

Weathering the Storm – Acts 27



Eventually arrangements were made for Paul to be taken to Rome, along with some other prisoners. Luke, and another Christian friend, Aristarchus, were able to travel as Paul's companions. So in this chapter Luke is giving us a first-hand account of Paul's continuing adventures.

Luke gives us quite a lot of detail about the voyage and the bad weather that they faced from the beginning. They took a ship that followed a route to the north of Cyprus, where they were sheltered from the strong wind, and reached Myra, a port on the coast of what is now Turkey. From there they joined another ship carrying a cargo of wheat from Egypt to Italy. They sailed with difficulty along the coast as far as the port of Cnidus. The captain then had the choice of fighting the winds through the Greek islands or making for the open sea around Crete. He chose the latter and they reached a place called Safe Harbours on the south coast of the island.

Paul was an experienced traveller and a man of prayer who relied on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He recommended that they remain where they were, as winter was coming and weather conditions were deteriorating. The captain and the owner of the ship, however, wanted to sail further along the coast to the harbour of Phoenix, a more sheltered place to spend the winter. The Roman officer in charge of the guard agreed with them.

So they set off again, with a favouring breeze as they sailed along the coast of Crete. Soon, however, the wind changed and turned into a violent storm that drove them out into the open sea. Vessels in the Mediterranean usually kept fairly close to land, so this was a potentially disastrous situation. Acts 27 gives us a vivid account of how the bad weather continued, leading to the eventual loss of the ship, although all on board were saved.

I am writing this as we go into another period of “lockdown”. Paul’s attitude and conduct during the storm have much to say to us in the storms of life that some of us may well be facing at the moment. Two elements in the story particularly stand out for me. The first is Paul’s courage and calm in the face of danger, based on his trust in God’s power to save. This communicated itself to the crew and other passengers, and helped to calm them too. Although Paul was a prisoner, they looked to him for guidance.

The other element of the story that especially impresses me at this time is Paul’s advice to everyone to eat some food (verses 33 and 34). In the terrors of the storm, nobody had felt very much like eating, and many of the less experienced voyagers might in any case have found it hard to keep food down. As they neared land, however, Paul knew they needed to eat something in order to keep up their strength for whatever ordeals lay ahead. Following Jewish custom and the example of his Lord, he took bread and gave thanks. Everyone was encouraged, and ate.

We too, need to take care of our bodies by eating good food, even when we don’t particularly feel like preparing it. And not only our bodies, but also our spirits, need nourishment in times of difficulty. Bible reading, prayer, and worship, whether through the medium of Zoom, live streaming or even a printed order of service, can feed us spiritually. This will strengthen us in whatever storms of life we may have to face.

A prayer:

Heavenly Father, we remember those who today face the waters of the Mediterranean and the English Channel in flimsy vessels, seeking security and a better life. Protect them, we pray, and bring them safely to shore. May they find there compassion, understanding, practical help and renewed hope. O hear us when we cry to Thee for those in peril on the sea. **AMEN**

- *Rev John Barnett*

Image: Jan Porcellis (1580/84 – 1632) - Ships in a Storm on a Rocky Coast (c. 1614-18), Hallwyl Museum, Stockholm, Sweden.