

Place: Lurgan Baptist 13:32:2012

THE CHURCH ABLAZE

Reading: Acts 27:1-44

37. COURAGE IN THE MIDST OF LIFE'S STORMS

In 1892 after a year of intensive work in Great Britain, D.L. Moody sailed for home in the U.S.A. eager to get back to his family and work. The ship left Southampton amid many farewells, but about three days out into the ocean it ground to a halt and before long began to take on water. The crew and passengers were terrified, no one knew whether the ship would sink or not, and nobody knew if there were any rescue ships in the area.

After two days of anxiety Mr. Moody asked for permission to hold a meeting and to his surprise nearly every passenger attended. He opened his Bible at (Psalm 91) and read these words, “ *He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.*” Moody later wrote, “ *it was the darkest hour of my life, relief came in prayer. God heard my prayer and enabled me to say from the depths of my soul, “ Thy will be done,” I went to bed and fell asleep immediately.*” The Lord answered prayer, the ship and passengers were saved and another vessel towed it to port.

In recent days we have seen the Costa Concordia that great cruise ship crash into rocks of the Italian coast leaving more than thirty dead. On 15th April 1912, at

approximately 2.30am the stern of the White Star liner Titanic swung slowly upward toward the stars. Her lights went out, flashed on again, then went out for good. My some 1500 passengers were unable to get off that great ship. Now a wreck of any kind is a terrifying experience whether it is a train derailment, or a car collision, or the crash of an airplane. But probably the most terrifying of all is a shipwreck, because of the prolonged agony that the passengers and crew endure. Now Acts (Ch 27) is a story of one of the most detailed shipwreck accounts in ancient history. *Have you ever wondered why God takes an entire chapter to tell us in great detail about this shipwreck ? I'll tell you, what I think. You see, while this is history its more than history, it's an illustration that can apply to our lives. Is life not a voyage ? Are the circumstances of life not like the weather ? Sometimes there is smooth sailing, at other times there are storms, and we are caught in those storms because we are sailing on the sea of time between two eternities. Do you recall that two years previous Christ had appeared to Paul in his prison in Caesarea ? Do you remember what He said ? “ Be of good cheer Paul for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem so must thou bear witness, also at Rome.” (23:11)*

This was an unconditional promise. Paul would go to Rome, no doubt about it. However the Lord did not promise smooth sailing along the way. You see, as we serve Christ there will be storms, hardships, high seas, but also peace, assurance and the sustaining presence of the Lord. We just want to get to Rome but God is more interested in how we get there. The late great preacher Adrian Rodgers said this, “ *Every Christian is like this,*

he's either in a storm, coming out of a storm, or heading into one." He was not of course talking about literal storms although hurricanes and tornados cause many to go through difficult times. Rather he was talking about storms the way Peter mentions in his letter when he says, "*Beloved think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you as though some strange thing happened unto you.*" (1 Pet 4:12) All kinds of storms come in life's voyage. It may be a storm of sickness that comes up in your life. Or it may be that you're in a storm of failure. You've tried and yet you have failed and your self-confidence is shaken. Maybe your business is not going the way you had hoped it would go. You're in a storm of difficulty. Sometimes the storms take the form of unexpected tragedies. I mean just a tragedy that comes all at once upon your life. It might be just the ringing of a telephone, or a doorbell and you're in the middle of a storm. My how do you respond when the storms come in your life ? Anybody can live for the Lord when it's smooth sailing, but what do you do when the storms come up ? What did Paul do ? Did he exhibit courage in the midst of life's storms ?

Now we don't how much time elapsed between Paul's hearing before Agrippa and his departure for Rome but probably it was not that long. "*Paul began as a prisoner;*" said Joseph Parker "*but he ended as the captain.*" He took over the situation when it was obvious that no-one else knew what to do. Now a crisis does not make a person, a crisis shows what a person is made of, it tends to bring true leadership to the fore. Now this story unfolds in four stages.

(1) THE START

And this takes in the first stage of the journey from Caesarea to Sidon (27:1-3) and then from Sidon to Fair Havens (27:4-8) Paul was handed over to a Roman centurion named Julius who was responsible for transferring the apostle to Rome from Caesarea. He was,

(a) *THE CENTURION FOR THIS TRIP:*

And he treated Paul graciously. Like all the other centurions in the New Testament Julius cuts a very fine figure. He belonged to the Augustan cohort. This was probably a special group of soldiers who acted as liaison officers between Caesar and the Roman provinces. He was evidently a just and kind man giving Paul and his companions the opportunity to visit friends in Sidon when the ship stopped there. Paul was obviously trusted by this commander and held in high esteem. (a) But notice,

(b) *THE COMPANIONS FOR THIS TRIP:*

Did you notice here the resumption of the "*we,*" section ? "*And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy,*" (27:1) The last time we saw that term was in (21:18) You see, Luke had probably been living in Caesarea or nearby during the two years of Paul's imprisonment there. But now he was on hand to sail with Paul for Italy. And they were accompanied by another of Paul's beloved fellow workers "*Aristarchus a Macedonian of Thessalonica,*" (27:2) Aristarchus was one of Paul's travelling companions who had been

dragged into the theatre during the riot in Ephesus. (19:29) He accompanied Paul on his journeys throughout that region. (20:4) Later, writing from Rome, Paul refers to him as a fellow prisoner. (Col 4:10) This faithful young man was willing to be Paul's slave and to go to prison with him. No doubt Paul was greatly encouraged by such a loyal friend and fellow worker. You know, we often think of Paul giving care to others, but he also needed to receive care. I mean did he not teach that we are all part of the body of Christ ? He says, “ *For the body is not one member but many,*” and “ *now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular.*” (1 Cor 12:14, 27) You see, though we might be different from one another we are dependent on one another. Listen, I need you, and you need me and we each need each other. This is why we are not to forsake the “ *assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is but exhorting or encouraging one another,*” (Heb 10:25) You see, we receive encouragement by being with the Lord's people and here's Paul's companions ministering to him en route to Rome.

(c) ***THE COURSE FOR THIS TRIP:***

Look if you will at (27:2) Adramyttium was a city on the north west coast of Asia Minor near Troas modern Turkey. You see, ideally a good sailing ship would have left the coast of Israel and sailed straight west across the Mediterranean to Italy but the winds were against them. Notice,

1. The First Stop:

Sidon. About sixty miles north up the coast. Here Paul was refreshed by his brethren. Notice,

2. The Further Stops:

Passing between Cyprus and the mainland they came to Myra. (27:5) Here they changed ship, and got on board an Egyptian grain ship probably leased by the Roman government to move food and supplies around the Mediterranean in support of the Roman armies. Now this was a slow lumbering ship “ *and chief among its drawbacks was that it could not sail in the wind.*” (Kent Hughes) Do you know what their best hope was ? Not to encounter any storms in the journey. But look at (27:7-8) You see, what happened was this because of the clumsy ship and the adverse wind they had to head south toward the island of Crete and make port at Fair Havens on the southern coast of the island. Do you see what kind of journey this was ? It was a two steps forward, one step back journey so far and it was going to get worse. “ *Contrary winds,*” (27:4) and “ *slow sailing,*” marked this trip so far. My which of us at the beginning of our Christian life did not feel like “ *singing all the time ?*” I mean we were full of great hopes, bright expectations and glorious times ahead ?

Yet we were not long on the journey until we realised that that we were not going to “ *carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease.*” Suddenly there were contrary winds that we never expected to encounter. I wonder is this were you are this ? Are you in the midst of the storms of life ? 1.

(2) THE STORM

Now sometimes we are caught up in storms that are not our own fault. Was this not the way it was with Paul ? You see, having reached “ *The Fair Havens,*” (27:8) he did not want to sail any further. Do you see the word “ *perceive,*” in (23:10) ? It means to perceive from past experience. Now Paul did not want to sail but he was caught up in the circumstances and sometimes we are the same. A man will move from one town to another, it’s not God’s will that he moves, but his company says, “ *If you move there, we’ll give you more money.*” He does not soak his decision in prayer and so he’s about to get into a storm, and the little children, they are just prisoners on the ship and they land in the storm also. There are folk in a marriage right now and one of the partners says, “ *I want out of this marriage.*” He just steps out of that relationship and brings the storms of life down on that home. My do you ever find yourself in storms that are not out of own making ? Do you notice here that,

(a) GOD’S WISDOM WAS REJECTED:

Look if you will at (1:10-11) You see, because the ship was part of the Imperial grain fleet, Julius, not the ships pilot or captain or owner was the ranking official on board. And he decided to sail contrary to the servant of God and the will of God, and they did this because of a number of reasons. I’ve called them five ways to sink your ship. Notice,

1. There was COMPULSION:

“ *When much time was spent,*” (27:9) Travel in the open sea was dangerous from mid September to mid November after which it was ceased altogether until February. Since, the Fast, the Day of Atonement which was late September or early October was past, further travel was already extremely hazardous, but they said, “ *we have stayed around here long enough lets do something even if its wrong.*” Do you know folk who act out of compulsion ? They quit school, get divorced, drop their job, move from one church to another, out of compulsion ? They don’t know the will of God or enjoy the peace of God, they just say “ *I’m wasting time here and I’m going to do something else.*” My stay where you are until God tells you to move ! You’re not wasting time when you wait on God.

2. There was CONSULTATION:

Look if you will at (27:10-11) Do you see this ? Julius heeded the Master more than the Messenger. He said to himself, “ *this man is an expert and you know preachers are so impractical, what do preachers know about sailing ?*” So in consultation with the expert he makes a decision. Now thank God, for the experts, the doctors, lawyers, and professionals, but my when they tell you something which is contrary to the Word of God, you’ve got to have enough spiritual sense to go with the Word of God. (Ps 119:97) I heard about a lady who was being counselled by a marriage counsellor, a psychiatrist. Her pastor found out about this and he was not too happy. He said to her, “ *I want to ask you a question, what’s his authority ?*” “ *Why,*” she said, “ *his wall is lined with*

degree's, he's a medical doctor a psychiatrist." The Pastor said to her, " *how many times has he been married ?*" " *Three times,*" " *Three marriages have failed and he's counselling you about marriage.*" You see, so many times we consult people and their counsel is contrary to the Word of God. (1) (2)

(3) There was COMFORT:

Did you notice (27:12) ? The professional sailors deemed Fair Havens an unsuitable location to wait out the winter. Phoenix located 40 miles away provided better shelter from the winter storms. This was not a good place to spend the winter. So they said, " *lets do what is going to be best for us, we want to pamper our flesh and take the easy way.*" My the easy way is almost always the wrong way. Are we not called to " *endure hardness,*" (2 Tim 2:3) but the devil says, " *just take the easy way if its going to cause you any discipline don't do it.*" Is that how you make your decisions ? Do you want to stay in the comfort zone ? Well, belong long you'll discover you are going to be uncomfortable. (1) (2) (3)

(4) There was CONSENSUS:

For we read, " *the more part advised to depart hence also,*" (27:12) Now what happened was this. The centurion said, " *Lets put this to a vote. How many people on board of this ship think we ought to move on, and sail ?*" My Paul was outvoted. The majority wanted to sail on. Can I tell you something. Don't make your decisions by majority vote. In the Bible the majority

is usually wrong. Do you remember the ten spies who said, " *it can't be done.*" (Num 13:31) But the two, Joshua and Caleb, said, " *It can be done and by God's grace it will be done.*" Did you know that in the average church, even in a fellowship like this, the majority is almost always wrong. The majority of our members do not come to the prayer meeting, you think about that for a moment. The majority are not soul-winners. The majority don't have a burden for the lost. Oh, the majority can be right, but you had better learn not to be guided by the adage, " *Everyone is doing it.*" The fact that " *the more part advised to depart,*" did not mean they were in the will of God. There was (4)

(5) There was CIRCUMSTANCE:

" *And when the south wind blew softly,*" (27:13) It so often does. " *Supposing they had obtained their purpose,*" we so often do. But beware when the south wind blows softly especially when it blows in the teeth of counsel given by Paul. I mean is this not the clincher with many people ? They make their decision on the basis of circumstances. " *And when the south wind blew softly,*" what does that mean ? Why, the very wind they needed came along and proved how wrong Paul was. Can you imagine someone saying, " *why, would you look at that, what a wonderful time to sail and this is a sign we ought to go, the circumstances are just right.*" My this is the most deceiving of all. Have you heard some believer saying, " *I know this is God's will, the Lord gave me the opening, but they did not check it with God.*" Isn't it all too easy to take seemingly favourable circumstances as

the deciding factor in guidance and ignore the sterner counsel of the Word of God. I mean some believers just check the wind, whatever way the wind is blowing, but that soothing south wind was about to turn into a horrible, howling devastating cyclone. So they set sail. (a)

(b) MAN'S WAY WAS ACCEPTED:

But look at (27:14) Can you see here,

1. The Fierce Winds:

“Euroclydon,” or “Euraquilon,” refers to a north-easterly, it was a strong dangerous windstorm greatly feared by those who sailed the Mediterranean. They were now driven out to sea away from the coast of Crete. 1.

2. The Frantic Sailors:

I mean the ship's crew sprang into action doing whatever they could to save the ship.

1, They Secured the Tender: (27:16)

This was a small boat that was used to transport people from the large ship to the shore. The sailors pulled the skiff aboard and tied it down.

2. They Used Cables to Undergird the Ship: (27:17)

This provided additional support for the hull that was being thrashed by the high seas.

3. They Lightened the Ship: (27:18)

They began throwing things overboard so that the ship was sit higher in the water.

4. They Threw the Tackle Overboard: (27:19)

Was this to lighten the load or perhaps to drag behind the ship to slow it down ? Whatever it was evidence of the crew's desperation. My there was (1) (2)

3. The Failing Hope:

For look at (27:20) Have you ever been made ill by storm while on water ? *I heard of a woman who became seasick while on a day long sport fishing boat. She staggered up to the captain holding out the keys of her new car saying he could have it if he would just turn around.* My the plight of Paul and his friends was a thousand times worse. Day after day for fourteen days with no light of sun by day and no stars by night they wallowed in the deep until finally they gave up all hope that they would be saved. I wonder are you in the storm tonight through no fault of your own ? I heard about a man who lived in Ohio whose oil well caught fire, and he put out an all points bulletin for help. *He offered \$30,000 reward to whoever could put out that fire.* Well, all the large firehouses from neighbouring cities sent their best crews along with the most modern fire fighting equipment, but not one of the trucks could get with 200 yards of the blaze, because the heat was too intense. Finally the Calcutta township voluntary fire department appeared on the scene. They had only one rickety truck with a single ladder, only two buckets of water and three buckets of sand and a few blankets. When that old truck

reached the point where all those other fire companies had stopped, the driver did not even hesitate. He just kept going on ahead until he and his crew were right in the thick of that blaze. *They jumped out of that truck threw the two buckets of water and three buckets of sand on that fire and then beat the fire out with those blankets.* The oil tycoon was so impressed by that display of unbelievable courage that he gave the driver \$30,000 dollars in cash on the spot and said, “ *What are you and your men going to do with all of that money ?*” The driver shaking like a leaf said, “ *the first thing we’re going to do is to get those stupid brakes on that truck fixed.*” My sometimes we are thrown into the fire through no fault of our own. Often we are passing through the waters through no fault of our own, but we cannot drown because Christ is with us. Indeed is that not what Paul stood up and proclaimed ?

(3) THE SERMON

There are times when a sudden change in circumstances tends to throw men off balance but not Paul. Can you see,

(a) THE MAN OF GOD:

1. He is marked by Calmness: He was in control of himself and the situation.

2. He is marked by Courage: He spoke up when others were too scared to speak. You see when faith prevails fear must go.

3. He is marked by Confidence: He knew what he was

talking about. He knew that he had the goods and they knew it too.

4. He is marked by Cheerfulness: I mean, every one thinks he has pooped his cork, but listen to him as he says, “ *be of good cheer.*” My here is the ship about to sink and Paul is going round saying, “ *Hey, everyone cheer up I believe God.*” Here he was on a ship in the custody of Roman officers who were carrying him to imprisonment and eventual death and yet he thought of others in the hour of this storm. My are these not the marks of a good, godly and great man ? (a) Can you hear,

(b) THE MESSAGE OF GOD:

Have a look at it for it was all about,

1. God’s Presence with him:

“ *For there stood by me this night the angel of God,*” (27:23) Isn’t that amazing ? I mean nobody on board that ship, in that wide and angry sea had any ideal at all where that ship really was. But God knew. He was able to give His herald angel the exact latitude and longitude. In this case it was not the Lord Himself who had appeared to Paul as in Caesarea (23:11) but His angel. But it had the same effect, to remind Paul that the Lord was always with him, always aware of the trials that he was going through. My do you see that storm that you are in ? The Lord is with you in it, He knows what you are going through. Late in his life, the great pioneer missionary to Africa, David Livingstone, received an honorary doctorate from

Glasgow University. As he rose to speak, he was gaunt and haggard as a result of the hardships he had gone through in tropical Africa. His left arm, crushed by a lion, hung helplessly at his side as he announced his resolve to return to Africa without misgiving and with great gladness. He added, “ *Would you like me to tell you what supported me through all the years of exile among a people whose language I could not understand, and whose attitude toward me was often uncertain and often hostile ? It was this, ‘ Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.’* On these words I staked everything, and they never failed.” 1.

2. God’s Possession of him:

“ *Whose I am,*” (27:23) Paul tells these men on board that he belongs to God. So do you. My He purchased you with something far more valuable than silver or gold namely with His precious blood (1 Pet 1:18-19) and He isn’t about to abandon you. My does this not encourage you in the midst of the storm ? You are His.

3. God’s Purpose for him:

“ *And whom I serve,*” In another storm on the same sea centuries earlier, Jonah had no such testimony. In contrast to Paul’s witness to his Gentiles associates Jonah was reproved by the ship’s crew. My if we see ourselves as the Lord’ servants, we can be encouraged in the storms of life because the Lord looks out for His servants, indeed we are immortal until our work is done. So Paul speaks here about (1) (2) (3) and now,

4. God’s Promise to him:

Do you see it in (27:24) These words are simply a reminder of what the Lord already had told Paul in Jerusalem (23:11). The word “ *must,* ” points to divine necessity. When God says, “ *you must,*” you know that it *will* happen. He is *always* faithful to His promises. During Donald Grey Barnhouse’s student days in France, he led a girl to Christ who later married a French pastor. She often came to the Barnhouse home and saw them taking verses from a promise box, a small box that held about 200 promises from the Bible printed on heavy paper curled into cylinders. *They would take one out and read it when they needed a word of special comfort.* So this French woman made her own promise box, writing these same verses in French. Years later, during the war, this French family had no food except for the potato peelings from a nearby restaurant. The children were hungry and were almost in rags, and their shoes were worn through. In one of her lowest moments, this woman turned in desperation to the promise box.

She prayed “ *O Lord I have such great need. Is there a promise here that is really for me ? Show me O Lord, what promise I can have in this time of famine, nakedness, peril and sword.*” Her tears blinded her and in reaching for the box she knocked it over. The promises showered down around her, on her lap and on the floor.

Not one was left in the box. At that moment the Lord showed her that all the promises were indeed for her in that hour of her greatest need. My so it can be for you in whatever storm you are going through. As the Lord

promises in (Is 43:2) “ *When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee, when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.*” Is it not these truths that gave courage in the midst of life’s storms ? (1) (2) (3) (4) and,

(5) God’s Protection through him:

“ *And lo God hath given all them that sail with thee,*” the words “ *God hath given,*” or “ *granted,*” imply that Paul prayed not only for himself but also for all on board that they would all be saved from death through the shipwreck. My the world never knows the protection that it receives because of the presence and prayers of God’s people. It was Paul on board that kept them from drowning. Do you know society says ? “ *These Christians are the trouble makers,*” well one of these days we will be removed and then the boat will sink. (2 Thes 2:7-8) But do you know something ? When you are going a storm, don’t just pray for yourself. Pray that God will grant the souls of others with whom you have contact during the storm. My The Lord may be taking you through the storm for that very reason. He wants you to bring the gospel to others “ *on board,*” with you. How did this all end ? (1) (2) (3) Notice, finally,

(4) THE SHIPWRECK

Isn’t it interesting to notice that Paul received encouragement from the Lord and then he in turn

encouraged others to the Lord. Now some of the men on board may have been condemned prisoners headed to Rome to die in the arena with the lions they desperately Christ. So Paul encouraged them to look to the Lord. He encouraged them *practically*, they were to eat some food, (27:34) he encouraged them *emotionally*, he said “ *there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you,*” (27:34) he encouraged them *spiritually* he said, “ *I believe God.*” (27:25) You see, the sailors had their eyes on the problems but Paul was in touch with the Problem-solver. What a man. And what a God. Not one soul was lost, and God’s name was wonderfully glorified. Now,

(a) THE SHIP WAS GROUNDED:

Though they did not recognise it in the dark they were approaching the island of Malta, south of Sicily. In fact they were about three miles from the entrance of what is known to day as St. Paul’s bay. Remarkably in the providence of God the storm had driven them across the Mediterranean to a small dot of land in the middle of the sea. God caused the boat to drift 476 miles from the small island of Clauda to Malta, another speck in that vast sea. Although the sailors were not in control, God was. In the 19th century, an experienced Scottish yachtsman, James Smith, made a careful on-site study of this narrative. He asked experienced Mediterranean navigators what the mean drift of a ship of this kind would be in such a gale. He learned that it would drift about 36 miles in 24 hours. Even today, the soundings mentioned in (27:28) indicate that the ship was passing Koura, a point on the

east coast of Malta, on her way into St. Paul's Bay. Smith calculated that a ship leaving late in the evening from Clauda would, by midnight of the 14th day, be less than three miles from the entrance to St. Paul's Bay. He also reported that no ship can enter St. Paul's Bay without passing within a quarter of a mile from the point of Koura, where the sailors would have heard the breakers, thus surmising that they were nearing land, as Luke reports in (27:27) (cited by F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* [Eerdmans], pp. 514-515) ***I mean isn't God's Word amazingly accurate ?*** My when things in our lives are out of our control, they are never out of God's control. And we need to learn to trust in the promises of His Word. Now the ship was grounded. Look at (27:41) (a) But,

(b) THE SOULS WERE DELIVERED:

“ And so it came to pass that they escaped all safe to land,” (27:44) Perhaps many found Christ in those following months on Malta. Sometimes, storms come so that others will look beyond us to Christ. My Are you in a storm ? Does it look like your ship is about to go under ? If so you need some anchors.

- 1. The Anchor of God's Presence: He is with you.**
- 2. The Anchor of God's Possession: You are His.**
- 3. The Anchor of God's Purpose: You serve Him.**
- 4. The Anchor of God's Promise: He is all sufficient**
- 5. The Anchor of God's Protection: He will keep you.**

With anchors like these you can have courage in the midst of life's storms. Trust Him.