

“Shipwrecked...But Saved”*Acts 27²⁷-28¹⁰***Contemporary Contact - Thailand Story CLIP1**

This unfolding story in Thailand has gripped people around the world,¹ and rightly so as people from around the world have gathered to work and pray for a successful outcome. As I have watched the daily updates in the midst of working on this week’s sermon, I have gained a fresh sense of what it must have been like for the crisis that Paul & Luke, and the 276 people aboard their ship, experienced during their two weeks in the deadly storm Luke describes for us at the end of the book of Acts (turn to it).

Biblical Contact

Before we pick up that story where we left off last week, I want to take a moment to explain the reason for the theme of this summer’s sermon series. This summer we’ll be building on the Kids’ Camp theme **SLIDE2** (“Shipwrecked: Rescued By Jesus”). We’ll do this by exploring both some of the literal shipwrecked stories in the Bible as well as some of the metaphorical shipwrecked stories. Along the way we’ll discover the many and various “life-preservers” that God used and uses to rescue people who have been physically, relationally, emotionally, or spiritually shipwrecked.

Structural Contact

Today I want to look at Luke’s story of the literal shipwreck that he experienced and lived to write about. We’ll pick up the story where we left off last week...**SLIDES3, 4, 5, 6** In the middle of the perfect storm...At the point where everyone aboard had given “up all hope of being saved.” **READ Acts 27²⁷ – 28¹⁰ SLIDE 7**

¹ On June 23 the Wild Boar’s soccer team and their coach went missing, trapped by rainfall and flooding in northern Thailand’s Tham Lung Nang cave. Feared dead, the search and rescue team persisted, working their way through km after km of the flooded cave. Then on July 2, nearly nine days later, two British divers discovered all twelve boys alive! As the good news of the successful search spread around the world their efforts quickly shifted to coming up with a plan to rescue them. Since none of the boys knows how to swim, and swimming is currently the only way out, there are difficult decisions still to be made, and a miracle needed if they are going to all make it out alive.

Can you imagine what it would have been like to be aboard that ship, lost at sea, having done everything in your power to try and stay afloat, having tried every trick in the book? Nothing has worked. In fact, the harder you've tried, the worse things have gotten to the point where even the biggest optimists have openly confessed that they too have lost all hope of being saved. **BLANK8**

E.g. I recall being in the midst of a workplace storm that was sinking me...I desperately tried every trick in the book, all to no avail. I can remember getting up after yet another sleepless night with the realization staring me in the face like a neon sign saying *"I cannot fix this"*...Shipwreck seemed certain, I might survive but I was probably going to lose everything—my job, my church, my community, my friends, and perhaps my sanity...

Here in Acts 27, God didn't promise Paul that *everything* would be all right, but he did promise him in the storm that *everyone* would be all right (*"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."*^{v.24})

"I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me," Paul said to his fellow crew members. God had assured him of the ultimate outcome, but He didn't tell Paul all the details, like how long the storm would continue. Two weeks can go by very quick when you're on holidays, but two weeks trapped in a cave or in a storm can feel like an eternity. *"On the fourteenth night"* (i.e. after they had left Fair Haven)...

Day 1 = the opportune moment & the day of their departure (v.13) & the beginning of the storm.
Day 2 = caught in the storm, pulling the life-boat up, frapping the ship, tossing over the cargo & putting the brakes.
Day 3 = throwing over the spare tire & roadside emergency kit
Days 4 - ? = "neither sun nor stars appeared for many days"^{v.20}
 • How bad was it? See v. 33...(*"For the last fourteen days...you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food—you haven't eaten anything."*)

Day 14 - *"about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land"* (and confirmed it by taking soundings). Now a new fear quickly set in...

- *"Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight."*^{v.29} (What a prayer meeting that must have been!)
 Meanwhile there is an escape attempt (v.30). Paul steps up to give a word of advice, that the centurion and others are learning to listen to by now...and trust

that what Paul is saying is true.

As dawn was about to break Paul’s leadership in the crisis rises again, in this case urging all of his shipmates to eat—something they hadn’t done for a long time either because of the *constant suspense*^{v.33}, or seasickness, or perhaps because cooking had been impossible in the storm.

- Paul also repeats and underlines the promise, “*Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.*” (cf. echo of Jesus’ words in Matt. 10³⁰)

But like the boys in the Thailand cave, they would need all the strength they could get, so in verse 35 we read that Paul “took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat.” What Paul did almost seems like serving communion, but it wasn’t. What he says and does was common Jewish practice at a meal (praying before eating). Paul is simply living out his faith, and yet under the circumstances these habitual spiritual practices are the life-giving rhythms that sustain him and the crew.

- Notice the encouragement they draw both from **what he says** (v.22 “*I urge you to keep up your courage*” & v.25 “*So keep up your courage*”), and **what he does** (v.36 “*they were all encouraged*”).

Reminded of a clip I saw on the ALPHA course in which Jose Gonzalez, one of the 33 Chilean miners trapped in August 2010, talked about those events.²

CLIP 9 ...Someone said, **SLIDE10** “*The hope José had spoken about for years in the light seemed so relevant in the dark shadow of the mine.*”

In Acts 27³⁹ Luke tells us that “*when daylight came*” (**N.B.** this = an answer to their prayers—v.29 “*...and prayed for daylight*”)

- v.40 = they took their chance to get to shore... (“the foresail” = small one left)
- vv.41-44 = for those with eyes to see, God’s hand was clearly evident in the midst of all the chaos (saved from death at sea, saved from death at the hands of the soldiers^{explain}, and saved all 276 from drowning in the shipwreck).

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRq14cDm4pM> and <https://alpha.org/blog/in-the-dark>

- **E.g.** When Elaine & Ryan almost died in childbirth...God gave us signs along the way...That night (the pediatrician on call, the words of the paramedic), and in the days that followed (perfect timing – released on the 40th day...Had our picture taken in front of the large rainbow painted on the entranceway of the neonatal unit we had been walking by every day...the Gen. 9 symbol of God's faithful promise).
 - Business Card quote (*"He who does not believe in miracles is not a realist."*) **SLIDE11**

In the Acts shipwreck, we also see the tremendous character and example of Paul and his Christian witness. **BLANK12**

“Here then are aspects of Paul’s character which endear him to us as an integrated Christian, who combined spirituality with sanity, and faith with works. He believed that God would keep his promises and had the courage to say grace in the presence of a crowd of hard-bitten pagans. But his trust and godliness did not stop him seeing either that the ship should not take risks with the onset of winter, or that the sailors must not be allowed to escape, or that the hungry crew and passengers had to eat to survive, or (later) that he needed to gather wood to keep the beach fire burning. What a man! He was a man of God and of action, a man of the Spirit and of common sense.”³

- E.g. “He knew that hungry men are not efficient men.” (Barclay)

You Are Here (28¹)

The proposed forty mile trip from Fair Havens to Phoenix ended two weeks later on the island of Malta, **SLIDE13** which was scarcely a day’s voyage from the great port of Syracuse in Sicily (so close yet so far away because they had to wait in Malta until winter was over). Yet Luke tells us that the “islanders”⁴ *barbaroi* showed us unusual kindness.”

- The difference that practical kindness can make in a crisis... (MCC **SLIDE13** & brief explanation of the importance of refugee & hygiene & education kits)

One of the kindnesses of the islanders was that “They built a fire...” But what struck me was that despite everything that has happened and how exhausted he must have been, Paul helps gather a pile of brushwood—v.3. This too = Jesus’ like isn’t it! (*“It is only the little person who refuses the little task.”*—Barclay)

³ John Stott, Acts, p. 392.

⁴ The noun translated “islanders” in verses 2 and 4 is *barbaroi*, the word the Greeks used for all foreigners who spoke their own native language instead of Greek (contra the KJV translation “barbarians”).

- But tragedy strikes when a viper “fastened itself on his hand” (very visible!).
- Notice the islanders interpretation of this (v.4), a very reasonable one, but also very untrue. (if time permits, comment on the fickleness of the crowd⁵)
- V.5 = Paul’s response is so undramatic! Did he not know it was poisonous? Did he not care? Did he simply have faith in God’s promise that he “*must stand trial before Caesar*” (27²⁴) and could trust in God to preserve him?
- V.6 = What the islanders expected and were shocked to see... I wonder if Paul even realized at the time that a miracle had taken place (e.g. story of my missionary/pastor friend Rudy Froese when he was a missionary in Brazil...came home late from a meeting...Stepped on something in the dark while getting something out of the car trunk...Couldn’t see what it was so he went into the house for night....The next morning he saw where he had stepped and what he had stepped on...the head of a very poisonous snake that was lying there dead with its head crushed by his shoeprint!—Luke 10¹⁹ “*I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.*”)
- In vv. 6b-10 we see how God turned the evil omen into a divine one.
 - “They changed their minds and said he was a god.”
 - “the chief official...show us generous hospitality for three days”
 - Paul visited, prayed for, and healed the chief’s father who “was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery.”^{v.8} (probably = “Malta fever” which was common in Malta, Gibraltar and other Mediterranean locals.)⁶
 - As the news spread, others came and Paul carried out a healing ministry for the people, who in turned restored Paul & the crews fortunes (“honored us in many ways...furnished us with the supplies we needed.”). Isn’t God amazing (cf. “*To him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine...*” Eph. 3²⁰)

⁵ John Stott points out that “So fickle is the crowd that in Lystra Paul was first worshipped, then stoned (14¹¹⁻¹⁹), while on Malta he was first called a murderer, then a god. But the truth was at neither extreme.”

⁶ Stott, *Acts*, p. 395 also adds that “The micro-organism, which causes it, was apparently identified in 1887 and traced to the milk of the Maltese goats. Although a vaccine has been developed, the fever lasts on average for four months and sometimes persists even for two or three years.” But not in the case of Publius’ father!

Applications & Implications⁷

1) **Faith Works** – source of HOPE and COURAGE and HELP in hopeless and fearful and helpless circumstances.

- Some have wondered why Luke would waste so much time on space on a “secular” story (vs. church planting). But Luke shows how faith works in any and every setting, even (or perhaps especially) in “secular” settings because the light of God given hope and courage and help shone the brightest in these darkest of circumstances—it often does.
- Our words and actions can cause us to be agents of hope in a world that often seems hopeless (e.g. “take courage”—27^{22, 25, 36}).
- Our witness can often be the strongest in the midst of crisis so don’t just pray for it to be quickly over and done with. Pray for God to use it for all its worth.

2) **God Works** – in difficult and even hostile conditions and circumstances (whether caused by human folly or the forces of nature).

- *“Christ can still every storm, but he does not immunize Christians from problems that others in the world also face. Sometimes he miraculously delivers Christians from such situations, while at other times he gives Christians courage to endure natural and other disasters.”*⁸
- *“Though Christ can still the storm, we can have the courage to face it when he does not, for we know that through the crisis God’s sovereignty will work out something good (Rom. 8:28).”*^{Ibid.}
- Song - *“Sometimes he calms the storm...and other times he calms his child”*

⁷ “Why did Luke devote so much space to this journey?” and “What does he want to achieve in telling this story?”

⁸ Ajith Fernando, Acts (NIV Appl. Comm.), p. 617.