

Stormy Wind Fulfilling His Word

by Tom Macartney

The stormy wind is fulfilling His orders, and our risen, reigning Lord Jesus is so great that He can permit Himself to look imprisoned by all the limitations and failures of His church.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5, Matthew 6:13, John 10:27, Romans 8:28, Colossians 1:27, Hebrews 2:14, Revelation 21:1

Topics: "Gods Sovereignty", "Trusting Christ"

Description

Tom Macartney preaches on the encouraging chapter of Acts 27, highlighting the triumphant outcome of Paul's perilous journey to Rome as a prisoner, showcasing the Lord's sovereignty in the midst of terrifying circumstances. The chapter reveals deeper lessons on the storms of life, the enemy's attacks, and the importance of trusting in God's presence during trials. It emphasizes the necessity of realizing Christ's command in our lives and the assurance of salvation through Him, even in the midst of storms and suffering.

Transcript

Acts 27 must be one of the most encouraging chapters in the Bible - read it again! It is good for a Christian's morale, telling as it does the triumphant outcome of Paul's perilous journey to Rome as a prisoner, through storm and shipwreck.

Now the Holy Spirit would hardly guide Luke to use precious time and space recording all the details of this story simply for our interest. We may safely assume there are some important lessons for us here. Consider the happy outcome in the last verse: "And so ... they all escaped safe to the land." Behind the details of the shipwreck (Acts 27:41), lies an amazing example of the Lord's sovereignty in the most terrifying circumstances. The Lord controlled the shipwreck so that it was possible for all to escape. So let us seek to grasp some more of the lessons of this chapter.

We note first how many occasions in the Bible have to do with storms at sea and rivers or water as impassable barriers. For example, there are two storms on the Lake of Galilee recorded in the gospels. And in the Old Testament, we have the flood, the escape of Israel from Egypt through the Red Sea, and the crossing of the Jordan into the promised land; and, of course, the story of Jonah. And there are many references to the Lord's sovereignty over wind and wave and storm. For example:

"He commands and raises the stormy wind ... He makes the storm a calm" (Psalm 107:25, 29).

"Fear not ... when you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you" (Isaiah 43:1, 2).

"They saw Jesus walking on the sea ." (Mark 6:49).

"Even the wind and the waves obey Him." (Mark 4:41).

Yes, we are on sure ground in saying that Acts 27 has a deeper message and significance than appears at first sight. Consider first: was this just another storm, to be expected in the autumn in the Mediterranean? Was the storm on the Lake, in Mark 4, which threatened to sink the boat with the Lord Jesus and His disciples on board, just another storm? Surely not. Behind these storms (normal phenomena in themselves) we can see the hand of an enemy out to destroy them. The Lord Jesus warned us about the war this enemy would wage against His church - I will build My church; and the powers of death shall not overcome it." And it is clear enough in every true Christian's experience that there are times when the storms rage, the storms of suffering, trial, heart-break or persecution, and we feel we shall be overwhelmed. Yes, there is no escaping the storms, if we truly belong to Christ: "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." We refer particularly to those sufferings that only Christians know, but include those in which they inevitably share in this fallen world. We must not blame the devil for everything unpleasant that happens or anticipate finding him round every corner. Nowhere in scripture are Christians guaranteed a calm and happy journey to glory. While Paul was perfectly safe in the storm, because he was united to his living Lord - "The God to whom I belong, and whom I serve" - he was nevertheless in a highly unpleasant and dangerous situation.

It is possible to argue, of course, with some justification, that it was Paul's own fault, or the fault of others, that he was in this storm at all; that he had made a mistake in going to Jerusalem, that his fellow-Christians there had let him down, that he had been caught in the plots and intrigues of unscrupulous men. But Paul was a man fully committed to his Lord, and for such, those who love Him, the Lord overrules human factors and secondary causes for good, in the long run. The real reason he was in this storm was that he was the Lord's servant and therefore the enemy was out to destroy him, and Luke with him. Just think of it. The Lord was still using Paul and Luke to write about half the New Testament!

As Christians we live in enemy territory in this world and must expect a stormy passage to glory. Indeed, there must be something wrong if we claim to be following the Lord and know nothing of this. Without becoming pre-occupied with the enemy, we must allow for him continually: "Deliver us from the evil one." The story of the true church is one of suffering, but for such as Paul all must be well.

From the many lessons of this chapter we should note the possibility of getting ourselves into trouble by giving the enemy an opportunity of attacking us. Was it not the self-interest of the owner of the ship which drove him on to try to deliver his wheat cargo before winter? Self-interest will always get us (and others) into trouble. Was it not discontent with the deficiencies of the harbour they were in which caused the pilot and owner to risk trying to find a better one? Discontent with circumstances which the Lord has allowed is likely to bring us into greater difficulties. And note the factor of disobedience, the rejection of the Lord's warning through Paul, and the reliance on blind human wisdom: "When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had obtained what they wanted; so they weighed anchor and sailed," out into a hurricane. How often Christians have been enticed by 'the gentle south wind' to seek easier circumstances, a higher standard of living, a better job perhaps or anything else, and have sailed into a storm, or worse, have become becalmed in unperceived spiritual sterility. "Trust in the Lord with all your

heart, and do not rely on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths."

Note also how the bankruptcy of man and all his efforts is underlined: "The ship was caught by the storm ... and driven along." The cargo and ship's tackle were thrown overboard. Every kind of feverish effort was made by the crew to save the situation, until they, "Finally gave up all hope of being saved." Then, and only then, did the Lord, through Paul, intervene. Such is always His way. Grace can only reach us when we have given up all hope of saving ourselves. Note the contrast between verses 10 and 22, "Much loss ... of lives," and "There shall be no loss of life." Grace has intervened to avert deserved disaster because of the man on board.

This is the key to the whole story. The presence onboard of God's man, Paul, guaranteed the salvation of all in the ship. Without him disaster would have engulfed them. It was the presence of the Lord Jesus in the boat on the Lake that guaranteed the disciples safety, in spite of their little faith. It is His presence, by His Spirit, in our hearts that guarantees our salvation, and that He will see us through the storms of life. United to Him we are secure. He is in us, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." We are, "Justified by His blood ... and saved by His life." The disciples' lack of faith did not affect their safety, but only their state of mind. It is interesting to note how slow those on board were to realise that Paul's presence guaranteed their survival. And so it often is with us. In the storms, the countless promises of God made to us in His Son may seem unreal and irrelevant. Nevertheless, they will prove true even if we fail to believe them. Our eternal salvation and our survival in our storms depend only on the Man on board, the Lord Jesus; but our state of mind in the storms, our deliverance from our fears and doubts depends on realising He is on board, and trusting Him. The disciples survived, in spite of their fears through their lack of faith, because He was in the boat with them. And what a lesson they learned!

One final and profound lesson. Although Paul was a prisoner throughout the story, he was in fact the real captain. To begin with, Julius paid little attention to his warnings. But as events unfolded he and all on board came to see that Paul was really the man in command, upon whom everything depended. Paul the prisoner is gradually discovered to be the real captain.

Here is a great and profoundly encouraging mystery. Our risen, reigning Lord Jesus is so great that He can permit Himself to look imprisoned by all the limitations and failures of His church, and still remain in command. We say this to our shame and His glory, and not to minimize the seriousness of hindering and grieving Him. Consider how we limit Him who lives in us by the way we think and act. Consider the history of the church, so full of what dishonours Him. Consider this tragic world in its folly and rebellion against its rightful King. How often He seems to be a prisoner, defeated by circumstances beyond His control. In fact, He is always in command, The stormy wind is fulfilling His orders! His day will come when His triumph will be seen by all. In His life on earth we imprisoned Him from the cradle (with swaddling-bands) to the grave (with grave-bands), and still He triumphed. And now, as history runs its stormy, tragic course, He is still Lord of all. But we should each ask ourselves the question: "Is He my captain, in command of my life?" Under His command all will be well!

What an antidote to the despair which may sometimes threaten to engulf us as we journey through life's troubled seas to the day when the sea will be no more. Our hope is in the growing discovery of our Captain, whose presence in our hearts guarantees our safety and whose cheering words constantly inspire hope. As Paul cried in the darkest hour: "Take heart: for I believe God," so our Captain says to us, as He said to the fearful disciples under the shadow of the cross: "In Me you may have peace. In this

world you will have trouble. But take heart: I have overcome the world."

Bible references: Matt. 6:13; 16:18; John 10:27, 28; 12:31; 16:33; Acts 14:22; Rom. 5:9, 10; 8:28; Eph. 2:8, 9; Col. 1:27; Heb. 2:14, 15; Rev. 21: 1; Proverbs 3:5, 6

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