

The Great Stories of the Early Church
81-Paul in Roman Custody05
Used by God
a Ragged and Irregular Path
Acts 27:1-28:11

Read 27:1-14

Introduction:

Rather than read the whole text for this particular lesson we will be reading it as we go along. As we open Chapter 27 Paul has been a prisoner of the Roman authorities for a little over two years. You will recall that he had ended his third missionary journey by traveling to Jerusalem to personally deliver a huge sum of money to the church there to be used throughout Judea for the relief of the saints because of the drought which had gone on now for several years.

While there in Jerusalem he had confronted some accusation which had been levied against him among the Christian Jews, that he had abandoned the faith of their fathers and the worship system of the temple, that he had been speaking against the Jewish system throughout the Gentile world. To ease their concerns Paul had gone into the temple with some Christians who were bringing their Nazarite vows to an end.

While he was in the Temple, some unbelieving Jews had concocted a story that he had profaned the sacred place by bringing uncircumcised Gentiles into it. The accusation was false but they caught him and undertook to beat him to death in the street.

The Roman garrison in charge of keeping the peace in Jerusalem stopped the impromptu execution and took Paul into custody. The Jews vehemently demanded that he be returned to them but Paul, being a Roman citizen, insisted on being tried as a Roman by Roman authorities.

Having had several hearings, including the last one before the king of the region, Herod Agrippa, Paul is now, as we begin this story, finally on his way to an audience with Caesar in Rome. He had actually been wanting and planning to make this trip for a while, but not under these circumstances. You make recall that as he had finished the great ministry in Ephesus, he had looked to visit a couple more places, return to Jerusalem and then make the trip to Rome.

Acts 19:21

21 After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. KJV

Then, while in the custody of the Romans at Jerusalem, he had actually been visited by God with the information that the Lord was sending him to Rome.

Acts 23:10-11

- 10 And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.
- 11 And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

And now arrangements have been made to send Paul there, in custody, as a prisoner. He was being sent by God and according to his own wishes, but the Lord was having the Romans pay for it and guard him the whole way.

Think with me for a moment. If you were the Almighty God and had a man in your service like the Apostle Paul whom you were going to send from Caesarea to Rome, how would you do it?

As I thought about that, I realized that I would have had a wealthy Christian donate a goodly sum so that Paul could purchase a ride on the largest and best vessel available. Then, I would have the wind and weather be favorable so that the trip would be comfortable, safe, swift and uneventful. Paul would arrive rested, refreshed and encouraged, ready to preach and witness at Rome. That is how I would probably do it. I assure you that I would not have had him attacked in the streets of Jerusalem and nearly beaten to death, languish for two years in prison as Roman officials sought bribes from him to be released, and then sent on a freighter into a dangerous storm to be shipwrecked on an island for three months. But, then, I am not the Almighty God!

Let us refresh our minds about the Lord. He is Omniscient, knowing absolutely everything about everything not only now but past and future, every detail about every single event that will ever occur. He is also Omnipotent (having all power - nothing impossible to Him) and Sovereign (the Absolute Ruler of all that exists). He both owns and controls his Creation, including the weather and the ocean. And He loves His people, especially His faithful servants like Paul, but also Roman soldiers, shipowners, sailors, and barbarians.

So, what is all of this about contrary winds, storms, being off course, shipwreck, escaping to land on wreckage from the ship, barbarians and snake bites?

How and why did the Mighty God give this dear servant such a horrible trip from Judea to Italy? It was certainly no pleasure cruise.

Paul had occasion to write down his perspective on the Workings of God.

Eph 1:3-11

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself,
according to the good pleasure of his will,
6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the
beloved.
7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins,
according to the riches of his grace;
8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;
9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good
pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:
10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all
things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:
11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to
the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: KJV

He works “all things after the counsel of His Own Will.” So said Paul. So, this miserable trip which included a storm and a shipwreck was thoroughly planned out and executed by God Himself!

But why would He plan such a trip with so much, seemingly, going wrong?

- 1. He established in the minds of the Centurion and well as the captain of the ship and the ship’s owner (who was apparently also on the journey) that Paul was a man who had both wisdom and contact with God so that his warnings should be heeded.**

Acts 27:9-14

9 Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because
the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them,
10 And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much
damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.
11 Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more
than those things which were spoken by Paul.
12 And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised
to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to
winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north
west.
13 And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their
purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete.
14 But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon.
KJV

- 2. Thus, God established that when His servant gives a warning, even if the situation does not seem to support it, the servant of God is still worthy of respectful attention. See v.13.**
- 3. It was further demonstrated to the crew and the soldiers that God can save even when it seems that all is lost.**

15 And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive.
16 And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come
by the boat:
17 Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest
they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven.
18 And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship;
19 And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.
20 And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us,
all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.
21 But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should
have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm
and loss.
22 And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life
among you, but of the ship.
23 For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve,
24 Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee
all them that sail with thee.
25 Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told
me.
26 Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.

**4. It is also shown here that the role of the man of God in a situation of profound
distress is to seek God's face on behalf of those with him. See vs.23-26**

**5. In the process, the Centurion and maybe some of the soldiers learned to trust Paul's
wisdom and insight.**

27 But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about
midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country;
28 And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they
sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms.
29 Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the
stern, and wished for the day.
30 And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat
into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship,
31 Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be
saved.
32 Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.

6. God proved that His Word through His servant was true.

33 And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day
is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.
34 Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an
hair fall from the head of any of you.

35 And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat.
36 Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat.
37 And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls.
38 And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.
39 And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.
40 And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.
41 And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.
42 And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.
43 But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land:
44 And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.

7. **This was demonstrated in that the command of the Centurion not to kill the prisoners was not according to SOP. Vs. 42,43.**

8. **Ultimately a man on the island was healed as well as many others. Undoubtedly a number of people were converted.**

Acts 28:1-10

1 And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.
2 And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.
3 And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.
4 And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.
5 And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.
6 Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.
7 In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously.
8 And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.
9 So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed:

10 Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary. KJV

They were way off course. There is probably no way that these people would have been exposed to the gospel without this series of events. As long as the ship was navigable, the shipowner would have insisted on taking the best route for his cargo. Paul may not have even known that this little island existed.

So, the journey, which should have taken more than a week or two, turned into a trek lasting about four months altogether. But much was accomplished during that time for the Kingdom of God.

There are many practical life lessons here, beginning with the reality that many of the life stories of the bible seem to be very ragged trails.

Remember Abraham? He was specifically called by God out of Ur of the Chaldees to go to an unknown land and God made great promises to him, right?

A famine drove him into Egypt

There he almost lost his dear Sara

He was promised a son but had to wait until he was impossibly old for the child to be born.

He had to go to war to rescue his nephew Lot.

Then he was required to sacrifice his son to God.

He ultimately had to drive his other children away so as not to confound the inheritance of Isaac.

And then, the fulfillment of the Great Promise to him turned out to be different than it seemed at first.

Consider Jacob.

Before he was ever born he was announced as the one whom God would bless.

Gen 25:21-23

21 And Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

22 And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the LORD.

23 And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger

than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger. KJV

But then he and his mother were seemingly forced to conspire against Isaac to retrieve the blessing due him.

He was forced to flee his home and serve 21 unpleasant years for his uncle and father in law.

He involuntarily acquired a wife his didn't want.

He was put in a situation to wrestle with God for a blessing he sought and was crippled in the effort.

He had 12 sons but 10 of them were a misery to him.

How about Joseph?

He was specially gifted and specially loved but was sold as a slave by his brothers after some of them wanted to kill him.

He was falsely accused and cast into prison before being raised to second ruler in Egypt.

We could speak of others: Elijah - David - Ezekiel - Jeremiah - Daniel - Jonah - men who were blessed by God but whose lives did not follow a straight path nor an even curve.

In fact, most of the lives of people of God followed paths that seem very irregular to us.

Our perceptions tell us that God's leadership and direction of our lives should be something like that trip I imagined at the beginning of this message, straight, comfortable, predictable and enjoyable.

But the reality is that this is rarely the case. God has a purpose, you see, and it involves much more than simply us. He is working to mature us but at the same time, He is working in the lives of others and our lives intersect with those of other people whom God will bless in the process of shepherding us toward maturity.

He is going to have others participate in the process by ministering to us and as we minister to them, but He is also going to get glory to Himself in the whole process.

Let us walk through those ideas together.

His purpose is to mature us.

- But not necessarily according to our plans or the plans of anyone else.
- In God's Kingdom all of the pieces are unique and uniquely fashioned.
- He does not produce cookie-cutter copies in His Maturity Program.

Can you not just imagine what those people were saying under their breath as they heard of how things were going with Paul after he went to Jerusalem against their counsel and their wishes, “if he had only listened to us...”

But if Paul had listened to them countless souls would have never heard the gospel message and never been impacted by the life of this great messenger of the Word of God. Jewish observers of the Sanhedrin, Roman Centurions and soldiers, two Roman governors and a king as well as their aides and servants, sailors, and the barbarians of Miletus. This journey, as ragged and trouble-ridden as it seemed, was designed in Eternity for maximum impact on a group of humans who desperately needed the gospel message.

So, let me say this to you. As you look back over your life from this moment it may seem as ragged to you as the journey to Rome was for Paul. But, if you belong to Christ, every turn of the road has been designed by God to grow you to what you are today and He has plans for your future to grow you even more.

But, do not be tempted to try to plan out God’s Work. He is not working to make you a copy of someone else but He is working to build you into something that will give Him honor and glory and will be encouraging and helpful to others.

The final story cannot and will not be told until the Great Judgment but if God has laid His hand on you, He will not let you go until His Work is complete.

Do as Paul did. Seek Him in the storm. Tell others what He has shown you. Serve Him during the tempest and share His Word with those whom He brings into your life. Only Eternity will tell the impact that you will have.