**Storm Tossed**



**Acts 27**

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You probably remember the miracle on the Hudson River. It started out as a normal flight from New York. It was going to Charlotte on January 15, 2009. The plane began to ascend and then all of a sudden a flock of geese came in the path and took out both engines. What do you do in a moment like that? Well luckily, the pilot, Captain Sully, as he became to be known, was able to land the jet in the river. That is something that is not supposed to happen. You are supposed to land on an airstrip. He was able to land on water. Because he was there, one hundred fifty-five people were saved. Not one person died in that plane’s emergency landing. It is interesting to think what if Sully had not been there? What if the pilot had been someone else? Maybe that pilot would have been able to do the same thing, but maybe not. Here is what we do know. Because Sully was there, one hundred-fifty people kept their lives. One hundred fifty-five people were saved.

We will be looking at Acts 27, a chapter of Scripture that tells of one guy on a ship that gets in a lot of trouble. As the ship is storm-tossed, we will find out that because this one guy named Paul is onboard, 276 people keep their lives. In other words, because Paul is there, everyone on the ship got better. It was better for them that Paul was there. Had Paul not been there, presumably, 276 people would have died. We will ask a question to ourselves…In all the arenas of life we will walk into this week, whether it is with family, jobs, friends, social interactions, social media, wherever we go, wherever your influence is known, will it better that you are there? Or, will it actually be worse? Paul’s presence on a boat made it better for everyone else. The question we will ask ourselves this week is when you are in the boat, when you are around people, when you are influencing others –– does your presence make things better, or does it make things worse? Paul is on the boat and it made everyone better. What about you and what about me? We will verses 19–20, and then walk through this entire chapter of Scripture.

**Acts 27:19–20:**

**And on the third day they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.**

We will walk through a telling of this story. It involves a shipwreck. It involves the telling of people who are saved from this storm. Luke gives us a lot of details. Thomas Walker says this, “There is no such detailed record of the working of an ancient ship in the whole of classic literature.” What Luke does here, no one else has done. No one has ever in classical literature given us as many details about a ship’s voyage as Luke does here in the 27th chapter of Acts. He has an entire chapter of what I could have written in two sentences…*They left the port; they had a shipwreck and they landed on an island. Everyone was saved.* That could have been the whole description. *Now, get back to the mission. Let’s get back to the gospel. Now, let’s get back to what we are supposed to do, take the gospel to the ends of the earth*. But Luke takes an entire chapter and fills it with details. Yet, he is not a sailor. Perhaps he is doing it wrong. Perhaps he doesn’t know how to properly log a ship’s trip. Maybe that is true. Or, maybe in the details he is trying to do something else. Maybe in the details of this story he is hinting at a bigger story. He is trying to hint at some things that have happened in the past that impact Paul’s future and our future. As we read this chapter, there are a lot of details that we will think about and what all the details mean for us. We will walk with Paul who will give us a lot of actual life lessons, things we can do as Christians and leaders that can make a difference to those around us. Also, there are some bigger picture lessons on how we are to live our storm-tossed lives. Let’s pick up this very detailed story.

The ship’s voyage starts in Jerusalem. They travel to several places. As we read these places in Luke’s narrative, you can think about where Paul is, where the islands are. Anybody reading this, familiar with Paul’s locations, could vividly see these places he visited. They are merely names to us. A map of the locations can help us navigate in our minds where this boat is going.

**Acts 27:1-3:**

**And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius. And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica. The next day we put in a Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for.**

So, here is just a little detail in the text that I want to draw attention to. It says that Julius treated Paul kindly. That might not seem big to us but think about it for a moment. Julius treated Paul kindly. Who is Julius? He is the centurion in charge of all the prisoners. He is the boss of the prisoners. Yet, he is treating Paul, a prisoner, kindly. What does this tell us about Paul? Paul is a good prisoner. Paul is a prisoner somewhat like Joseph was a prisoner. Joseph was a man of integrity. He did the right things. He was a blessing to the other prisoners. He was a blessing to the guards. That was what Paul was doing. He was a blessing to those around him and he gained favor, even from those who were in charge of him. I can imagine that most centurion guards didn’t befriend prisoners because they had to give them the stick to get them where they needed to go. But Paul is so endearing that this centurion shows him kindness. I think what we will see is that no matter where you are and no matter what circumstances you are in, if you love God and love your neighbor, it will help your influence in every situation. We will see this is absolutely true for Paul. Because Paul built a relationship with Julius and Julius favors him and shows him kindness, it helps the whole rest of the way. Notice that Julius lets Paul go to his friends who care for him. Paul was presumably a good friend because he had friends. His friends wanted to care for him. We see in the character of Paul that he does the right things in the right places. He is befriending the centurion. He has friends that he cares for and they are caring for him. We will see that this plays out really big as we read through the narrative.

**Acts 27:4-8:**

**And putting out to sea from there we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. And when we had sailed across the open sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia. There the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy and put us on board. We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, and as the wind did not allow us to go farther, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone. Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.**

They have been making these journeys. They have been hopping to these islands. They have arrived at Crete and have come to a place called Fair Havens. They have a decision to make. This is not their destination. They are on an island off the ship. They are on a cargo ship and are getting ready. They are wanting to get to Italy because Paul is to stand trial in Rome. All of the other prisoners need to get to Rome. Everyone on the boat needs to get to Rome. They have a destination but here they are on this island. A decision needs to be made. We will pick up with why that decision needs to be made.

**Acts 27:9-10:**

**Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, saying, Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.**

They are on this island, trying to get to Italy, and Paul says we don’t need to go. Now, why is that? The Fast had already taken place. What is the Fast? The Day of Atonement had already occurred. This puts the time of year at the beginning to the middle of October, probably October 4th. November is right around the corner. Every ship person knew that you did not sail that sea in November because of bad weather. You didn’t sail in the winter. What they should do is find a good place to rest during the winter. When spring hits, they could then make the journey. Paul speaks up. Paul gives his opinion. Now, who is Paul at this point? He is not Apostle Paul on this ship. He is prisoner Paul on this ship. What is his place of influence and leadership? He has zero influence and leadership authority. He is not a person in charge. He is in shackles and chains. You can imagine they are trying to decide what to do next when they have this prisoner named Paul giving his opinion…*Hey, guys! Can I speak? I have an idea…* *You are a prisoner. You are not supposed to have ideas. Just keep your mouth shut. We’re sailing this ship. You are on it and you are in captivity. You don’t have opinions.* But Paul thought it wise to speak his mind because he thought he actually knew best.

One thing we will learn from this chapter is the schooling Paul gives us on what leadership looks like, godly leadership. There are several levels of leadership. One level of leadership is called positional leadership. That means you have a position where you are over people and they have to listen to you. If you are the boss of your company, you have positional leadership. People have to do what you say. Maybe you are a manager. People under you have to do what you say. Maybe you are a parent. Your kids have to do what you say. These put you in a position of leadership. I am dad so do this. That is positional leadership. Paul doesn’t have positional leadership at this point. His position is he is a prisoner. Nobody has to listen to him. Nobody has to obey him. The centurion is the one with positional leadership, not Paul. Yet Paul is giving his opinion. What we will see is that Paul, who doesn’t have positional leadership, has relational leadership. Then, he will have resultant leadership. In other words, because Paul had gained favor with the people around him, they will eventually start to listen to him. Because he says right things and true things and makes good decisions, it becomes evident he knows what he is talking about. Because he makes wise choices and he is a man of results, they will begin to take him seriously. This becomes really important as we walk through this text.

Paul, at this point with no position, gives his opinion. We will see what the centurion does with Paul’s opinion.

**Acts 27:11:**

**But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and the owner of the ship than to what Paul said.**

Of course he did! Right? You are the centurion. You are in charge. The buck stops with you. You have a prisoner saying we shouldn’t go any farther. The captain of the ship is saying, I think we should. The owner of the ship is also saying we should move on. Who do you listen to, the owner, the pilot or the prisoner? You are going to listen to the owner and the pilot. Right? They, presumably, should know best. They should know more than this prisoner, Paul. The centurion is going to listen to them.

**Acts 27:12:**

**And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.**

They would not be attempting to go all the way to Italy. What they wanted to do was to get to Phoenix (I presume the restaurants were better there and life would be better in Phoenix). The place they were in was a little harbor, not meant for ships to spend the whole winter there. It was exposed so that the winds would come in. It would not be the best place to be. I’m sure the captain was thinking that this prisoner didn’t know what he is talking about. The captain was like…*we need to get up to Phoenix. That’s where the action is. That is where the party will be. If we are going to spend the winter somewhere, let’s go there.* Everyone agreed. Everyone on the ship agreed to make it a little farther. If you look at a map, you can see that Phoenix is just around the corner. But we will find that they will not get to where they are wanting to go. They are intending to loop around to get to Phoenix. Paul knows they should not do this. He is a leader and he has sailed a lot and has some common sense. Paul says they should stay put. I don’t think things are going to be great. But what do they do? They decided to go with the pilot, the owner, and the majority of the people. Paul has spoken his opinion that they should not go. Everyone else agrees that they should.

**Acts 27:13:**

**Now when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to the shore.**

Things are great. They have a nice breeze. I know that many of us may not have sailed before. Maybe you haven’t been island hopping on a sail boat. Maybe you have. All of us have watched movies where people have been out to sea. You can almost feel the breeze. You can smell the salty air. This is a beautiful scene. Right? The beaches are lined. There is a great breeze. They say to Paul…*I’m glad didn’t listened to you.* Everything is good. They are sailing. Everything is right. They are in a good place. All of a sudden, things begin to change.

**Acts 27:14-20:**

**But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land. And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. Running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the ship’s boat. After hoisting it up, they used supports to undergird the ship. Then, fearing that they would run aground on the Syrtis, they lowered the gear, and thus they were driven along. Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. And on the third day they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.**

Things change quickly. Right? Paul had said they shouldn’t go but they said…*We’ve got this, just a little farther*. As soon as they went out, everything seemed great. But then something changed. A tempestuous wind came. All of a sudden, they are in trouble. The lifeboat, we can imagine, is floating behind them. They weren’t really worried about a lifeboat. With great effort, they secure that lifeboat. They hooked it on the side of the boat because they now know they might not make it through this storm. Then they lowered the gear and braced the boat for impact. They are about to go over this reef at Syrtis, which was a graveyard for boats. They knew if they hit this reef, they would not make it. They tossed lines over the ship, swam under it to the other side, and tied these giant ropes to the other side. They knew the winds and waves would crash against the boat in such a way that it might not stay together. They were experiencing a violent storm. They were violently storm-tossed. You can imagine the scene. Take any movie you have seen of a vessel out in the sea with waves crashing against it. People were panicking. It was dark. There was lightning. Everyone was wet. Everyone was thinking he was going to die. Hour after hour, they were toiling, trying to save the boat and to save their lives. They hadn’t listened to Paul and things changed really quickly. They start throwing things overboard to lighten the load.

If we told that story as Luke has told the story and as readers hear the story, what automatically goes through your mind of another story we have heard from the Scripture? Another story of a tempestuous wind. Where is the other place that has happened before? Oh, the story of Jonah. We think of Jonah chapter 1 where the same thing happened. A violent storm came and everyone started throwing cargo from the ship. They knew they were about to lose their lives. I think Luke, in the details, is trying to draw us back to another story, to remind the readers they have heard a story before that is a lot like Paul’s story. He is wanting us to not just think that Paul is like Jonah. He wants us to recognize that Paul is very unlike Jonah. Remember Jonah? He is in a boat around a bunch of people. But because he is on a boat, everyone is worse off. He is on a boat fleeing God’s presence and facing God’s judgment in the middle of the sea. His presence on the boat made everyone else’s situation worse.

Now, we find another guy, Paul, but we notice how different Paul is from Jonah. Paul is not fleeing from the presence of the Lord. Paul is pursuing the presence of the Lord. He is living out the mission of God. He is doing exactly what he should be doing. He is not disobedient. He is obedient but finds himself in the same storm. What we will see is because he is on the boat, everyone is better. Because he is on the boat, there will be salvation rather than destruction. We can pull in the two characters, Jonah and Paul. When you are on the boat this week, around people this week, will it be for the better or for the worse? When Jonah is on the boat, everyone else is in big trouble. When Paul is on the boat, everyone else is going to see salvation. What about you and your life? When the storm happens to the people around you, will your presence in their lives be for the worse or for the better? Are you in their lives impacting and influencing the judgment they are feeling? Or, are you there to show them there is grace and mercy and a better way?

Paul, being on the boat, made things better. I think Luke is trying to call or attention to that story that is familiar, and then it brings us right into Paul’s story. He is at that same place. Notice the additional details Luke provides as they are violently storm-tossed. They are throwing things overboard. Verse 19 told us that on the third day they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands. So now we are not only brought into the Jonah story, we are brought into a third day event in Paul’s story. There is heavy storm, people are throwing things overboard, and we are introduced to a third day. On the third day, neither sun nor stars appeared for many days. All hope of being saved was at last abandoned. We are not only brought to the storm of Jonah, we are brought to that fish moment where Jonah is in the belly of the fish where it has been three days and three nights, and all hope is lost. He is dying and there is no way out. This is what the people on the boat with Paul feel. It is the third day of a violent storm and all hope is gone –– they can’t make it, they don’t know where the sun is, they don’t know where the stars are. Those were the means of their navigation. They didn’t pull out their phones and hit map. They looked up at the stars to navigate. Well, guess what. They are in a place with no phone service, so maps are not working. The stars aren’t working. They can’t navigate. There is no way out. They are completely hopeless and lost. Luke has included the detail that it is the third day. Why does he bring that detail in? Why does he remind us that it was the third day? I think he is calling us back to the story of Jonah and what happened on the third day.

After the third day, Jonah was in death but he faced resurrection. On the third day, he was spit out on dry ground. He came through death and there was life. Luke brings us into that third day, not just in the story of Jonah, but to point us to another third day he has written about in his gospel. There was a third day where a man who had gone into a tomb got back out. He was in death. He was hopeless. All hope was gone. There was no salvation. It was completely abandoned. But then, on the third day things changed. On that third day, there was resurrection. On the third day, there was hope. Paul points us right into this story to say that Paul knows something that they don’t know. He knows about the third day. He knows that a third day changes things.

I have only sailed once in my life. When I sailed it felt a little like this moment. I was with one of my good friends, Chris Lawrence. We were in college and one of his friends had a sail boat. Because it was a windy day, the friend suggested we go sailing. Chris nor I had ever sailed before in our entire lives. We get on the boat and the friend of Chris says, “I am going to let you guys operate the sail boat.” We are like, “Okay. Sounds good.” He tells us how to do the sail, when to pull it up and when to let it down. He said he was going to give Chris and me the most important job, “Whenever the sail boat gets in trouble and starts to lean, I need you to grab a rope and run to the other side of the boat, stand and pull as hard as you can. Otherwise, the boat will tip over.” We are like, “Alright, we’ve got this.” It was kind of a calm day. Within about five minutes, the guy hits the sail and the boat is about to turn completely over in Kentucky Lake. Chris and I are panicking. We are in sheer terror that we are about to cause the friend’s boat to go over and we are going to die! He throws lines and screams for us to run to the side. Chris and I grab the ropes and pull as hard as we can. The friend implores us to pull harder. Water is blown into our faces. I’m screaming. Chris is screaming. We are on the side of the boat pulling on the rope as hard as we can. They are screaming, “We are not going to make it! Pull harder!” We are pulling as hard as we can. “We are not going to make it, pull harder!” We are pulling as hard as we can. I’m screaming. Chris is screaming. We, literally, think we are about to die. We are in a storm-tossed event and we feel like the people on that ship with Paul. It is hopeless. All is lost. I am pulling as hard as I can. Chris is pulling as hard as he can. We are about to lose it. All of a sudden, the guy cuts the sail, flips it around and the boat turns. He makes the mast hit both of us and we go flying out into the water! We are in the water, panicking. We are looking up and I am bobbing in the water. Did the boat make it? Is everyone alive? Do you know what happened when we got up and could see the situation? Chris’s friend on the boat is dying laughing. And we are like, “We almost died! How can you be laughing? We almost didn’t make it! The boat almost turned over!” He continued to laugh. What Chris and I didn’t know is that a sailboat has this thing underneath it called a keel. The keel goes about six feet under water. The keel is there to prevent the boat from tipping over. What this friend was telling us that we were supposed to do to keep the boat from tipping over was actually an impossible thing. The boat could not have ever tipped over in that moment. He wanted us to feel like we were about to tip over and everybody on board get killed. Let me tell you. I felt that way. We didn’t know there was a keel. We didn’t know there was six feet of protection. The boat couldn’t tip over. In the middle of our little storm, all hope was lost. We didn’t know about the keel.

I think Luke is trying to tell us that in the middle of the story there is something the sailors don’t know. There is something the people on board don’t know that Paul does. He knows there is a third day. On the third day, things change. When you are hopeless, there is always hope. Why? Because there is a third day. That man, Jesus, walked from the tomb on the third day. Jonah was spit out on the third day. In death, there is always resurrection around the corner. We have to be those people who are on the boat with our friends who we are able to call on in the midst of hopelessness and tell them there is a third day.

How does this come to pass in Paul’s life? They are hopeless. They are abandoned. Let’s read on.

**Acts 27:21:**

**Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss.**

Paul is proving his resultant leadership. He was in a position to tell them and he knew what he was talking about.

**Acts 27:22-26:**

**Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on some island.**

Paul has some information they don’t know about. Not only is it the third day, but after the third day there was an angel that came to Paul. Doesn’t that remind us of a garden scene on another third day when an angel came to some women and told them…*things are not how you think they are? You think there is death. There is actually life.* Paul has encountered an angel after the third day and the angel tells him that they would make it to shore and he will stand before Caesar. This is a promise. Not only him but everyone sailing with him would be saved. Paul was able to stand up after that third day and say that God has promised salvation…*my faith is in him. I belong to him. I worship him. My faith is in him. We are going to make it.*

Now, I love this little bit of the sovereignty of God in verse 25. Notice what Paul says. Take heart, men. They are in a violent storm. Things are not good. But what does Paul say? “So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told.” Paul encouraged them to take heart…*I have faith. It will be exactly as God has told me. The sovereignty of God will prevail. He is in control of this boat and our lives.* Then verse 26 says, “But we must run aground on some island.” I love putting those lines together. “It will be”…“but we must.” Do you hear the beautiful harmony of God’s sovereignty and our responsibility? It will be, but we must. Throughout Scripture, we don’t just depend on God’s sovereignty and not do anything…God is in control so I will just lay back. My friend is lost, but God is sovereign and He will figure it out. No! It will be, but we must. God’s sovereignty does not negate our responsibilities. No. We do because we believe God will. We don’t say God will so we are not going to do. No. We do because God will. Paul said…*because this is a promise now let’s do our part. We have to run this boat on an island somewhere. I don’t know how it is to happen, but we must do our part because God has promised that this will happen*. I love that. It will be but we must. In so many areas of our lives, it will be, but we must. We are doing because we are banking on the sovereignty of our God.

**Acts 27:27-29:**

**When the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms. A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms.** [That is 120 feet and then 90 feet. So they are getting closer to land.] **And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come.**

I find that little detail interesting. These sailors, we can guess, are pagans. Paul has told them that God would save them. Now, they are doing work and also praying. I feel like Paul has had an influence on these guys as they are perhaps now believing in the promise and are doing the work required for what this promise to be fulfilled.

**Acts 27:30-32:**

**And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship’s boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.” Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship’s boat and let it go.**

The sailors are trying to listen to Paul, but then they have this plan. The sailors have decided that they don’t think this is going to work. They don’t think they are going to make it, so they let down the ship’s little dingy lifeboat, acting as if they are letting down more anchors. However, they are really planning to cut ties, leave in the lifeboat, and let the ship sink into the sea. They are trying to save their own lives. Paul is aware and understands what is happening. Who does Paul go to? He goes to Julius, the centurion, and tells him the sailor’s plan. Paul tells him that if he allows this to happen, he will lose his life along with all the others on the ship. They have to stay with them if they are going to make it. Paul has no positional authority, no positional leadership. The centurion does not have to listen to Paul. He could say they have a good idea and he is going to jump on the boat with them. That seems like a better plan. But in this moment, Julius believes Paul. Why? Paul has a relationship and results to back up what he has said. He is in a place to actually lead, to actually take charge of what is happening. The centurion tells the sailors to get back on the ship. They cut the line and send the lifeboat away. Now, they are all in with Paul. Paul, the prisoner, has now become the one in power. He is the one they are all looking to for making the decisions. It is almost like the Joseph story. The guy in prison who has no power or authority –– because of his character and wisdom and because he does the right things in the right places –– rises to a place of relational and resultant leadership. This leads to a place where everyone says…*OK Joseph, we are making you a prince, and we will listen to you now.* That is what is happening in Acts 27. They are in a place now where everyone on the ship, the centurion, and the sailors say to Paul, the prisoner…*you are the captain now. We are all listening to you.* Paul is calling the shots. He said they must cut the rope and all do this together.

**Acts 27:33-38:**

**As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing. Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you. And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.) And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.**

Again, there are a lot of details. Why would Luke tell us that on the fourteenth day Paul gets up and tells everyone to take heart and have some food? Why would he take bread and bless it, break it, and all eat together? Seems like a strange detail to record in the story of trying to get to Rome to promote the gospel. Again, in the details, I think Luke is trying to call to our minds a bigger story, a story that is above what is presently happening in Paul’s life. Paul’s little story is, actually, connected to a bigger story. Guess what…so is ours.

Notice in the text it said on the fourteenth day. This could be a coincidence or there could be some significance. What is the fourteenth day? If you are a Jewish kid reading this text, the fourteenth day jumps out, you know what the fourteenth day is –– it is Passover. That is when God delivered your people from slavery in Egypt to freedom. You have grown up knowing that the fourteenth day is the time for Passover and we have a meal where we celebrate God’s deliverance of us. God saved us through the death of a lamb. What does Paul do on the fourteenth day? He says, take heart, get out the food, break the bread, and have a meal together. It is almost like Paul is signifying they are about to witness a Passover moment where God will pass over us from death and bring us into life. Then he said those very familiar words, like the words of Jesus. He takes the food, breaks it and blesses it, and tells them to eat. The Baker Commentary says this sounds very familiar to the feeding of the 5000 and to Jesus with the disciples at the Lord’s Supper, that Passover meal where Jesus said, “take, eat.” I don’t think Paul was doing the Lord’s Supper with these people on the ship. With this meal on the fourteenth day, I think Luke is calling our attention to what is happening outside in the bigger story that Paul is under, that there has been a Passover meal; God has delivered His people before. In an even greater way, He has delivered people through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, which is celebrated with a meal together with His disciples. Here, we have in this moment, Paul celebrating a meal with these guys on the fourteenth day to say salvation is coming. Salvation is here. On the fourteenth day, they eat together. Suspense is growing. They are encouraged. They have hope. They will see the great salvation of the Lord.

**Acts 27:39-40:**

**Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned if possible to run the ship ashore. So the cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that tied the rudders. Then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach.**

That beach is now called St. Paul’s beach. You can travel there. It is a great place, I have heard. I want to go. The reason it is called St. Paul’s beach is because of what is about to happen.

**Acts 27:41-43:**

**But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken by the surf. The soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape. But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land.**

At this moment of salvation, this moment of everything looking great, the soldiers realized they were about to land on a beach and all the prisoners were about to be freed. That is not good for the soldiers. If you were a Roman soldier entrusted with prisoners, you were given strict orders. If a prisoner escaped, the soldier would take his place. If the prisoner was supposed to die in Rome by execution, the soldier would die in Rome by execution. If the prisoner’s sentence was five years in prison, the solider would serve the five years. The person guarding the prisoner took the place of the prisoner if he escaped. The soldiers were thinking that they did not want to become prisoners, so they wanted to kill all the prisoners. All of a sudden, this boat is a bad place for all the prisoners. For the prisoners, this journey with the storm will end in death –– except there is one guy on the boat. That one guy is Paul. Paul, because of the Lord’s grace and mercy, has gained favor with the centurion Julius. Julius, wishing to save Paul, tells the soldiers not to harm any of the prisoners. Every one of the prisoners lives rather than dies because Paul is on the boat. Do you see the constant narrative that Luke is weaving through this? Because Paul is there on the boat, no matter what happens, whether the threat of the violent storm or potential death at the hands of soldiers, things are better for those around him. Because of one man’s faith, one man’s obedience, one man’s pursuit of God, all of the prisoners get to live. We will see that not only do the prisoners get to live but all on the boat get to live.

**Acts 27:43b-44:**

**He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.**

What an incredible story! (We saw pictures of that plane in the Hudson River and people in lifeboats. That was a beautiful story.) Can you imagine what this beach would be like? Can you picture people swimming up to the shore while others are floating on planks? They reach shore and they begin to check off the manifest, who is here and who might be missing, who might have been lost, who might possibly have drowned. Of course, some people are going to die…but the news was brought that nobody was lost! Everybody, every single person from the ship, is alive. Why is that? It was because of one person on the ship. It was because of Paul’s presence on the ship. Everyone on the boat was brought safely home.

This is what I want to ask as we try to bring this into our lives. What is Luke trying to do in this story? Why does he spend an entire chapter on it? That is what I spent the entire first half of the week considering. Why did Luke spend so much time telling us about a ship? What am I going to say Sunday because there are just a lot of ship details? What am I going to preach? All of a sudden, those ship details began to formulate. This is not just about Paul’s story. It is about a bigger story. It is about God’s story. It is about the story of Christ.

I want to read a quote by N. T. Wright. This is what he says about this chapter of Scripture. “Luke is asking us to watch as the story unfolds, to see this narrative as if it were superimposed on the story of the cross, not as just another story of suffering and vindication, but as a sign of the way the unique event of Jesus’ death is implemented in the mission of the church to the world, the world that is yearning for its new creation.” I think he is right. I think that is what Luke is doing. He is taking the story of Paul, giving us all these details, all these little bread crumbs, to say this is Paul’s story of how he saved a bunch of people on a ship, but there are all these details he wants us to know about. There are all these little nuggets suggesting that the Day of Atonement has already occurred. Of course, that is true for us. The Day of Atonement has occurred. The sacrificial Lamb has been slain, Christ on the cross for us. Because the Day of Atonement as already occurred, in the middle of this storm, what can we cling to? In our bottomless hope, there is a third day. Just like a whale spit out Jonah on the third day and Jesus walked out of the empty tomb on the third day, so after the third day there is life. There is a keel on the bottom of the boat. It will not tip over. We can have life through death. Luke uses Paul’s situation to remind us of that bigger story of Christ and the empty tomb. Not only is there an empty tomb but it is about the fourteenth day. You know what that means. It is Passover. Because of that empty tomb, God has passed over our sins. We are free people. We are passed over people. We are the ones who are righteous now and get life from death. In the middle of a storm, in the middle of a ship, Paul is living out his story and it is connected to the story of Christ. And, the story of Christ affects the story of Paul. Paul’s hope was in the story of Christ.

What does this have to do with you and me? We, this week, will walk through many storms. We will be in a boat with people who are in storms. They will be at that place of hopelessness. They will be at a place where they have abandoned all hope, feeling that things cannot get better. Things cannot move forward from here. Feeling they are in death and can’t ever have life. In those storm-tossed moments, when all hope is gone, you will be the one to remember the cross story. Yes, there is a lot of hopelessness in the places we are. But in the middle of hopelessness, in the belly of a fish, there is hope –– there is resurrection because there is a third day. There is a third day and a fourteenth day. These days tell us there is hope in any situation we face. The question is in the places you find yourself this week, when you are on the boat, wherever that is, at work, with family, on a trip, with friends, will you make things better or worse? When Jonah boarded a ship, he made everyone’s life worse. He was fleeing from the presence of God. With Paul on the boat, everyone’s life was better. He was pursuing the presence of God. God was working out the gospel story in and through him in the lives of others. You will be in a boat this week. You will be around people this week. It might just be a boat that is storm-tossed. Because you are there, are things better or are things worse? For things to get better, it is not because you are better. It is because you remember that better story, that story of the third day when Christ walked out of that empty tomb. Let’s tell that story to the people that need to hear it.