

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Acts 27:27. We're going to get right into it. We have communion as well tonight.

The book of Acts is a narrative and, just like the historical books in the Old Testament, narrative lessons are learned by placing yourself in the story so that you might stand where the narrative takes you and where the people lead you and look at things from their perspective; and God uses it to teach us much. And so the book of Acts is pretty much a narrative. And tonight we are going to continue the narrative as Paul heads for Rome and for, really, the end of the book of Acts, and then we'll kind of move on from there.

I'll give you tonight's lesson before we start. And this lesson is this - God makes great promises, but upon those promises we still have great responsibility. So that if we just sit around and wait on the Lord to....."Well the Lord said He'll provide." Yeah, but if you don't go finding a job, and then you go, "Well, the Lord didn't provide," well, no, He did. You've just got to go to work! And there's a balance there between what God promises to do and what we need to do. And we'll find that same lesson repeated three times in our narrative tonight, down through verse 44, and the end of the book is just now two weeks away from tonight. And then Don Stewart will be here for a couple weeks; we're going to answer questions one night, and he's going to come and do a little Bible prophecy update and all the things he sees in the news that reflect not only positively on our future but on the timing as far as the Lord's coming and what we, maybe, should be encouraged by. So, that'll be in a couple of weeks.

Every week I've been giving you a review to get us up to date. I'm not going to do that tonight; I hope you know where you're at. I'll give you a quick synopsis, thirty seconds. Paul comes to Jerusalem. He gives them gifts. He compromises on a request that they make. He's accused by the elders from Jerusalem in town. He gets a beating at the Temple. Claudius Lysias rescues him. He gives a sermon on the steps of the Antonia Fortress. He uses the word "Gentiles" there. There's a second riot. He is taken again. They're planning to scourge him, but they let him go because he's a Roman. The next day they have a meeting with the Sanhedrin. Paul mentions he's a Pharisee, and there's a third riot. They plot to kill him. His nephew

finds out. Lysias sends him off to Caesarea, and Felix there is the governor. Okay. (Laughing) A little dizzy. (Clapping) Wait. No, no, no. I'm not lookin' for applause till the end, okay? (Laughing) You may not like the rest of what you're gonna hear.

Paul spends two years in jail. Felix wants bribe money. He shivers when Paul speaks. He and his wife go to listen to Paul about the Lord. He's eventually pulled out of his job for being overly violent and disappears. A fellow named Festus, who's 70 years old, takes over. He's a well-known guy around town. He tries to use Paul as a political prisoner. He tried to get him to go to Jerusalem to be heard. The Jerusalem guys have decided he just has to die. That would be the solution. So Paul's not takin' that deal, and he asks to be sent to Caesar. Festus doesn't know what to accuse him of because, again, he's an innocent man, and everyone knows it. He asks the advice of King Agrippa II and Bernice who happened to be in town. They also get a heavy-duty kind of message from Paul. They agree that he should have been released had he not appealed to Caesar.

And then, in chapter 27 - the first twenty-six verses, Paul is sent to Rome. Let me catch you up on last week's study, if I can remember. To go to Rome, Paul was put on a boat with a centurion named Julius and a bunch of Roman soldiers. There were no passenger ships in those days, so every boat that you took was a cargo vessel. The only one that they could find in Caesarea was a small kind of vessel that would travel along the coast, a coastal vessel. They hoped that they could find a larger one later because, as you see from the map, they had a long way to go. But they got into the boat - Julius did, and Paul did, Aristarchus (one of Paul's friends), Timothy, Luke was with them (the fellow that wrote this book) as well, many prisoners - 276 people in all. And they went to Sidon, notice behind us in the drawing. They then stayed for a week. Paul got to be encouraged by some of the church there in Sidon. They set out again. They sailed past Cyprus, they sailed past Cilicia and Lycia. They finally came to a place called Myra, which is along the coast of Turkey today. They off-loaded there and found a larger oceangoing vessel out of Alexandria in Egypt (was headed for Rome). So they got on a big boat and, when they got on this boat, notice that they were planning to sail to Cnidus, which they headed for, if you will. But the wind kicks up, it pushes them south underneath Crete, where they kind of hide for shelter.

It doesn't look like it's going to be a very nice trip. And, needless to say, with great difficulty, they get there, and Paul, last week, says to everyone who wants to listen, "I really think we shouldn't sail anymore." They left in 59 A.D. late summer,

so it's heading towards the winter, and Paul thinks this is a dangerous move. Now the Lord had said to Paul, "You're going to make Rome." So Paul's just sharing his heart. He believes God'll get him to Rome, but in what condition he doesn't know. So he advises everyone to not go, but the centurion listens to the skipper and to the owner of the boat who say, "Well, we do this all the time, and this is a terrible place. They don't even have a movie theater in town. We'll just sail 60 miles up the coast towards Phenice at the point of Crete. We can winter there. It's a beautiful place. They have lots of good restaurants. That's where we should go." So they get the boat out again, and the winds seem to be favorable. But it doesn't last very long. And if you'll notice the map, they immediately get pushed away from Crete, and they head for the Sandbanks off the coast of Libya, North Africa - pretty dangerous place to be, a lot of boats have wrecked there, everyone is more than a little concerned. It was a bad decision. And this huge, almost northeastern, wind blows, if you will, against them so much so that they're trapped; they can't go anywhere. This boat doesn't have an engine; it has sails. And so they took down the sails (verses 18, 19 and 20 of last week); on the second day they throw all the non-essentials overboard; on the third day they throw most of the essentials, except for the food, overboard. These are seasoned sailors. This is what they do for a living! And they're pretty sure that they're going to be lost. Paul and his prisoner friends are down in the hold, seeking the Lord no doubt. I talked last week about how sick I just get sick reading it. How hard this must if you're not a boat person, I can't imagine how this would go.

In verses 24, 25 and 26 last week, for the fifth time in the book of Acts, the Lord appears to Paul, comes to speak to Paul directly; says to him, "Don't be afraid. You don't need to fear. You and all of those on board are going to be saved, but the boat is doomed." That's what the Lord tells Paul. The good news is Paul had been praying - not for himself because he believed God had said, "Go to Rome, you're gonna be there" (in fact we read that here in the book of Acts) - but Paul had spent the last many days praying for his compatriots on board. The Lord says, in verse 24, to Paul, "You will indeed be brought before Caesar." Now understand that Paul is headed to Rome at a time when the Caesar is Nero. If you know anything at all about Nero, Nero was a pretty normal guy until about 60 A.D., and then Nero absolutely lost his mind, I mean, historically. And there are at least some Bible teachers (and there's no really reason to argue with them) that believe that it might very well have been the reaction of hearing Paul sharing the gospel with him. Because he will eventually burn down the poor part of Rome and blame the Christians in the hopes that persecution (and it did) turned against the church

in a huge way. He really wanted to rebuild Rome in his image and as he wanted it to be and all. So we're not sure (it's the right time) whether that's the right action that precipitated Nero going over the edge; we don't know. We do know that Paul will eventually be released and win this case. While he was in Rome in prison, he will write 1 Timothy, and he will suggest to Timothy and all, but in the most certain way, that he thinks he's going to be free. "I think I'm going to beat this. I think I'm gettin' out. The Lord kind of gave me peace." Most of the historical records beyond the book of Acts tell us that Paul went back to Ephesus. He lasted about eighteen months before he was re-arrested by Nero again, placed in the Mamertine Prison (along the Appian Way in Rome), and Paul knew that that was it; they were going to take his head off. And so he wrote 2 Timothy, the last letter he ever wrote, and if you'll read that letter, you'll hear Paul (two years down the road from where we are, three years down the road), saying, "That's it. I'm done. This is the end of the line for me. The Lord has prepared me for this." So, it may very well have been that Nero, rejecting Jesus, went over the edge much like Herod did after he turned away from listening to John the Baptist. Remember, he heard him gladly and then one day he just seemed to have lost his mind. So, I guess once the truth is turned away from, you've got nowhere to go but down. The Romans were so angry with Nero when he died that they sought to destroy everything he had built, including taking his palace and covering it over with dirt. They put a road right over his house. Now they thought that would ruin it; what it did was it preserved it and today, if you go to Rome, it is one of the best-preserved buildings in the city. But for now, Paul was visited by the Lord in the midst of a Herculean kind of a storm that even seasoned sailors thought that they were no way going to get out, and the Lord spoke to Paul that he shouldn't be afraid, that he was going to get to Rome, that the Lord was going to give him - as a result of prayer - the lives of those who were with him. Notice verse 24, " 'Don't be afraid, Paul. You must be brought before Caesar, and indeed God has granted to you all those who are sailing with you.' So take heart, men, I believe that the will of God will be just as He told me." And so Paul went up to speak to the crew and to everyone else, and then Paul said, "We are going to run aground on a certain island," which is something that only the Lord could have told him. There's no way that anyone on this ship could have known at the time.

So that brings us up to speed. Verse 27, "Now when the fourteenth night had come," imagine, "as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land. And they took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little

farther, they took soundings again and found it to be fifteen fathoms. Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come." Two weeks in a storm where you haven't seen the sun, the moon, the stars, but you've seen your food - every two minutes - comin' up (Laughing) is a pretty frightening thought. But somehow they heard a noise, and it seemed to them good noise at all. Maybe they heard waves crashing in the distance. We don't know what they heard. But they took some depth measurements. A fathom is six feet. So they found out 120' of water and then a little later it was only 90'. They knew they were pulling up to something, and so they threw four anchors out, hoping to hang on in the storm until the morning and not drift into some land. In all of the story, from a purely sailing standpoint, these guys were really good. I mean, all of the sailors did their job. They got rid of the food, they strapped the boat together, they kept watch; they did everything that you could have done in a vicious storm that was so dangerous. They even, like I said, put out the anchors in the hopes that they weren't going to break free and somehow run into the shore or something and crash. Storms are bad enough at sea; if they're in shallow waters, they're much more dangerous, and so they just kind of hang on. And notice that everyone's praying now. Everyone prays in a storm, don't they? Everyone is praying now. And they "prayed for day to come."

Verse 30, "And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow, Paul said to the centurion" (that would be Julius) "and the soldiers, 'Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.' " So here're a couple of crooked sailors who plan to save themselves, take the little boat that they have on board, fend for themselves, and kind of escape. There is usually found in great pressure situations people with a natural kind of cowardice and selfishness; not everyone. But everyone is in great danger for their lives, and these guys said, "Well, let's bail!" Right? You always find the best and the worst in people when the pressure is turned up. We have no idea how Paul knew what was going on. I don't know if the Lord goes, "Hey, watch them guys" or if it was just common sense to keep an eye on them. All I know is it seems like, with all of the people on board, Paul is the only guy that's keepin' an eye on things. He really is the captain of the ship. Right? His directions are being followed by everyone now.

The question becomes - back to verse 22 - the Lord says, "There'll be no loss of life. You're only gonna lose the ship." So, if there is gonna be no loss of life, how does Paul now say to Julius, "These guys bail, you're gonna die"? Almost seems

contradictory, doesn't it? God told him, "No one will die. I've given you all of the lives on the ship. All 276 of you are gonna, this afternoon, stand dripping wet on the island of Malta. But you're gonna be fine." And yet now, in these guys trying to escape, Paul points his finger at them and says, "Now, wait a minute. If they get off the boat, we're all gonna die. All bets are off. There is no way that we can be saved. We're gonna die!" (verse 31) "We're gonna die." In fact, in verse 32, "the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off" (into the ocean). This is the prisoner giving orders to the soldiers!

Now, the issue then becomes how do you reconcile these two verses? Is Paul credible? Were the words from the Lord right? Are they generalized? Was He being specific? And why would he now say to someone - because this is to the same guy, the same day, "Hey, they bail, we die"? And I think this is the first example of that important lesson that God works at both the means and the end. Do you hear what I'm saying? In other words, the end is nothing short of miraculous, but the means may be as simple with common sense and personal responsibility as it can be. "We're gonna need every guy on deck to get to land, and God expects us to be there." The ending is to His glory. The method requires our responsibility. And so the Lord wasn't going to allow a few guys to escape while everyone else suffered, but yet His promise to everyone would be saved was still in force. Could God have delivered 266 guys while 10 of them took an earlier boat? Yes, He could have. Of course He could have. But the presupposition was if God's gonna make Himself known, He wants everyone to know Him. So there's both this divine work of God, and then there's this personal responsibility. "We've gotta maneuver the boat. We're gonna need all hands on deck." God would use each one of them. Could He have done it without 'em? Sure He could. But Paul is led to speak up, and all bets were off "unless you keep them on board."

So here's this balance, and you'll find it a lot in the Bible - between the supernatural works of God and the responsibility of men; that you have a responsibility to be faithful to God's callings, though God will do what God says. And it's one of those heavy kinds of theological positions that you need to work yourself through as a Christian because you're gonna be facing it a lot of times. It's like witnessing, you know? On the one hand, why bother to witness if God already knows who's gonna be saved? Because He told you to. And He has a method by which He's gonna reach the lost. Your job's just to tell. His job is to save. We've all got our things to do. You can't save anyone, and He only can speak through you. That's what He's decided to do. He's gonna pick you and me to speak

through. Bad decision, maybe? Well, no. God doesn't make bad decisions. It might look that way from us, but God works on both sides. What if God wants to use you to be the means by which another is saved? These sailors were a part of the means that God had ordained and the Lord will bear witness to all. So Paul speaks up, and I love the immediate effect that Paul has upon the whole boat. Everyone's listening to a prisoner who has been walking with God. If the sailors were angry, they don't show it (because Roman guards could be pretty tough). And, again, here is this centurion who we find having surprisingly insightful wisdom. He is acting by faith. He thinks that's the right choice to make. He commandeers the boat, and he won't allow them to just save themselves. So they throw in with Paul. These centurions always look really good in the Scriptures.

So the night passes, verse 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.' " Imagine that - two weeks, nothin' to eat. Most of us are gonna go home tonight and eat before we go to sleep. Look, two weeks! " 'Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you.' " So, dawn breaks, Paul has his second speech. The ship has held its position. "We'd better eat. It's gonna be a long, busy day, and we've all not eaten at all. We need our strength. Don't despair. God is gonna save every one of you as He has promised me. Not one hair of your head will be lost." It's a promise I wish I'd read years ago. (Laughing) Okay, here's the same practical issue again. On the one hand, the Lord says, "Not a hair of your head is gonna be moved; we're all gonna make it." On the other hand, "But you'd better eat somethin'." "Well, why? I thought the Lord's gonna save me." "Well, He will. But you're gonna have to swim." "Oh, I thought the Lord was gonna save me." "No. He will, but you'd better eat!" The practical decisions between faith and responsibility. We see it sometimes. People.....I've had people quit their jobs because they're not happy there and say to us (the church), "I quit my job today. The Lord showed me I don't need to be there anymore. I hated it." And I'll say, "Well, great. Where're you gonna work?" "I don't know, but the Lord told me to quit." "All right." A month later, they'll come into the office, and they'll say this, "Hey, Pastor, you think you can help us with the rent?" And I say, "No!" "Why not?" I said, "Because I didn't tell you to quit, the Lord did." (Laughing) "So ask the Lord for the money, man. I ain't givin' it to ya." They want me to now pay for their act of faith, their step of faith. There's a balance between responsibility and the supernatural. God does promise to meet your needs, but if you're out of work, here's what you can do to serve the Lord - you can go look for a job eight

hours a day; go fill out applications, go knock on the door, be available, take a job that's beneath you, humble yourself. Go to work! And then go home and thank the Lord for this position because they work together. We can't expect God to move a boat that's tied to the dock. "Lord, guide me." And we're not..... "Guide me, Lord." "I'm tryin' to....." "No, just guide me!" It doesn't work. And that's the way it works here with this balance of faith and responsibility. It's a vital truth. This is the second time it's repeated. God promises to preserve them, but they're gonna have to do their part. Sometimes people get so spiritually-minded that they become no earthly good. They just talk as foolishness, and yet their behavior's just ridiculous. God doesn't expect you, in faith, to lose your intelligence. And faith isn't stupid. If God provides, He will. But go to work, man! Now if you can't work, if there's no way you can get out of bed, if you can't, then we can trust the Lord to do a whole lot of things that you can't do. But don't get angry with God when He wants you to do your part. "I just want to grow in the Lord." Good. Start reading your Bible not just sleeping on it. "I spent the whole night over the Book." Yeah, but not in it. That's the problem.

So Paul, "God spoke to me. Don't be afraid. We're gonna get to Rome. You're gonna speak to Caesar. Everyone's gonna be saved. We're gonna lose the ship. We're gonna crash onto an island." And Paul goes, "Don't let them guys go or all bets are off. Don't let 'em go. We'd better eat because we've got a lot to do today."

We read, in verse 35, "And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken it he began to eat. Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves. And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship." Paul is the prisoner-turned-master of the ship; he's representing the Lord. He had tried to keep them all from leaving, he had prayed for their safety, God had assured him, and now nobody's jumping ship. There's he and 275 others. But notice Paul leads by example. "We gotta eat." And I love the fact that he stands up in front of the heathen elect, here, and he begins to pray and thank God publicly and loudly for His provision and for His goodness and for His blessing on this two-week-old grain; bread - moldy, maybe, now. And I'll bet every eye was closed now except for the soldiers who were watching the sailors who they didn't trust. Paul led by example. The sailors that had tried to sneak away - they, I'm sure, stood and were ashamed; they'd been caught. They were tired. This isn't their lot. They knew how dangerous things were, and now they're brought into the awareness of a God who oversees them, listening to this man pray. The passengers, I suspect, would be

sick, if not terrorized; beside themselves. And Paul introduces them quietly to the comfort and the hope and the rest that God's presence brings. The prisoners, I think, should have been the most fearful because they are strapped - at least from a historical standpoint - in arm and leg iron stocks. You're literally tied down in a boat that could sink. That doesn't feel too good. And then you've got this other problem - if a Roman soldier loses you, they go to your punishment. So the plan and the work, at least historically, has always been if you're gonna lose a prisoner, kill him; but don't lose him. Because at least you can bring his body and say, "I didn't lose him. He tried to escape." That way you spare yourself. So these guys are in a world of hurt, but their leader, Paul, is going, "Oh, Lord, thanks for the day. It's so beautiful. It looks like the sun's gonna come out." And they hear from the mouth of Paul about the mercy and the kindness of God, who can do the impossible and save to the uttermost.

Paul is an amazing witness, and I'll tell you what - you can be an amazing witness, praying with unbelievers around. You should always try to pray, no matter who you're with. Go, "Hey, can I pray for our food?" and just pray the gospel. I've done several police graduations at the academy. I just pray the gospel. "Thank You, Lord, for sending Jesus to die for the sins of the world, and we're all sinners. Boy, that's why we need police officers".....until you're done. "Amen. And that we can come to You in faith." We do as a chaplain for the Santa Ana PD now. We go and do opening prayers at City Councils. And the place is full, it's a busy city, and we're first up. In uniform. Pastor's going to come and pray. I talk about Jesus, man. "Well, you can't use Jesus' name." "Oh, I can. I was asked to come pray. I can't talk to anybody that I don't know, and I know Jesus. I'm talkin' to Him." It's been a great way to witness to people. And look at Paul. He stands before a whole boatload of unbelievers, and he begins to talk to Jesus and thank Him for what He's done. And notice that they listened to Paul as he thanked the Lord. And then he began to eat. And verse 36 says he made a big difference; they were all encouraged. They're all going to take some food. They're cheerful again - 276 people moved by Paul. Was this Paul's way of wantin' to reach 276 people? I would say he'd vote no. "I don't want to do it this way." But it is amazing how the Lord places him right in this place where verse 36 is the effect. Their fear, their suspicion, their anger, their hate seemed to fall away. Paul's God seemed very, very near to him and now to them; very personal. And it's amazing people will watch because that's what they want - what you have.

Verse 38 tells us, "So when they had eaten enough," they threw out the rest of their food, "they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea." The profit is now gone, the ship - it's a disaster financially, but they're going to have to get as light as they can to try to make a run for land. Practical measures, right? Riding as high in the water as they can. Didn't the Lord say, verse 22, "The ship will be lost"? Why bother? Same principle every time. You do what you're supposed to do. Be responsible. It won't change God's plans, but He depends on you to be faithful. So they shouldn't purposely sink the thing.

We are told, in verse 39, "When it was day," (when the sun was up or at least the light came up) "they did not recognize the land; but they observed a bay with a beach, onto which they planned to run the ship" (aground, I guess) "if possible. And they let go the anchors and left them in the sea, meanwhile loosing the rudder ropes; and they hoisted the mainsail to the wind and made for shore. But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves." They didn't know what island it was. You can look at the map. Malta is still around today. If you go to any kind of Mediterranean or Adriatic tour in the summer out of Italy, they'll oftentimes take you there for the day; it's a beautiful place, a little, small place. But anyway, Paul and the boys were headed there, and they didn't know what it was. But I'll tell you what. Any island at this point is a good thing, and they weren't concerned. So no rock faces, no cliffs without access. It looked like there was a beach. "Maybe we can make beach. It looks hopeful." At some point, as they let the ship run, they hit a sandbar. The back of the ship was jutting out into the ocean. They were gettin' beat to death by the violence of the waves. It looked like the thing was gonna get wrecked. The only thing they could do now was swim for it. We don't know how far out they were. But how would that make you feel? "You have to swim. I mean, the waves are big enough to break a boat, but you can swim." I think most of us would go, "Yeah, maybe this is not gonna work out so well."

Verse 42, "And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners," (we just mentioned that) "lest any of them should swim away and escape." So Paul, who had been led of the Lord to this point, is now saved from the sea, and immediately he is threatened by these panicked soldiers. And, again, like I said, lose a prisoner maybe lose your life - if that was his sentence. So again, in selfishness and cowardice like the sailors, now the soldiers want to do this self-saving thing. Again God's grace intervenes. Paul had made a friend of the centurion. He was deeply moved, I think,

by Paul's honesty. And so we read, in verse 43, "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," (who, I guess, they couldn't swim) "some on boards and some on parts of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land." So Julius, the Roman centurion, again - same guy - makes a good call. Saves the prisoners from a wicked move, unchains them. I can't imagine being on this boat and you can't swim. But we're not told how long it took or how they got there, just that they got there, and 276 people were standing together on the shores of Malta. Verse 1 of chapter 28, "Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta." Club Med in Malta. That's where they landed.

Sometimes God brings into our lives storms, and you wonder why. Paul certainly is a guy that went through a lot of that that we can talk to him about - what is he going through and why.

Sometimes you can label them storms of correction because sometimes, when you're out here, God brings a storm to bring you back over here. He does it because He loves you. He doesn't forsake you because you're His kids. You don't want to let your kids just get away with murder. He wants to raise you well, and so He brings difficulty. The story of Jonah, maybe, is the best example of a storm of correction. He's a rebellious guy. He's a disobedient guy. He's a hateful guy. He knows God's a loving God. He wants the people that he's supposed to be warning to be destroyed, and so he sets off to go away from where God is. And, in fact, when the ship he's on starts to take in water (it looks pretty bad), they say to Jonah, "Why have you done this?" And then it says, "Because the men knew he had fled from the presence of the LORD because he had told them" (Jonah 1:10). So Jonah was well aware of the fact he was heading in the wrong direction, told everyone on the ship, and then when they began to suffer, they went, "Well, we can't drown, sir. We're going to have to throw you overboard." But it was a storm of correction. It was meant to bring him back to the ways of the LORD.

In the book of Job, when they were discussing the storms of correction, one fellow said (Job 27:22), "God hurls against us and doesn't spare; he flees desperately from His powers," trying to insinuate that Job was one of those guys. He was wrong, but his concept was right. I mean, God does have a way of taking you through the storms, dealing with you. In fact, if you read the book of Judges (and we did that on Wednesday nights before this book, I think), God's dealing with

Israel was pretty much 350 years of storms of correction. Every time they went south, God brought a storm - an enemy, an army, a threat - and either slowly or quickly, they came back, "Oh, God, You are so right." Haven't you ever gone in the wrong direction and God brought you to your knees, and you go, "Oh, God"? Storms of correction.

Sometimes the storms that God sends you through are better termed storms of perfection - that God just makes to make you strong or help you to be strong. But in order to be strong, you're gonna have to go through some stuff. Right? You're gonna have to dig deep and run your roots deep. Paul, when he wrote his 2 Corinthian letter (which we're working on, on Sunday mornings), said of his afflictions (and there were a lot of them), "My light affliction is just for a moment, but it is working in me an eternal and exceeding weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17). "I know I'm goin' through it, but God is just preparing me for what comes next." And there is a way that sometimes the storms come so that you might get stronger. Paul wrote, in Hebrews 10:36, "You have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise." But you need to just learn to hang in there. The word "endurance" means just that, to not quit. Sometimes God just allows you to go through. You know, faith isn't a pill that you can take. Faith, in the Bible, is a muscle that can be exercised. And if it's gonna grow, it's gonna be because you have to use it; which is why James sits down, and he writes, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into these trials, knowing that the testing of your faith will develop in you patience" (James 1:2). Sometimes God just puts you in the midst of a storm to grow you up. You haven't done anything wrong, you don't need to be corrected. You just need to be strengthened and built up.

Jesus, you might remember, sent the apostles into the Sea of Galilee after the feeding of the five thousand and all, that they could apply what they were learning to themselves. And they got stuck - you remember? - they quickly forgot that there on the boat were twelve baskets of food; when they had started, it was just a handful of lunch. They should have looked at their feet and went, "The Lord can do this!" But they just freaked out. And at their feet was the answer for their problems. They were storms to perfect them, strengthen them.

Sometimes God sends storms your way to protect you. Correction, perfection, protection. That's three. To keep you from trouble - for your own good, if you will. Noah found grace in the sight of the LORD, so He put him on an ark. Protected

him, wasn't it? It was a storm of protection. Oh, it was judgment, sure, for the world; but very protection-oriented for Noah and his family. Lot gets out of Sodom by the goodness of God. It was a storm of protection. God got him out before the destruction came. Sometimes the Lord will.....(Pastor Jack speaks in a whining tone), "I was fired. Oh, I wonder how come God's not good to me." Who knows what He spared you from! (Pastor Jack speaks in a whining tone), "Oh, I was in this relationship, and this girl - she told me she loved me, now she left me!" Well, God bless you. Good for her now, and maybe good for you! We don't know. Storms of correction, perfection, protection.

Sometimes they are storms of direction. I think that's the last one I'm going for. Malta needed to hear the gospel. I don't think anything and anyone was planning to go here. Certainly Paul wasn't. And yet God dropped on their laps the most interesting, powerful apostle of his generation, and it just took a little wind and a couple of weeks. They actually ended up pretty close to where they were headed. Oh, they wouldn't have maybe sailed in that direction, but the Lord had another plan. I think we hate it when God steers us off course. Right? When things don't go our way. We make plans, we can't keep them. We make decisions, our fortunes change, our circumstances change. And we fight God because we're so unhappy. To us, if He's blessing, things'll go the way we want. When in actuality, if you've given the Lord your life, He can take you wherever He wants. You're better off to get up in the morning and pray this, "Lord, don't let me miss out on whatever You've got planned today. Interrupt me, mess up with the schedules. Just have Your way. I don't want to miss your best." Try prayin' that for a week, see how you do. One thing for sure - Paul wouldn't have come here on his own. And because he did, this island is touched with, and still has great remnants of, the influence of Christianity to this day.

Here's what you can't do. When God is bringing storms in your life, don't abandon ship. Make sure you say to yourself, "Don't do a verse 31. Don't get in the skiff and try to run it out" (right?) while the wind is howling and waves are crashing, and abandoning ship sounds like a good idea. I've heard it all before. I can't begin to tell you how many people in counseling have said to me, "I can't take this marriage another day. I can't work at this job another day. I quit. I'm jumping ship. I can't live with my parents another second. I'm moving out. Adios! I'm jumping ship." But I'll tell you what. You will never discover the will of God or the plans of God jumpin' off the boat. If He's in charge of your life, that means you're right where He wants you to be.....unless you're going astray, and He's got to bring you back.

So, stay and see God work it out. Don't lower the life boat, cut the rope. You start thinkin' about divorce, that'll soon be your reality. You start thinkin' about other men and women, you'll soon be involved in an affair. It's just the way sin works. So don't jump off the boat. Think about leavin' your job, don't come here for rent. (Laughing) Not that we haven't helped people, but usually it doesn't kind of fall together that way. "Oh, it's easy for you to say." Well, it's true. But the life boat is not meant to save you; the Lord saves.

So Paul is led by faith. And notice in the narrative how he, every step along the way, is a perfect example of a man that listens to the Lord: man of God, man of faith, man of action, filled with the Spirit, great common sense. Lord, help us.

So next week and the next week after that, Lord be willing, two more weeks we're gonna hang around in Malta, and then we're gonna go to Rome. If you've never been to Rome, make sure you don't miss two weeks from now. We're goin' to Rome.

Let's have communion, shall we?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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