

GOD GIVES PAUL HIS WORD IN THE STORM

Acts 27:1-44

Key Verse: 27:24

and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.'

In today's passage, Paul is caught up in a raging storm on a boat the Mediterranean Sea. The storm was so bad that everyone on the boat, gave up all hope of being saved! The truth is, we may not be out on the Mediterranean Sea, but at times we are also unexpectedly caught up in a storm; just like Paul.....having to deal with an event or a situation that is simply beyond our human capabilities.....and that shakes our lives....to the very core...making us feel helpless.....powerlessand hopeless. But things do not have to be this way! In today's passage, God gives Paul His word in the storm, to transform him from a fearful prisoner to the brave captain of the ship! May the Lord stand beside you and me and also transform us with His word this morning.

Look at verse 1. Finally, after two long years in Caesarea, Paul was sent to stand trial before Caesar in Rome. He and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius. Together they boarded a ship and set sail for Italy! But strong winds made their voyage difficult from the beginning. Look at verse 7. It says, because of strong winds, they made slow headway for many days..... and had difficulty..... arriving off Cnidus. The winds became so strong that they did not allow them to hold their course. These winds were not incidental but seasonal winds that blew every year between mid-September and mid-November; making sea travel during this period especially dangerous. According to verse 9, when Paul and the men arrived at Fair Havens, it was already after the Day of Atonement which meant they were in the first or second week of October! A time in the year when many sailors considered it already too dangerous to sail.

But the pilot of Paul's ship thought he knew better, and wanted to push on. Paul could not just let it slide. Despite being a prisoner, he was also a seasoned sea traveller. He knew that what the pilot and owner of the ship were doing was irresponsible and dangerous. So he spoke up, look at verses 10. "Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo and our own lives also." But they did not listen. At this time, Julius, the centurion, could have taken Paul and the other prisoners off the ship. But instead of listening to what Paul said, he followed the advice of the irresponsible pilot and owner.....So Paul had

no choice but to remain on the ship as the sailors weighed anchor and began sailing along the shore of Crete. (13)

Look at verses 14-15. "Before very long, a wind of hurricane force called the "northeaster," swept down from the island. The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so they gave way to it and were driven along deep into the open and stormy waters of the Mediterranean Sea. This kind of storm was precisely what Paul warned them about! And it happened so quickly, in a blink of an eye! Everything changed as the ship, and everyone on it suddenly had to fight for their lives. First, the sailors secured the lifeboat by hoisting it on board. Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together as the rough waters pounded it from all sides! And if keeping the ship in one piece needed to be more stressful, they also had to avoid hitting the sandbars of Syrtis. So they lowered the sea anchor. Look at verses 18-19. The ship took such a violent battering from the storm that they began throwing the cargo overboard the next day. Finally, on the third day, they threw the ship's tackle (equipment) overboard with their own hands. One commentator said that this included their beds, clothes and other personal belongings.....as they were desperate to lighten the ship and prevent it from sinking.

The reality was these men were in over their heads. The storm was too big and powerful as it raged on and on for many days, with neither sun nor stars appearing. Finally, after doing everything they possibly could to survive.....and after many sleepless days and nights of fighting the raging storm.....they gave up all hope of being saved. They stopped working.....they stopped shouting....they stopped believing..... As despair....regret.....and fear were all that remained in the hearts of the 276 men caught in that raging storm.

Have you ever felt like these men? Perhaps you are feeling like them even now! The truth is, you may not be out on the Mediterranean Sea, but at times we are also unexpectedly caught up in a storm; just like these men.....having to deal with an event or a situation that is simply beyond our human capabilities.....and that shakes our lives...to the very core...making us feel as helpless.....as powerlessand as hopeless as the despairing men on that ship. Of course, we do not like to feel this way, right? So then, why does God allow it? Why did God let Paul end up fighting for his life in a storm; especially when he warned the pilot and owner of the ship not to set sail in Fair Havens? Did God forget about Paul? Was God unable to save Paul? Nothing could be further from the truth.

Look at verses 21-22. While everyone on the ship sat in despair, crushed by the circumstances and waiting to die, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed." How could Paul be so confident? How could he be so strong amid a raging storm? Was he simply an optimist by nature? No, that was the pilot and owner of the ship, yet the storm battered the last bit of optimism from their hearts. Then how could Paul stand up and speak so boldly.....in the midst of the storm?

Look at verses 23. (Read) Paul could stand up and speak boldly because God stood beside Paul in the storm. Humanly speaking, Paul was seemingly one of many men on that ship.....no different from any of them. But this was not true. In Christ Jesus, Paul was special, because he belonged to God.....that is why he said; the God whose I am. There amid the storm, all the men felt abandoned.....unloved.....and alone. But not Paul, for God sent His angel to stand beside him in the storm. To let Paul know how much God loved him! And that God would never abandon him. This is also true for you and me. It is true that when the storms of life batter us, we quickly feel as if God does not love us....that He has abandoned us. But nothing can be further from the truth! When we kneel down in prayer, we will quickly discover that the Lord stands lovingly besides us; ready to give us His word in the storm.

Look at verse 24. Can we read today's key verse together? And said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.'" The angel's first words were, "Do not be afraid, Paul." Paul was human. Yes, we know he had a strong faith and a deep understanding of the things of God. But even he was afraid in the midst of the storm. Yet, the Lord did not rebuke him. Instead, the Lord understood, saying, "Do not be afraid, Paul." As of first importance in the storm, the Lord helped Paul overcome the fear in his heart. To any person, overcoming fear in the storm is crucial for.....fear paralyses us.....it shackles our feet so that instead of confronting a problem and overcoming it, we withdraw and become crooked in our thinking. We must know that without overcoming fear, we cannot stand up in a storm to speak boldly and act decisively for God.

How, then, can we overcome fear? Like Paul, we too should personally hear and accept God's word: "Don't be afraid, [your name.]" When Paul heard God's word, "Do not be afraid, Paul," the Holy Spirit drove out fear and renewed the love of God in Paul's heart. For "there is no

fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear...." (1 John 4:18a). We must know that God's love, expressed through the Holy Spirit, is the antidote to fear.

Look again at verse 24. The angel also said, You must stand trial before Caesar. With this, the Lord reminded Paul of God's firm plan for Paul to stand trial before Caesar. God had given Paul the vision to go to Rome. God had promised him that he must testify in Rome. (Ac 23:11) God had not changed His plan because of the storm and would make sure that Paul safely arrived in Rome. Here we can learn that God reminds us of our purpose in life amid storms. Many young people struggle with the desires of the flesh. Sometimes these desires are so strong that they seem to be the driving force of life. But this should never be. God's calling and purpose should be the driving forces of our lives.....that directs our lives and always keep us pointing in the right direction.....to go where God wants us to go and do what He wants us to do. What is your purpose in life? Have you ever thought about it? We can discover our purpose in Jesus when we humbly read and accept God's word in our hearts. Let's have a clear purpose in Jesus this year!!

Look again at verse 24. Then the angel said to Paul, "...and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you." No doubt, there in the belly of the ship, Paul cried out to the Lord for help. Yet, he not only cried out for God to save his own life.....but also the lives of the other 275 men with him. Then, God graciously agreed to save them also. How amazing is our God! How wonderfully kind and loving.....for not only did He stand beside Paul in the storm.....not only did He promise to save Paul's life but also the lives of men who did not even call on His name. Yes, God saved them because His precious son and servant, Paul, prayed for them. This is what our God is like, the God to whom we belong and serve!

The question is, how did Paul respond to God's word to him in the storm? Look at verse 25. Paul said I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Yes, there in the belly of the ship.....still being battered by the storm.....Paul accepted God's word into his heart and believed it 100%. Then something amazing happened.....Paul was transformed..... from a fearful and paralysed prisoner..... to the ship's captain who decisively and boldly led the men to safety. Look again at first 25 and also 26. Paul said to the crew: keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island. Doesn't he sound like the captain of the ship?

Then on the fourteenth night...about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land. Look at verses 28. They took soundings and found that the water was thirty-seven

meters deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was twenty-seven meters deep. Indeed, after everything they went through, Paul was right! They were going to make it out alive! Land was near. Yet, fear that they would be dashed against the rocks in the shallow waters *also* shot up in their hearts. So they immediately dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for God to keep them safe until daylight.

But with land so nearby, and the risk of being dashed against the rock growing by the minute, the sailors (in other words, the men who knew how to sail the ship) decided to escape from the ship and leave the rest of the men behind. They pretended to be lowering an anchor, but they dropped the lifeboat. They planned to jump into it and row for safety. They were selfish. More than that, they were faithless cowards.....for unlike Paul, they did not accept God's promise word in their hearts. But Paul, the ship's new captain, was alert to the problem. Look at verses 31-32. Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved." So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it drift away. Then just before dawn, Paul realised the men had not eaten for a long time. They needed strength to swim ashore. So Captain Paul encouraged them to eat and promised, "Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head." It is an incredible promise. Even when we take a shower, we lose many hairs from our heads. Then Paul gave thanks to God in front of all the other travellers. He made it very clear to everyone that it was God who would deliver them from the storm...Altogether there were 276 of us on board. When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea. (36-38) Then when daylight came, they saw a bay with a sandy beach. So they cut loose the anchors and made a run for it. Then as Paul promised, they were all saved.

In conclusion. It is true that when the storms of life batter us, we quickly feel as if God does not love us....that He has abandoned us. But as we have learned from today's passage, nothing can be further from the truth! The Lord always stand beside us, ready to give us His word in the storm. But why does God allow these storm-like moments in our lives? There can be many reasons. But in context of today's passage, God allows the storms in our lives.....so that He can stand beside us in the storm.....and reveal Himself to us in an extraordinary way. We live in a time when people.....including believers.....see storms in life as a sign of God's punishment.....and something to avoid at all costs. However, we must know, that storms in life are opportunities for us to grow closer to God and see who He really is! He is a loving and caring God who not only stands beside usbut gives us His word in the storm to strengthen and even transform us when we accept it into our hearts.