

The Storms of Life: Acts 27 vs 14-44.

This morning we are returning to the book of Acts after our Easter break. In the weeks before Alan Wilson and Will McCallion took us through Paul's trials before Felix and Festus and then his audience with King Agrippa. That episode ended with Agrippa saying to Festus "this man could have been set free, if he had not appealed to Caesar." But Paul exercised the right of a Roman citizen to have his case heard before Caesar in Rome, in obedience to God's directive. Acts 23 v 11 "take courage as have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you **must** also testify in Rome. As God's apostle to the Gentiles, he welcomed any opportunity to bring the Gospel into the very heart of the Gentile empire. So, to Ch 27 and Paul's sea voyage to Italy. Luke writes a meticulous, precise and clearly eye-witness account of the voyage. Why? Was it just an exciting story to complete his book? I believe there are 2 reasons. (1) Lk 1 v 3 "I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the **certainty** of the things you have been taught.

As Luke carefully investigated others' testimony, he knows his own work must stand up to close scrutiny. James Smith, a soldier and yachtsman of 30 years-experience, served in Malta, Cyprus and other areas in the Med. He was a fellow of the Royal Society and a well-respected amateur geologist and geographer. In 1848 he wrote the book "The voyage and shipwreck of St. Paul." He attests to the accuracy of Luke's account in terms of geography, meteorology and seamanship. He says you can take a yacht into the Med. at the same time of year as Paul's voyage and use Acts 27 to tell you the prevailing winds and where you will end up. So, we can trust and accept Luke's writing as part of God's word and know the **certainty** of the things it teaches today. Jesus tells us in Jn 17 v 17 that God's word is truth. As such it is the revealed truth about God about God's people and the truth about the nature of the people of this world. So we must not let sceptics convince us otherwise. (2)

I believe Luke recorded these events to illustrate how one person's faith can make a big difference not only to that person, but to others caught up in the storms of life. He wrote to encourage us and strengthen us in our own storm-filled journeys of faith, whether these storms are uniquely personal, national or international. At the moment we are all passing through the Covid storm. But, as we begin to see that storm abate with the success of the vaccination programme, we see other storms gathering; civil unrest, racial tension economic and political instability and the spectre of unemployment. After 20 years of relative peace and prosperity, it's easy to forget that past generations have also faced major storms. From my 71st year I can remember the following. 1957 Asian flu. It's estimated it killed 1 million people worldwide. This is comparable to the worldwide death toll from Covid, given the world's population is 3 times larger today. 1968 Chinese flu killed up to 4 million people worldwide. These pandemics prompted Public Health warnings. There were regular TV warnings. Here is a typical storyboard. The lady of the house shakes a large pepper pot over her husband's head and when he starts to sneeze, she rams a hanky over his mouth and nose. The associated jingle: "coughs and sneezes spread diseases, trap your germs in your handkerchief." 1950s/1960s. The Cold War was at its peak with regular testing of nuclear weapons. 1962. The Cuban missile crisis. Most political commentators thought nuclear war was imminent. Civil Defence distributed leaflet. Put up posters and ran regular TV warnings.

There was advice on how to build and stock your own nuclear bomb shelter. They advised: in the event of a nuclear attack, shelter behind a stout structure and assume the brace position. Place your head between your knees. Some wags added: and kiss your backside goodbye! 1970 ushered in 30 years of the troubles. Struggles, difficulties and storms are an inevitable part of everyone's life. Jesus told his disciples in Jn 16v16. "in this world you will have trouble."

Storms, struggles, and difficulties are an inevitable consequence of the fallen world we live in. But how we deal with them or pass through them is not. For a good part of my adult life I was not a Christian and when storms came, I just gritted my teeth hoped for the best and muddled through. Storms reveal character – good and bad. In this story we see greed, the greed of the captain and the shipowner. They put profit before people's lives. We see sailors putting their faith in their own abilities, their seamanship. Others exhibit selfishness and cowardice as they try to sneak away in the only lifeboat. We see fear, worry and anxiety give way to hopelessness. V20 "when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved. All gave up except Paul. Jn 16v33 again. "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart I have overcome the world. Paul knew Jesus was with him in that boat by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Paul knew God had a plan for his life and that plan (to go to Rome) would not be thwarted by any storm. He knew that although the moon and stars were hidden from his view, he was not hidden from God's gaze. Zeph3v17 "The Lord your God is with you. He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with love. He will rejoice over you with singing." That is why Paul was able to write in Ro5v3 "We also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character and character hope. And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit." How did this man of God react in a crisis and what can we learn from him today. Did Paul pray? The text does not say that specifically. But Prof Marshall, NT studies, Aberdeen, says that the original Greek implies Paul prayed for his fellow voyagers and God heard that prayer. Paul prayed and he expected to hear God's answer. When the opportunity arose, he shared God's word and his faith in that word. "Keep up your courage.

None of you will be lost, just the ship. How do I know this? God told me not to be afraid because I **must** stand trial before Caesar. God has also graciously given me the lives of all who sail with me. Keep up your courage for I have faith in God, who keeps his promises." Paul-the-encourager shared God's word with those that had lost hope. Paul trusted God's word and urged them to do the same. Paul had addressed their spiritual and emotional needs. But he also considers their practical needs too. They hadn't eaten in 14 days; seasickness, saturated provisions, impossible to light a fire to cook on. But they needed to eat to survive. Have you ever tried to eat in rough seas? In 1968 I was returning home on the Heysham boat, when it got really rough halfway across. People around me were getting really sick. I had to abandon my light refreshment. When I got home, I was telling my dad about it. He was a seaman of 30 years' experience. He told me I should have eaten strawberry jam sandwiches. In my naivety, I asked would that have stopped my seasickness. "Oh, don't be daft son. They just taste the same coming up as going down." V34 Now I urge you, to take some food. You need it to survive. He repeats his earlier words of encouragement. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head. Then Paul sets a good

example. He took some bread, gave thanks to the Lord for the food and for His assurance of their safety, broke it and began to eat. Paul's actions underscored his belief that they would reach dry land soon and be saved. Paul's faith is contagious. V36 They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. They exercised even more faith by throwing the excess food overboard to further lighten the ship. God's promises to Paul came to pass. V44 Everyone reached land in safety.

So, are you a person of faith like Paul, anchored in Christ alone, standing on the promises of despair, anchorless, without hope and tossed about by the storms of this life? If you are a person of faith, are you an encourager like Paul? Do you pray with and for people who have lost hope? Do you share God's promises from his word and back it up with practical help? Can you help with baby basics, the foodbank, the heating and lighting scheme, school uniforms, the Co-op giveaway and CAP. But above all are you setting a good example? Do you smile in the teeth of life's storms? Remember the children's chorus. "with Jesus in the boat, you can smile in the storm, smile in the storm....." As believers we should be able to smile in the storm, because we are Easter people and resurrection people. We know where our ultimate home is and that nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from the love of God and reaching that final destination to be with Him. How you face life's storms has a major impact on how nonbelievers perceive the word of God and your professed faith. People need to hear the gospel message, absolutely. But actually, seeing how the good news has personally impacted you and how you carry yourself through life's storms will do more to spark and encourage their faith than anything else. Finally, if you haven't yet invited Jesus into your boat, into your life, I would earnestly encourage you to do so now. Then you will know his peace – no matter what the circumstances. That peace that transcends all understanding. Amen.