

Acts 28:11-16: Ever Hear God Say, “My Child, You’re Awesome! Keep Going!”?

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I. Introduction

Do you know that God is always encouraging you through His Word, through circumstances, through your thoughts, through others? Do you hear His voice or are your problems so loud they drown out His voice? When He speaks and you do hear, what gives you courage, the fact that He fixed your problem or Him?

II. Acts 28:11-16: Do You Hear God’s Words of Encouragement or Are Your Problems Deafening?

28:11-16, having been provided everything they needed by Publius, the chief official of Malta, and the people of Malta, Paul and the 275 others stay on the island for three months. It was likely December – February since sailing on the Mediterranean Sea was unsafe until the month of February. They set sail again on an Alexandrian ship that wintered on the island. It was probably another grain ship just like the one that was destroyed by the storm (27:6). It would have to be large enough to accommodate 276 passengers. The ship was named after its figurehead, the Twin Brothers. In classical Greek mythology these were the Greek gods Castor and Pollux, the twin sons of Zeus and Leda (who was also the mother of Helen of Troy). These gods are also known as the zodiac sign Gemini. Sailors would paint or carve The Twins on the prow (very front) of the ship believing that these gods were the protectors of mariners who were out at sea.

They land at Syracuse and stayed there three days, probably unloading/loading grain or other cargo. Syracuse was 80 miles from Malta and was the most important city of Sicily; it had two harbors. They then reach Rhegium and stay a day. From there they sail to Puteoli which was 125 miles southeast of Rome. At the time, it was Rome’s only port city and it had an emporium for Alexandrian wheat ships. For some reason they had to stay in Puteoli a week (maybe Julius, the centurion, had business there). When they got there, they found a church and the Christians invited Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus (or perhaps all 276 of them) to stay with them for the seven days. While they were in Puteoli the Christians from the church of Rome heard that Paul was coming to Rome. So they left to meet and escort him into Rome. Some met him at the Appius Forum/Market which was about 43 miles southeast of Rome and some met him at the town called Three Taverns/Inns; it was 33 miles southeast of Rome. When they finally get to Rome, Julius delivered all the prisoners except Paul to the captain of the guard. Paul was allowed to live in his own rented house (28:30) while chained 24/7 to a Roman soldier (probably due to Julius’ favorable report concerning Paul’s key role throughout the entire voyage).

How does God encourage us? He constantly speaks to us through His Word (27:23-25), through circumstances (27:39-44; 28:3-6), our thoughts (Acts 18:5), and through people (28:15). God is speaking to Paul through people here. About three years prior Paul wrote the Romans letter to the church of Rome. He cared deeply about them and couldn't wait to see them (Roman 1:8-15). So you might think that this is the reason why when he saw them, he thanked God and took courage. He's certainly glad to see them but this is an odd statement. Why would he take courage from seeing these Christians? Does he need courage? Isn't this the same man who behaved bravely throughout a grave journey at sea which ended in a shipwreck and a viper bite? Isn't this the same man who stared down blood thirsty mobs who wanted his life (e.g., Acts 21:30-22:23).

We don't normally think of the great apostle Paul as someone who needs encouragement. In fact, he's always the one giving encouragement. He's the one who said Galatians 2:20 and lived it! But notice what God does here through these people. Now why does this great apostle need to hear what God's about to say to him through these Roman believers? Yes, Paul was a great apostle, probably responsible for more ministry than any other (2 Corinthians 11:22-27). But this great apostle was also human. And what did this man just go through? Trial after trial, years in prison, mobs wanting him dead, assassins vowing not to eat til they kill him, two Roman governors who wouldn't free him even though he was completely innocent, a horrific storm that lasted months and ended in a devastating shipwreck, finally, he gets bitten by a deadly snake. The storm and shipwreck should've killed him, but they didn't. The viper should've taken his life, but it didn't.

Yes, he was the great apostle Paul, who had tremendous faith, who healed many, who established church after church and encouraged the elders who led them. But he was human after all. He hurt (2 Corinthians 12:7-10), he worried (2 Corinthians 11:28-29), he needed prayer (Ephesians 6:19). So he needed encouragement, like you, like me, like Jesus. Why does Jesus need a word of encouragement before going into battle with Satan (Matthew 3:16-4:1)? Because He's not only God, He's human. And He, better than anyone, knows that man cannot live by bread alone but by every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matthew 4:1-11). Yes, Jesus was the great miracle worker but He also hurt (Mark 14:34). So He needed His Father's encouragement and He got it (Mark 14:48-49).

Thus Paul needs it too. Having gone through hell and back. God knows this, so He sends people from the church of Rome to give him courage for the road ahead (he still has to go before Caesar, and that Caesar is Nero). So what exactly gave Paul courage? Was it the Roman believers who came to see him or the God who sent them? Yes, he took courage from seeing them, knowing that he now had allies in Rome as he awaited trial before Caesar. But it wasn't just them. Paul took courage the way Jesus did, he knew that he could not live on allies alone, but by every word that proceeded from the mouth of God and God was speaking loudly to Paul through these Roman believers, "Paul, you've been through hell and back and it's not over. But I'm here. You've done an awesome job, keep it up. I've got your back all the way. Now follow this escort into Rome."

What should give us courage, our problem getting fixed or the God who fixes it? When God speaks, what gives you courage? Is it His help? Is it that He takes your problem away? If it is, it won't last long. But if you find courage in Him, if He's the center of your universe, then you'll realize that He's your salvation not the new job, not the new spouse, not the new house, not the new car, not the baby you can't have: though childless, Hannah finds refuge in God, 1 Samuel 1—why does Hannah no longer grieve over her childless condition even though the Lord hasn't given her a child? Is it that she believes God's going to answer her prayer as Eli said (1:17)? No, it's that she like Job (Job 2:21), like Jesus, and like Paul knew that she cannot live by children alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. It wasn't the child who gave her comfort; it was the Lord who gave her the child which is why she was able to give him back to the Lord (1 Samuel 1:24-28). Just look at the point of her song: the Lord is the center of her universe not children; He is her strength and salvation and that of those who trust Him (1 Samuel 2:1-10).



III. Conclusion

After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island. And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days. From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli, where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome. And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.