's whole life was one difficulty after another. Read 2 Corinthians 11 and you get a picture of all the hardships that he had gone through before this ever happened, and all of that was preparation for this great crisis that he faced, that gave him stability, gave him character. Makes us useful as we go through trials, it causes us to mature, and Paul was useful to those on ship.

He was not made a coward by the dangers. He'd seen dangers before. He was not made a coward because he knew the Lord and trusted in Him, and because of that, this became an occasion for him to help people in need and witness for Christ. He brought a message of hope and encouragement. He gave wise counsel, good common sense that kept the crew working and resulted in their being preserved. And it was because of his good character, it was because of his courage and his helpfulness that the centurion was impressed with Paul and for his sake ordered that the lives of the prisoners be spared.

Because Paul was faithful to God's Word, he was a blessing to the ship that was full of unbelievers. In all there were 276 people, including Paul, who were saved from the sea, and it was a salvation that occurred, a deliverance that occurred, because of Paul's presence among them.

F. F. Bruce commented that "human society has no idea how much it owes in the mercy of God to the presence in it of righteous men and women." Our faithfulness, our obedience, our good example, our good counsel are an influence in this world and it should be. We should be lights and salt in this world and have a good influence. In addition to that, God preserves society because of our presence in it. He preserves society for the sake of His church. To preserve us, He preserves others.

Life is filled with trouble for everyone. It's a common experience. It's like a voyage on a stormy sea. For believers, it is a time of testing, a time of experiencing God's faithfulness in which we grow and we develop as believers in Jesus Christ. For others, for

unbelievers, it is a time to learn their need. A time, an opportunity, to come to the end of themselves and seek the Savior.

It was in a great storm on the Atlantic that John Newton recalled the Bible verses that his godly mother had taught him when he was a child. You know the story of Newton, how he went to sea at a very young age. He very soon after that cast off his Christian training and he chose to live a wild life, and he did that, he indulged in sin, he lived a life of debauchery for many years. But on the sea during that terrible storm that lasted for days and days when the hull of the ship began to fill up with water and they couldn't pump it out faster than it was coming in, when he and all others had given up hope, those verses that he had learned as a child came back to him and he believed.

He believed the gospel, God saved him, and God saved that ship, He delivered it from the storm. Newton went on to become a minister of the gospel, an Anglican there in the city of London for many years and wrote that great hymn, "Amazing Grace."

God has His purpose in the things that touch our lives. We may not understand them but then we don't have to understand them. What we need to understand is His promises. They assure us that He understands our situation and that our circumstances have a purpose and that He is in control, so we can take courage. But if you're here this morning without Christ, if you are not a believer in Him, then courage for you is a fantasy. You have every reason to fear. Even if you avoid storms in this life, you cannot avoid the great storm that is coming, the storm of God's wrath.

The only way of escaping that is the way of escape that God has given because He has sent His only begotten Son into this world who died in the place of sinners, who bore that wrath in their place so that all who believe in Him will escape that wrath, will have life everlasting, will have the righteousness of Christ and be accepted into God's family forever. If you're here without Christ, realize your need. Look to Him. Trust in Him. The moment you do, you receive the forgiveness of sin, life everlasting, you become the inheritance of God

and He, your inheritance. May God help you to do that and help each of us to live a life of faithful service to Him. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your goodness and your grace when we come to a text such as this and read what really is adventure on the high seas. What an experience Paul and those sailors and that crew had. And yet, Father, there's so much more here than that. It was an occasion for you to show your mercy and your grace, your sovereignty, your control of all things, and we can take that as a pattern for our lives because our lives do oftentimes become stormy, out of our control. We seem to be carried along by the circumstances and yet we can come to a text such as this and many, many others throughout the Bible and they assure us that nothing just happens.

You are the God of circumstances. You bring the storms of life into our lives for a good purpose. Encourage us with that, strengthen us, prepare us for the storms that may come that we may be faithful to you. We thank you for your faithfulness to us, for sending your Son into the world, who died in our place, that we might have His life. We thank you for Him and it's in His name we pray. Amen.