

Acts 27:1-44: Who Owns You, God or the Storm That Surrounds You?

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I. Introduction

There you are, your life is falling apart. Things are so bad you wish you were dead. Where's God? Why would He stand by and let this happen?! Why doesn't He do something about it! Is it possible that our suffering and God's love can exist at the same time? Does our suffering mean that God doesn't care? If God is there, why can't we see Him? Can God give us peace in the midst of the storm?

II. Acts 27:1-44: The Worst Storm in the World, CANNOT Separate You from His Love

27:1-8, after the trial before king Agrippa II and since Paul had appealed to Caesar, it was decided that he should be sent to Italy. So they delivered Paul and other prisoners to Julius, a centurion of the Imperial/Augustan Cohort. The mention of "we" indicates that Luke was with Paul and likely had been during the two years he was incarcerated in Caesarea (Luke may've written his Gospel, the first part of Luke-Acts, during this time). They boarded a ship, which was likely a smaller vessel since it only sailed along the coast and wasn't headed to Italy. Aristarchus, one of Paul's Thessalonian converts was also with them. The next day they landed at Sidon about 70 miles away. And there's a curious note by Luke that Julius treated Paul kindly and allowed him to visit his friends in Sidon to receive care. Julius may've been told to give Paul some leeway since he was innocent, but this centurion is doing more than following an order, he's actually showing Paul kindness so it appears that Paul has already had an impact on this centurion, as we'll also note later.

Due to the strong winds, they sailed under the shelter of the Island Cyprus, sailing between it and the coast of Asia Minor. They come to Myra, a port city of Lycia, which probably took them 10-15 days from Sidon. In Myra, Julius found the larger ship headed for Italy he'd been looking for. It was a grain ship from Alexandria, Egypt, so he put them on board. Egypt was the main grain supplier for Rome; there was a fleet of ships controlled by the Roman government for this purpose. And Myra was the chief port for these grain ships. These ships were about 180 ft. long, 45 ft. wide and 43 ft. high. Besides the grain cargo, they could hold several hundred passengers. The winds were so terrible that it took them many days to get to Cnidus, about 130 miles away. The wind kept them from their actual destination so they had to sail under the shelter of the Island of Crete and with great difficulty they arrived at Fair Havens on the Island of Crete.

27:9-12, they had spent a long time sailing (perhaps two months) and since the Fast (Yom Kippur) had come and gone, it meant they were in the dangerous sailing season, i.e., the Day of Atonement/Yom Kippur was held in late September or early October. Sailing became dangerous between mid-September and mid-November (it was impossible between mid-November and February). This journey likely took place in AD 59; that year, Yom Kippur was on October 5th. So Paul (who's no stranger to the sea and had been in three shipwrecks, 2 Corinthians 11:25) warned them not to sail because not only would the cargo and ship be lost, but everyone on board (was Paul losing faith in Jesus' promise to keep him alive until Rome?). However, Julius was persuaded by the captain and owner instead of Paul and since Fair Havens was not a good harbor to winter in, they decided to try to make it 40 miles to Phoenix and winter there.

27:13-38, since it looked like it would be calm because a south wind blew softly, they set sail, staying close to Crete. But then a Northeaster hurricane-level wind grabbed the ship and took control of it. They were driven under the shelter of an island called Clauda about 25 miles from Crete and with great difficulty they brought the lifeboat on board and secured it. They also tried keeping the ship from tearing apart by using ropes/chains to undergird it. Fearing they would run aground on the Syrtis sandbars off the Libyan coast, they dropped an anchor to try to slow the ship down. Since they were still being tossed around, the next day they threw some of the cargo overboard to lighten the ship (making it float higher on the water, keeping the waves out and the ship from running aground). The third day they threw the ship's equipment overboard. After many days of seeing neither sun nor stars (navigational markers) and the ship still being beaten by the storm, they gave up hope that they would be saved. Luke seems to include himself as one of the ones who gave up hope! Why, after all he's seen the Lord do for Paul and others? After interviewing so many people who experienced and saw Jesus' miracles (Luke 1:1-4), why?

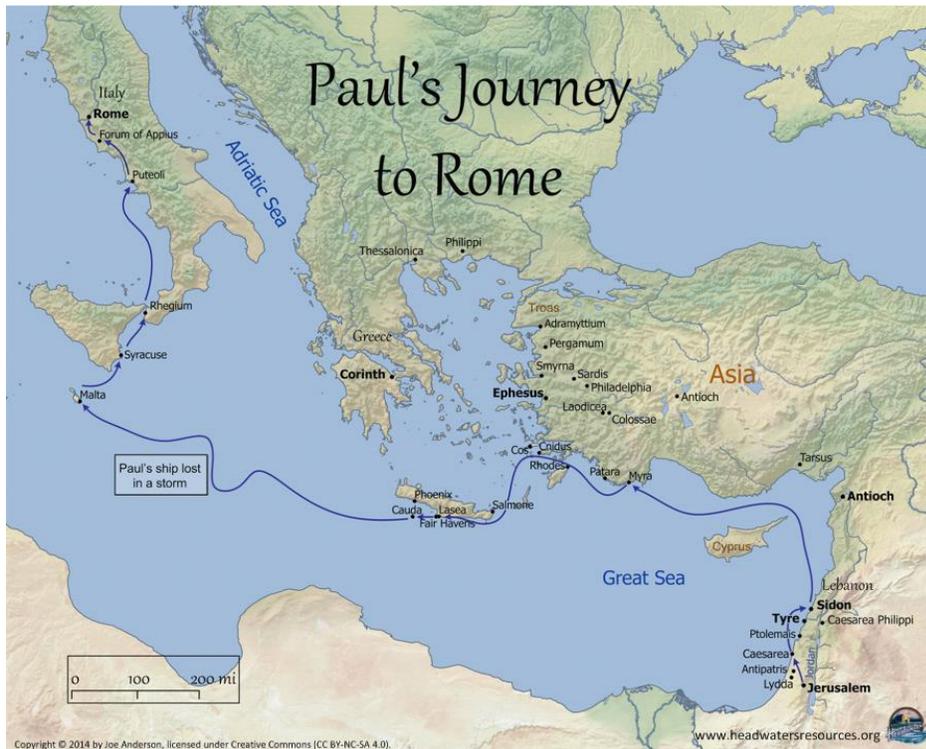
Their state was so hopeless that the men lost all appetite and after many days without food Paul stood up and told them that they should have listened to him. But then he told them to cheer up?! He then explains why: no one will die, only the ship will be lost. How does Paul know this? Thee God (this is not one of the pagan gods worshipped by the Gentiles on board) sent an angel to tell him not to be afraid because he will appear before Caesar and God has delivered the lives of everyone on board because of Paul. Therefore, they should cheer up because Paul believes that God will do exactly as He said. However, they will crash on a certain island...wait, what?! Why is Paul so calm, so cheerful as he tells them that they will all survive except that they have to crash land on an island (Malta was 476 miles from Clauda, that's how far the wind drove them off course)? Notice what Paul said about the God whom he serves: "For there stood by me this night and angel of the God ***to whom I belong.***" The storm doesn't own Paul, God does!

Fourteen days later of being tossed around in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors sensed that they were nearing land (perhaps they heard waves breaking on the shore). So they took soundings and found it to be 20 fathoms (120 ft.) then again and it was 15 fathoms (90 ft.—a fathom was about 6 ft., the distance between the middle finger tips of a man with outstretched arms). This meant land was closer and closer. To keep from crashing against the rocks, they dropped four anchors to slow the ship down and they prayed for daylight to come. But then the sailors tried to abandon ship by using the lifeboat under pretense that they were going to let down anchors from the front of the ship. But Paul informed Julius of their plot saying, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." The sailors are the ones who know how to beach the ship. So the soldiers cut the ropes of the lifeboat and let it fall off. Why are these soldiers needed, I thought God was going to save Paul and everyone else on board? Who's in control of history, God or you? Both. Your choices matter, but God ultimately controls the weather and your choices.

As day was about to break, since they had been fourteen days without food, Paul encouraged them to eat for their survival. Then he said something to remind them that none of them would die but he used a phrase that appears only one other time in the New Testament. It was uttered by Jesus and recorded by Luke, "not a hair will fall from the head of any of you" (Luke 21:18). Paul is telling them that they're all going to survive this utterly hopeless situation. Jesus said the same to His disciples, even though some of them would die (Luke 21:16-19)! How much damage can life's storms do to you and how do you survive it, even if you die? Having encouraged them, he took bread, thanked God and began to eat, thus encouraging the 276 on board and they ate too. Filled with encouragement and food, they threw out the main cargo of grain to lighten the ship further and get closer to shore.

27:39-44, when day came, they didn't recognize the land but they saw a bay with a beach. So they let the anchors go, loosed the rudder ropes, hoisted the mainsail and made for the beach. But they hit a sandbar hard and the front of the ship was stuck, immovable while the back of the ship was being torn apart by the violence of the waves. The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners lest they escape and have to answer for it with their lives (Acts 12:19:16:27). However, Julius stopped them because he wanted to save Paul. Then he commanded those able to swim to head for shore and the rest to make it on boards or parts of the ship. So they all escaped safely to land. Paul left an impression on Julius; he'd never seen a prisoner like this and though he didn't listen to Paul's advice about not leaving Crete, he gave heed to Paul now and grew to respect and care for him.

Does God care about you? If He does, where is He when you desperately need him? Was Paul's life in danger? Yes and NO! Why would God get him to Rome like this? Why not winter the ship and sail to Rome when it's safe? Why put us through this kind of stuff? So that you could know that man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God! If you only understood that God would not allow a single hair on your head to fall to the ground, not even if you died, then you would realize that God was there, He always is. NOTHING can ever separate you from His love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:31-39).



III. Conclusion

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. And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.' Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. However, we must run aground on a certain island."