

The Promise of God Dispels Hopelessness

Acts 27:1-26; Isaiah 26:3-4

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Have you ever found yourself struggling to get out of some situation that seemed hopeless? You felt trapped. You were afraid. You saw no place where you could escape and no one on earth who could help you. God ordained that in your life. Why? In order to turn you from looking for help in yourself, in your job, in your savings, or in any mortal, and to look for help in the God who made heaven and earth.

Even the great prophet, Elijah, came to such a seemingly hopeless place in his life when Jezebel sent word to him threatening his life (1 Kings 19:2). Elijah fled in fear for his life (1 Kings 19:3). This Elijah did even though he had just stood alone faithful before God against 450 of Jezebel's false prophets there on Mt. Carmel. He fell into a state of hopelessness (1 Kings 19:4,10). That is where you will usually be taken when the focus is solely upon you (notice the emphasis in the words of Elijah upon "my" and "I"). Did God bring this upon Elijah because he hated him? Was the Lord just cruel, unfair, or unloving? Or was the Lord teaching Elijah (and us) to keep the eye of faith on Him? What was it that revived Elijah's faith and confidence in the Lord to arise and persevere in courage to do the will of God? It was the promise of Almighty God that Elijah was not alone—God was with him and there were 7,000 that had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:17).

Praise God for His merciful promises which uphold our faith when all hope seems gone. When your eye is upon yourself, there is no hope. Paul found himself in a seemingly hopeless storm at sea. No deliverance was in sight. But it was the promise of God that upheld Paul, just as God's promises will uphold you, dear Christian.

The main points from our text this Lord's Day are: (1) Paul's Journey by Sea Goes from Good to Hopeless (Acts 27:1-20); (2) Paul's Faith Is Upheld by the Promise of God (Acts 27:21-26).

I. Paul's Journey by Sea Goes from Good to Hopeless (Acts 27:1-20).

A. Paul has now finished his testimony before King Agrippa in the previous chapter (Acts 26), after which both King Agrippa and Festus agreed that Paul was innocent of any crime and that he might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.

B. Paul embarks from Caesarea with two faithful Christian brothers, Luke ("we" begins in Acts 27:1ff) and Aristarchus (Acts 27:2), having likely received a courtesy from Festus who hoped Paul would give him a favorable report before Caesar. Julius, the Roman centurion, is put in command to see that Paul and other prisoners arrive safely in Rome.

1. They first board a ship that is returning to Adramyttium (in northern Asia Minor). The ship leaves **Caesarea** and heads north to **Sidon** (about 70 miles), where Julius allows Paul to leave the ship under the custody of a Roman soldier and to visit Christian brethren there to be refreshed by them (Acts 27:3). But why is Paul shown this favor, whereas none of the other prisoners received the same favor? Most likely Festus had communicated to Julius that Paul was innocent and should be shown respect (Festus likely saw this to be to his advantage at Rome).

2. The ship sets sail and runs into some contrary winds at the island of **Cyprus**, making it more difficult to press forward, but not so serious as to discontinue the voyage (Acts 26:4). The voyage continues without incident as it comes to the port of **Lycia**, where they transfer to a ship from Alexandria that is heading to Italy (Acts 26:5-6). Still there have been no major complications (only some contrary winds that were blowing against them and slowing their progress, Acts 27:7). These strong contrary winds forced them to alter their route to some degree by having to sail to the opposite side of **Crete**, where they stopped to

resupply at a port called the **Fair Havens** near **Lasea**. There they waited and waited for an opportune time to set sail for Rome (Acts 27:8-9).

3. The time for sailing the Mediterranean Sea was now coming to an end as severe winter storms descended upon the Sea until spring arrived. Luke notes that “the fast” (i.e. the Day of Atonement) had already past (which indicates that it is now sometime after October 5, 59 A.D.). It was a dangerous time to sail from about September 14 until November 11, and after November 11 all sailing came to an end in the Mediterranean. Paul and all those on this vessel were now in this dangerous season for sailing. Paul was himself an experienced traveler by sea (2 Corinthians 11:25). He warns the centurion, the master (captain), and the owner of the ship that if they continue he perceives that they would face the loss of the ship and lives (Acts 27:10, this was not a “thus saith the Lord”, but a reasonable deduction from his experience and the dangerous season of the year in which they were now sailing). The centurion listened to the master and the owner (Acts 27:11, who were thinking of their profit margin) rather than to Paul (who was thinking of the lives of 276 souls, Acts 27:37). They then set sail for a better port, some 35 miles northwest at **Phenice** (Phoenix, on the island of Crete).

4. At first, the wind was favorable, but then arose a “tempestuous wind” (Acts 27:14, the Greek word used is a typhonic wind—a typhoon, a hurricane). This typhoon which likely had been the doom of many sailors even had a name, Euroclydon.

5. In the next several verses (Acts 27:15-20), Luke (who is on board) relates the various measures the ship’s captain took to keep the ship afloat. They cast overboard all that might encumber the ship, brought down the sails, and simply let the ship run in the midst of this typhoon. Imagine the desperation of those on this ship. They took large rope cables under the ship and winched the timber of the ship tightly to prevent it from breaking apart. For the past three days they had fought for their lives. They could not guide or direct the ship in the least. They had tried everything they knew to keep the ship in one piece and afloat and to preserve the lives of those on the ship. To make matters worse, there was no sun or stars visible by which to navigate. They were adrift in darkness, having lost hope that they would survive (Acts 27:20—when Luke uses the plural pronoun “we” he seems to include himself and Paul). Could their hope for survival (from a human perspective) look any more bleak or grim? They were wet, cold, and shivering. They were exhausted from fighting this storm with every ounce of strength they had. They could not eat. There seemed to be no end of this storm in sight. They were not in control, but God clearly was in control. All hope in man was gone. That’s where the Lord wanted them to be.

6. Although you may have not been in this identical situation, you can likely relate to being hit with the storms of life that threaten to sink your family, your job, your struggle against sin, your seeking to pay those bills, your being overwhelmed by a chronic or terminal illness, or your facing the tyranny of wicked governments that threaten your safety. These storms are not designed by the Lord to destroy you, but to make it clear that there is no help in the arm of flesh. Your help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. And just when it all seems so dark, when you are so weak from the struggle, and feel as though your ship is about to be dashed in pieces, the Lord mercifully comes to your help with His promise that He is with you and that you are not alone. God has not abandoned you. He is control of the wind and the waves against which you struggle. He could have prevented that storm, but He didn’t because He is sanctifying you through suffering, trials, and afflictions.

II. Paul’s Faith Is Upheld by the Promise of God (Acts 27:21-26).

A. Without God’s promise to save you, to forgive you, to sanctify you, to guide you, to cause you to persevere, to provide all that you need in this life and the life to come, you would have no reason to hope. Without the Lord God who cannot lie, who is ever faithful, and who is the Almighty and able to bring His promises to pass, you would have no hope (this is why when you grow in your knowledge of God, your faith in

Him likewise grows). There is only hope because you are assured by God's promise that you are safe in Christ, you are more than a conqueror in Christ, you are loved and cared for in Christ, and that you are not alone—never alone. The constant fighting against the world, the flesh, and the devil that are relentless can easily wear you down to where you feel like you have lost the battle and there is no hope. But that is only the whisper of the devil in what he wants you to believe (he is a liar). There is hope because Jesus is raised from the dead and has promised that you will pass over to the other side in spite of those desperate storms.

B. After going without food and nourishment during those days and nights of fighting the winds and the waves and likely feeling seasick, Paul is renewed by the promise of God and says to the master, the owner, and the centurion, "Sirs, I told you not to set sail, remember" (Acts 27:21)? Was Paul getting even with them? No! Was Paul drawing attention to himself by putting them down? No! Paul was getting their attention for the really good news he had received from an angel of God. "You should have listened to me the first time, but now listen to what my God told me through His angel."

1. The promise is that all on the ship will be saved, though the ship will be destroyed (Acts 27:22-24). Cheer up, the end is not near, but rather God shall deliver us. Not one life will perish, though every life should have perished in such a typhoon. God had earlier promised Paul that he would testify of Jesus Christ in Rome (Acts 23:11). God will fulfill that promise even if it's a few years later, through many trials, afflictions, and storms. And so will the Lord do for you, dear child of God.

2. Paul declares that he believes the promise (Acts 27:25-26). He not only heard the promise. He believed the promise because God gave the promise. Many hear the promise of God in sermons: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." But they are not saved by simply hearing it. Many may know the promises found in Isaiah 26:3-4; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Isaiah 41:10; Hebrews 13:5,6. Each promise of God to you, dear child of God, is like a love note from the God of your salvation. God says, "I love you and I promise I will be with you and will provide for all that you need. Be not afraid, only believe."

3. Dear ones, that is the only way out of the darkness of despair—you must believe and hope in the promises of God—which are all yea and amen in Jesus Christ. There is no hope without God's promise. You are all alone and there is no salvation or eternal life without God's promise. There are only two ways to be justified before God: law or promise—your perfect obedience or Christ's promise of His perfect obedience. If you look to your obedience, you will perish in an eternal storm in hell. If you look by faith alone to the promise of Christ's perfect obedience alone, you will be rescued and saved from that storm.

4. How we look for ways to excuse ourselves, our doubts, and our unbelief. "If an angel appeared to me, I would believe like Paul." Dear friend, don't you yet understand that it is not the way that God delivers the promise that determines whether it is true or not? The Lord certainly could deliver His promise of salvation miraculously by an angel if He chose to do so, but then you would only believe the promise not because God said so, but because of the miraculous sign. Faith is believing the promise of God because the authority of God and all that He stands behind that promise. Moreover, who said the promises found in the Scripture are not miraculous and supernatural? All Scripture is inspired by God. Believe the promise of God whether you read it or hear it preached because it is God (who cannot lie) who declares it. Do not make excuses for your doubts, lest the doubts multiply in your mind. Rather cry out to the Lord, "I believe, help thou my unbelief."

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