

Faithfully Facing The Storm

D. W. Bailey

Introduction: Background to Acts 27:9-44

This was not the only *storm* that the apostle Paul faced while serving Christ. The New Testament records that Paul frequently faced trials and difficulties while serving the Lord:

- Violent persecutions from the enemies of the cross
- Rebellious attacks from wayward and unbelieving Christians (cf. Gal 4:16)
- Peril and poverty while preaching the gospel
- Declining health and chronic illness
- Anxiety and concern for his brethren in “all the churches” (II Cor 11:28)
- Loss of loved ones to disease and death
- Loss of loved ones to the great deceiver, Satan (e.g. II Tim 4:10)

Paul was certainly accustomed to the storms of life – he surely would have agreed with assessment of Job, “*Man, who is born of woman, is of few days and full of trouble*” (Job 14:1); or that of the wise man, “*For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? For all his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity*” (Eccl 2:22f).

And yet, despite all of these trials and frustrations, Paul was a champion for the truth of the gospel, faithful to Christ until the very end, steadfast and abounding in the work of the Lord! How could it be that this man who faced such seemingly insurmountable struggles was able to remain so unwaveringly faithful throughout all the storms and trials of his life?

I. Remember That Your Life Belongs To God (vs. 23)

Paul remembered constantly that upon becoming a Christian he gave up his life to serve Christ in humble obedience, and he found no excuse in trials and difficulties to become unfaithful. After all, why did Paul endure such terrible hardships just to preach the gospel? He had it made when he was following the Old Law and persecuting the church – why not just slip back into his old ways and get out of these persecutions?

- **Gal 2:17-21**
- **Col 3:1-11** – Paul exhorted other Christians to remember this commitment!

All too often, Christians facing times of sorrow and trial find excuse in their hardships to become unfaithful to the Lord. None of us are immune to this temptation – we might be tempted to:

- Let our attendance to worship services slip
- Find fleeting satisfaction in worldly pleasures forbidden by God
- Excuse the sins of our brethren because of their grief or suffering

When we face temptations like these we must see in the Scriptures that godly people throughout all the ages have remained faithful to God through trial and temptation by remembering that their very lives belonged to the Lord, and that their first priority, come what may, was to serve Him fully.

- *Joseph*, enslaved in Egypt, “How can I...sin against God?” (Gen 39:9)
- *Job*, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.” (Job 13:15)
- *Daniel*, “Purposed in his heart” (Dan 1:8) that he was serve God
- *Paul*, facing the sea and the storm

II. Maintain A Good Influence And Reputation Among Men (vs. 31-32, 43)

Next we must note that even in trial and danger, Paul maintained a good reputation and a pure influence among his fellow men. It’s difficult to prove this point completely from Acts 27, but we find allusions to this fact in this chapter and then can show it more fully by expanding our context to the entirety of Acts:

- **vs. 43** – The centurion admired Paul so much that he gave orders to specifically save his life
- **vs. 31-32** – The soldiers believed Paul to the point that they abandoned the skiff after enduring much difficulty to secure it during the storm (vs. 16)
- **Acts 26:24-32** – The impact Paul had over Agrippa
- Paul received similar responses from Felix, Claudius Lysias (the centurion)
- We are constantly impressed with how temperately, how humble, how harmlessly Paul conducted himself amongst men!
- **Acts 2:46-47** – Not just Paul, but all Christians!
- **Luke 2:52** – Much like Christ Himself!

Why is this so important? It has unfortunately become a popular religious idea that to be a true Christian one must be fanatic, eccentric, extremist, obnoxious, almost as if godliness is proportional to how much we are disliked by the world. Nothing could be further from the truth!

- **I Pet 3:11-12** – *Honorable* conduct, good works!
- **II Tim 2:24** – Not quarrelsome, but gentle, patient, humble!
- **Gal 5:22-23** – “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”

The point is this: I am well aware that living for Christ and contending for the faith will cause some people to make themselves our enemies – Christ made a promise that this is true! People may hate us because of the truth we follow, but Christians have no excuse to cause other people to despise us because of our outspoken opinions, annoying attitudes, and acts of false humility – these things just cause others to believe that we perceive ourselves as holier than them!

When our friends, co-workers, companions, school mates think about us, they should remember us as:

- Thoughtful people
- People who are easy to talk to, most easily approachable
- Temperate and moderate in speech and behavior
- Kind, patient, humble, gentle
- People whose goodness and peace spreads contagiously to those around us

It’s so easy in times of difficulty to become impatient, cynical, and condemning – but Paul maintained a pure influence, a good (even likeable) reputation, and we must do the same!

III. Pray Earnestly And With Thanksgiving (vs. 35)

What an impact it must have had on those 276 souls when Paul took bread, and in the midst of them all, bowed his head to give thanks. There is a similar scene to this in the life of Christ, on an occasion when He fed the 5000 in John 6 – Christ gave thanks to God the Father and then broke bread. This had an impression on John – see **John 6:23**.

- Imagine Christ sitting in the midst of 5,000 people with a handful of food thanking God for feeding them all!
- Imagine Paul in the middle of hundreds of heathens, all living in fear and peril of death, bowing his head to give thanks for a few morsels of bread!

We often make the point that at all times – in times of peace or times of trial – it is so important to remember to talk to God. In the words of Paul, “Pray without ceasing” (I Thess 5:17), and many times it feels like second nature to pray when facing hardships and difficult circumstances. **But notice the type of prayer specifically mentioned by the Holy Spirit in this particular scene in Paul’s life: a prayer of *thanksgiving*.**

- **Col 4:2**
- **Phil 3:4-7**

Do you detect a theme in these verses? Of course we do: prayer earnestly, without ceasing, but never forget to be thankful. Notice that Paul gives these two ingredients as the recipe for battling anxiety: pray and be thankful. Could it be that counting our blessings and remembering to thank God for them makes it difficult to focus on those circumstances that are worrying us?

I am constantly impressed with the psalms of David, that when he was in the most perilous and discouraging of situations he found reason to rejoice and give thanks:

- **Ps 34:1** – Fleeing from Saul to the enemies of Israel (Gath), “I will bless the Lord...”
- **Ps 35:17-18** – Surrounded on all sides by his enemies
- **Ps 30:4-5** – Sorrows and trials won’t last: in the blessed peace of God, bad times CAN’T last, so give thanks to God!

So much of our ability to remain faithful during trials and the difficult times that are common to our existence as human beings depends on our ability to remember the blessings of the Lord and give thanks to Him at all times.

IV. Trust In God Whose Deliverance Is Sure (vs. 25)

- God saved Paul and the crew against impossible odds (cf. vs. 10 and 20)
- Everyone of them came out alive, vs. 44, **JUST AS GOD PROMISED**
- **God will not speak to you by an angel in the night – but God speaks to us, and He makes great promises!**
- **I Cor 10:13; Rom 8:28; II Pet 2:9; II Tim 4:18**
- How do we come to have this kind of faith?? See Romans 10:17!

Conclusion: Like Paul, we are guaranteed to face storms in this life – temptation, loss, discouragement, disease...from these we cannot escape. But we can remain faithful if we will obey God, maintain our influence, prayer without ceasing to be thankful, and place our constant trust in the Lord! Read **Ps 5:11-12**.