

## ***Storms of Life***

Acts 27:9-26

There are a few storm stories in the Bible. There is a storm story about Jonah. Jonah tried to run away and not follow God's instruction and so God persisted and sent a storm. The Bible says that our sin of disobedience causes storms in our lives. In the Gospels, Jesus' disciples encountered a storm in the middle of the sea. The disciples, who were faced with death, woke Jesus and said to him, "Teacher, don't you even care if we drown?" He got up and rebuked the wind. Then he said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" In this case, the disciples encountered a storm in their lives, not knowing exactly why it was there. Maybe the same kind of storms come into our lives, like an unexpected occurrence or an amazing event, and causes us to not be able to breath. One morning a very healthy husband can unexpectedly have a heart attack. We can lose people that we love through unexpected incidents. It was a similar situation when Jesus met the storm in the boat. Christians can expect to meet these kinds of storms. If you are facing a difficulty in your life, you can overcome it with your faith in God. If you pray to God faithfully, He will make the storm quiet.

There is another story of storms in the Bible. That is today's scripture reading. The ship sailing for Rome with Paul inside met a hurricane. Paul was heading toward Italy to be on trial in front of the Roman Emperor. However, a wind of hurricane force, called a "northeaster" swept down from the island. Because of the hurricane, they tossed around for 14 days. Why did the ship that Paul was on board meet such a big storm? This is a very different storm story from Jonah's. This is also a different situation from Jesus' disciples. It is not because of disobedience; not a trial of his faith. Why did Paul meet this hurricane? When you look at the Bible carefully, the ship could have been saved from the storm. Paul had persuaded the pilot and the owner of the ship not to sail. Verse 10 says, "Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and will bring great losses to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also." Before sailing, Paul had announced that a storm was coming. But the centurion named Julius ignored Paul's advice and set out to sail. And then they met the storm. Verse 11 says, "But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship." The Bible said that the centurion gave credit to the pilot and the owner of the ship instead of listening to what Paul said when they decided whether they should set sail or not. Paul had a status as a prisoner while the pilot and the owner of the ship were experts in sailing. It may be a natural that the centurion listened to what the pilot and the owner of the ship said. However, the problem was that they met a storm listening to the "experts".

It is very important to choose whose advice we should follow in our lives. There are true Words that we receive from the Holy Spirit and some words that we receive from "experts" like the pilot and the owner of the ship. At this point, our lives are based upon what kind of advice we have decided to follow. Christianity respects man's free will. God gave us free will to judge things correctly. Nevertheless, what we must know is that the answer is not found in our free will and or our experiences. There are limits to what free will and experience can provide. The most important thing is God's Word. That is because God is the real expert about man. God created a Man. There is nothing more to know about man's life than God. God also created time.

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He already knows our future and controls our lives. Therefore, people must listen to what God says to them. That's the way to success.

We should know through today's scripture that our problems occur when our thoughts and experiences go against God's Word. The reason why the ship that Paul boarded met a big storm was that the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. When we continue to read on in the Bible, we can find other reasons why the centurion ignored Paul's advice and kept sailing. Verse 12 says, "Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbor in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest." I think the harbor that they were at was unsuitable to stay at during the winter. So many people agreed with the plan to sail on hoping to reach Phoenix where they could enjoy themselves. We surely know why they wanted to reach Phoenix. It is for the pleasure of their body. As we read the verses again, they met the storm because they followed the pleasure of their body. It is the same way in our faith life with God. The church seems to be a boring place like the harbor to people who seek after the pleasures of this world. Sometimes unbelievers think, "There is no fun in going to church. Christians are boring people." In their point of view, that is correct. Christians do not drink or smoke. They often don't go to "fun" places on a Friday or Saturday night. Christians are viewed with pity as they sit in their dim sanctuary rather than the bright lights of a club. The reason why many people refuse their faith life is that they don't consider it fun at all. That's why they are seeking the way to Phoenix. It is then that they are overtaken by a storm like the "northeaster". No matter what, there is only one place that delivers us from downfall and suffering. That is the church.

Another reason why the centurion followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship was that the majority decided that they should sail on. The Bible says, "...the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there." The centurion followed the majority's decision. Of course, the opinion of the majority is important. We believe that because we live in a democracy. However, we must realize that the majority is not always right. The majority's opinion could be wrong. When we as a Christian decide something, the decision should not be because we are following 'the herd'. We as Christians have to follow God's Word rather than basing it upon how many people agree with it. The church community is not democratic. The church always has to ask, "What is God's will?" If we do that, we won't fail in our lives.

Second, we should realize through today's scripture that our thoughts and experience are not always right. Verse 13 says, "When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had obtained what they wanted; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete." As soon as they decide to sail on to Phoenix a gentle south wind began to blow. They were very excited about it. Probably they were excited about the thought of spending the winter in Phoenix where there are many places for self-indulgence. However, they didn't know what was going to happen next. Sometimes we get deceived in our lives because of a gentle south wind. Sometimes we cannot see the waterfall that is ahead because of the gentle south wind. Most unbelievers' lives are like this. They don't know about death, and God's judgment after death, because they thought they are fine in this life. However, we can find an interesting word in verse 14. "Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the "northeaster," swept down from the

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island.” The verse begins with ‘before very long’. The phrase ‘before very long’ has a deep meaning. People who disobey God’s will are sure to encounter an unexpected heavy storm. Because of this heavy storm, man’s rational thoughts are totally broken down and his experiences are useless. Is there any value of the majority’s opinion as they faced the northeaster? When you look at verse 18, it says that they began to throw the cargo overboard. They had no choice but to throw their valuable and precious things away. They did this because they needed to make the ship lighter and ride higher in the waters. They began not just to throw the cargo overboard. They then threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. Then they gave up all the hope of being saved. The men went a long time without food. Their lives are not going the way that they wanted it to go. If a wind of hurricane force, or a northeaster, comes into our lives, we will be tossed around by the winds. Our rational thoughts are totally broken down and our experiences are useless as we face this storm in our life. Who can control our life? Nobody can. Therefore, we should be listening to what God says instead of the advice of “experts”. Whose voice are you listening to? Are you listening to other people’s thoughts and their experiences rather than God’s Word?

Lastly, we need to look at Paul’s position carefully during the storm. “Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the northeaster swept down people on the board.” Today’s text compares people who had gone a long time without food and were facing death with Paul who was bright like a star in the middle of a deadly storm. Verses 21-22 says, “After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss.” But now Paul urged them to keep up their courage, because not one of them will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. How do we compare people who are in deep fear and despair with Paul? Paul presented a way for people who are in deep fear and despair to overcome obstacles like these. Paul now became the leader of the ship. A leader is someone like this. A leader is a person who can give hope in deep despair and light the dark way. A leader encourages people with hope who meet storms. If it is so, then how was Paul so confident in this terrible situation? The answer is in verses 23-24. “Last night an angel of God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, ‘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.’” Paul can boldly speak while being tossed around in darkness during the storm because he can hear God’s voice. Paul, who was listening for God’s voice, was not afraid in any circumstance. People who can listen to God’s voice and experience God don’t become shaken. Paul couldn’t die because he had to appear before Caesar. God saved 276 people on board through only one person, Paul. Because of one person, the church exists as well. Our San Antonio area can survive because of our church. Many people around this area can be saved because of you and me.

After a storm comes, the utility of man’s knowledge and experiences wane. We can infer from this that man’s knowledge and experiences cannot save the world. However, Paul who was listening to God’s voice and was convinced by his faith in God could save the people on board the ship. Only one person, Paul, changed that hopeless situation. Only a true Christian can change our home and work place. The important thing is that this is how God works. God will always deliver us from despair and lead His work through His faithful people. Paul shouted in the middle of the storm “I believe.” This confession with confidence completed God’s work. God is happy with this confession of faith. The miracle began with this confession of absolute

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faith by one person. Do you have a similar confession of absolute faith? Can you confess 'I believe in God' in the middle of a storm?

I want to encourage all of you. Whose voice are you listening to before you do something? We need to decide to listen to God's voice instead of listening to man's voice or experience. God's people can overcome the storms of life with His promise and Word. I pray that all of you confess your faith to God even if you are standing in the middle of a storm.