

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
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18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
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Acts 27:9-11, 14-44 (Read vv.14-25) “Trusting God in a Time of Trouble”

Intro. The Apostle Paul faced many difficult days. In 2 Cor. 11:24-27 Paul tells of some of these difficulties. On 5 different occasions he was whipped 39 times by the Jews. Three times he was beaten with rods. Once he was almost stoned to death. At least 3 times he suffered shipwreck, prior to the story of our text. On one of those occasions he spent about 24 hours in the sea. He faced robbers from time to time in his journeys. He was persecuted by his countrymen. A number of times he faced hunger, thirst, and the hardships of jail. Our troubles may seem great to us, but for most of us, our troubles may be relatively small compared to what Paul faced.

Yet I know that some in our congregation *are* facing great difficulty. Some are battling cancer. Some have difficult and distressing family situations. Does the Bible offer help as we go through times of difficulty? Indeed it does. In our text today, we see how Paul faced a crisis in his life, and how he was saved through it. His faith in God and his hope in God not only led to his own deliverance, but his faith and leadership helped to save 275 others on his ship. Today we will see how Paul and the others responded to the trouble they faced.

As you recall, Paul had appealed to Caesar. So they boarded a ship going north along the coast. After reaching Myro, the Centurion in charge found a cargo ship going west on its way to Rome, so they boarded the ship (v.6). After a time of slow travel, they arrived to a port on the Island of Crete called Fair Havens (v.8). But by this time, it was probably late September or October. It was getting dangerous to travel by sea that time of year. In spite of the known danger, the captain of the ship agreed to move further to a more hospitable port. They were in imperial service and were anxious to get their cargo and the prisoners to Rome as soon as possible. Nice weather and a warm breeze were too tempting, and so they set out from the port of Fair Havens. Their intent was to travel from port to port until they reached Rome before winter. However, the danger was realized for Paul and the others when a fierce squall from the north-east came sweeping down from the Cretan mountains. In the face of such a stiff wind it was impossible to gradually make progress toward Phoenix. All that could be done was to allow the ship to be driven before the gale. Soon, they probably faced heavy rain and dark skies, and the ship was taking on water.

I have never been on a ship during a storm, but I can imagine that it can be a fearful feeling, especially if I were on one of those ancient ships. They were in big trouble! What were they to do? Well based on Paul's experience, I want to share several principles of what to do in times of trouble. You cannot expect to live in this fallen, sinful world without facing the storms of life. Since this is Father's Day, I especially want to appeal to fathers to be prepared to guide and protect your families in times of trouble. Now the first principle is this:

I. IN TIMES OF TROUBLE, DON'T REACT THE WRONG WAYS

As you face times of trouble, you are put to the test. The question is, are you going to respond the right way or the wrong way? Too often, we respond the wrong way. For example, one wrong reaction is the fact that:

A. Don't Lose Hope – Notice in v.20 that “when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up.” Several attempts had been made to save themselves from shipwreck and perishing in the sea. After they had done everything humanly possible to save themselves, they lost hope. After all, constant cloud cover meant they could not use the heavens to navigate, and the ship could not hold up under such a beating indefinitely. And so without hope, they decided to wait the apparently inevitable hour when they would all go down together. So they drifted “for many days.” The ship was no doubt leaking badly and taking on water, and they could not tell which way to make for the nearest land, in order to run their ship ashore, the only resource for a sinking ship. No wonder that they began to lose all hope of every reaching safety.

Yet even though we can find ourselves in what seems to be hopeless situations, remember that our God is the “God of hope” as Paul says in Romans 15:13. Therefore, don't lose hope. If you are ever faced with stage 4 cancer, you still have hope. I can't *promise* you that God will heal you, but you at least still have hope with God. And such hope will really be a big help as you face that difficulty. So no matter what you face, trust in the God of hope!

Another wrong reaction to watch out for is this:

B. Don't Despair and Become Depressed – When people become depressed, they either eat too much, or they do not eat at all in despair. The latter was the reaction of many on the ship. We read in v.33, “And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored them all to take food, saying, ‘Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing.’” Loss of hope may have been one factor to explain why they stopped eating for 14 days! Yet for some, sea sickness was no doubt another reason.

Even so, when people lose hope and become depressed, they may destroy their bodies with drugs and alcohol. Some even go so far as to completely destroy their lives with suicide.

C. Don't Fear the Worst – In v.24 we see that an angel of God said to Paul, “Do not be afraid, Paul.” It can be translated, “Stop being afraid” (Gk. μή with a present imperative). If you and I had been on that ship, we probably would have been afraid. Fear can be good and useful, for it can lead you to avoid danger and look to the Lord. But there comes a time when you should “fear not” and instead trust the Lord to see you through.

When John Wesley was on his voyage to North America as a missionary from England, his ship encountered a terrible storm, so bad that they feared for their lives. The English immigrants on the ship were shrieking with fear. Wesley examined himself, as he usually did in all circumstances, “and found to his horror that he was afraid, mortally afraid of dying.” But a group of Moravian Christians from Germany were singing hymns amidst the storm. After the storm had subsided, Wesley went to one of them and asked, “Were you not afraid?” The man replied, “I thank God, no!” Wesley persisted, “But were not your women and children afraid?” “No,” came the reply, “our women and children are not afraid to die.” This experience had a profound influence on Wesley, and these and other Moravians had a big part to play in his subsequent experience of evangelical conversion that sparked off the eighteenth-century revival in England.¹

So when you face trouble in your life, do you typically respond with hopelessness, despair, depression, or fear? If so, you especially need to listen to the rest of the message. Let's see how you can and *should* respond:

¹ Ingvar Haddal, *John Wesley: A Biography* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1961), 50-51, quoted by Fernando, p.619 [Illus. #C-2934].

II. IN TIMES OF TROUBLE, YOU CAN REJOICE

James 1:2 says, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials.” The reason we can rejoice in trials is that God is working through those trials to achieve some good in your life, just as Paul said in Romans 8:28. So while it would seem that losing hope, despair, and fear were the only logical responses to the storms Paul and others faced, they could look to God to intervene, and rejoice in anticipation of that. After all, Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus (v.2), servants of the Most High God, were on that boat!

Yet you know what we tend to do. When we go through troubles in life, we tend to have a pity party, and we feel quite justified in doing so! We go around with a long face. Is that what God really wants? That may be a normal reaction but I’m going to show you how you can rejoice in times of trouble.

God begins to turn despair into joy by working through Paul. He gives them a mild rebuke in the last of v.21 for not giving heed to his advice. Who can resist the temptation to say, “I told you so!” Yet in this case it was probably just an encouragement to listen to him now. Then Paul tells them in v.22 to “take heart,” (*euthumeo*) or cheer up (Jas. 5:13). The word can also be translated, “Be courageous.” In fact, he repeated that appeal in v.25. How could they cheer up at a time like this?

A. Because of the Promise of God - It is easy to call upon people to cheer up, but futile unless some reason for good cheer is given. Don’t tell someone “cheer up” without giving them reason for cheer. Paul gives good reason, beginning in the last of v.22, “for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.” He assures them that their lives would be spared. That should have caused them to cheer up, for they expected to die. However, God never promised that they would never face a storm. God did not promise that they would be exempt from hardship. But He *did* promise to see them through to safety.

That illustrates the way it is with us. God never promises to keep us from *entering* into trials and difficulties. But don’t worry. Don’t be afraid, for God has a purpose in each one you face. His purpose is not to destroy you. His purpose is to strengthen you, and teach you, and give you new opportunities to trust Him. And only rarely does a trial end in death. And even then we can rejoice, for death is our door into heaven.

Paul’s bold words might well seem at best only wishful thinking to them. Yet Paul’s confidence that they would survive the storm was not based on experience or shrewd calculation. Rather, his confidence was based on God’s Word to him. He ascribes his new confidence to a supernatural revelation made to him during the past night by an angel of God. He says in vv.23-24, “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.’”

Many times previously Paul had found His Word to be true. If God speaks by His angel with such firm promises, man’s plain wisdom is to grasp the divine assurance with a firm hand. If we do so believe, and take His Word as the infallible truth, then however dark the sky, or wild the water, or however lacking earthly help seems to be, we can be of good cheer, and in due time we shall see God’s hand at work to deliver us through (not necessarily from) our troubles. Can you imagine what it was like? Fourteen awful days and nights in a dreadful storm, and all they had to rest on was the Word of God that they should get safely to shore!

So again, the proper response was to rejoice in the good hope that God had given them by His promise to Paul. In Romans 12:12 Paul wrote “rejoicing in hope.” Such hope is to cause us to rejoice.

We have other promises from God which should give us hope in times of trial, and cause us to rejoice. Read God’s Word, and you will learn of His wonderful promises. For example, God has promised, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” He has said in Rom. 8:28, “All things work together for good to them that love God.” Now if you believe God, then why should you look so sad when troubles come your way? Do you truly believe God?

B. You Can Rejoice by Faith in God – How is it even possible to rejoice in the face of life-threatening trials? Paul gives the answer in v.25, “Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.” In contrast, Paul said of unbelievers in Eph. 2:12 that they were, “having no hope and without God in the world.” Without faith in God you are left without hope! So have faith in God. Yet faith is only as good as the object of your faith. So I want to call upon you to::

1. Trust in the Character of God – We see from v.25 that Paul’s faith was based on the firm belief that God would never lie to him, that God always keeps His word. Because he knew God to be faithful and true, he could say, “I believe God.” We should have the faith that says, “God said it, I believe it, and that settles it.” I am confident we will all survive because God said so!

Furthermore, we should:

2. Trust in the Sovereignty of God - I believe that even before the angel appeared, he had confidence in His God that he would survive this storm, for he believed that his work was still not completed. After all, God had said that he would testify in Rome (23:11).

3. Trust in God Alone - Time and again, the Word of God through Paul was not believed (vv.10-11). So often people do not believe God’s messengers; yet someday they are going to find out that as the servants of God tell of a fearful storm coming upon this poor world, they speak according to the Word of God. Even though the Centurion did not believe God at first, he learned to believe and trust in His Word.

In v.30 we see that Paul noticed that the sailors were trying to escape the ship by using the life boat. Certainly, they lacked faith in God or the promise of God. It looked as though the ship would soon be dashed against the rocks, and so the sailors said to one another, “Let’s save our own lives by getting away in the life boat.” Their intent was to save themselves, and not wait on God. So in v.31 Paul insisted that the only way they could be saved was to stay with the ship. They must trust in God and His promises alone. They could not trust in a lifeboat. So the centurion and his soldiers gave heed to Paul this time, and we read in v.32, “Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off.”

So often we want to trust God only as a last resort. God wants us to trust Him first! If the centurion had believed Paul and God to begin with, he would have avoided a great deal of trouble. The same is true of us!

There is another truth here relating to faith. God had already foreordained that the men would be saved. But Paul said they wouldn’t be saved if they left the ship. So their physical salvation was assured only if they believed and obeyed the command to stay on the ship. Here we can see the balance between divine election and human responsibility.

In addition to faith, we see another prerequisite for being able to rejoice in our trials:

C. You Can Rejoice in Effective Prayer to God – In the last of v.24 the angel said, “indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.” We may gather from the word “granted” the certainty that Paul had been praying for the lives of all that sailed with him. They sailors were only thinking of themselves, but Paul was concerned for others as well. So we see that a true servant of God will always widen his prayers to embrace those with whom he is brought into contact. When you go through a trial, don’t think only of yourself, but be concerned about others as well and pray for them. So often unbelievers, even though they don’t realize it, owe much to the presence and intercession of the godly. God saved thousands from starvation in Egypt because of the presence of Joseph and his family.

Even so we should pray in times of trouble, and through prayer we can rejoice. This is brought out by Paul in Phil. 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.” But you say, “How can I rejoice in the midst of such trouble?” Paul answers that in v.7 of Phil. 4, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known unto God.”

III. IN TIMES OF TROUBLE, BE A WITNESS TO OTHERS

One purpose for God allowing us to go through troubles is that it provides a great opportunity for witnessing. When you visit the sick, the grieving, or those going through some other trial, you have a great opportunity to be a witness to others in such times. And when you are going through times of trouble, you have an opportunity to witness to those who there to minister to you.

Here in our text we do not read of any aggressive evangelism by Paul, and yet I believe he was a witness for Christ in this time of trouble. So notice with me how to be a witness in such times:

A. By Your Encouraging Words – We have already seen in vv.21-25 how Paul encouraged the men on board with his words. Paul had already established a rapport and a personal ascendancy in that motley company of Roman soldiers, prisoners, sailors, and disciples. Now he stands forth with calm confidence and infuses new hope into them all.

In v.34 he encouraged them to eat and gave more words of assurance to lift their spirits. Loss of hope had been matched by loss of appetite. Seasickness must have taken its toll as well. But Paul knew that they would need strength to swim for safety. So he encouraged them to eat. Again and again Paul showed concern for their welfare.

Even so, if we are faithful to God in trouble, we can be an encouragement to those around us. There are too few encouragers in this world. Hope is infectious, and one cheery voice will revive the drooping spirits of a multitude.

B. By Being Thankful in the Midst of Your Troubles – In v.35 we read, “And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all....” Here was another way he was a witness to all.

Even so, we ought to bear witness for our Savior by giving thanks in public. We should not be afraid to pray in public as a witness for our Lord. We should look for opportunities to bear witness of our faith in the Lord. It is sad the way the ACLU and the courts have taken away the rights of the majority to pray publicly at graduations, sporting events, and so forth. Yet we still

have the right to pray and give thanks to God in many public venues. Let us do so. By the way, after the tragedy of 9/11, there was a lot of praying going on!

C. The Results:

1. Others Were Encouraged – We read in v.36, “Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves.” I want to ask you something. When people are around you, do you tend to encourage them, or discourage them?

2. Lives Were Saved – In v.41 we see that the ship finally was grounded and began to break up under the force of the strong waves. Then we read in v.42 that “the soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape.” The soldiers wanted to kill them to avoid being responsible for them. But once again, Paul had a role in saving others. We read in vv.43-44, “But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, and the rest, some on boards and some on parts of the ship...” Because of Paul, the other prisoners were saved from death. Then we read in the last of v.44, “And so it was that they all escaped safely to land.” And so, even though they faced the difficult task of swimming to shore, all survived. The supernatural promise made to Paul in their darkest hour had been fulfilled to the letter: the ship and cargo were lost, but every life on board was saved. V.37 indicates that there were 276 on board that ship.

3. Surely Some Were Spiritually Saved! This was one of the highest purposes of God in allowing Paul and others to face such a storm. Perhaps the centurion was saved at some point.

Conclusion: Think of the blessing you can be when storms come your way. May you and I follow Paul’s example!

Sources: F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954); Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975); H.A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Acts* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1943); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [Ver. 5:30]* (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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