

## “ALL WHO SAIL WITH YOU”

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Acts 27

Text: *...and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.*

– Acts 27:24b

### INTRODUCTION

A couple of weeks ago, when I was thinking about what to preach on for this Sunday, I remembered my mother preaching on this text. I don't remember much else about the sermon, but she had a way of capturing a phrase of Scripture and weaving it into your heart in a thrilling way. Ever since, this has remained to me a powerful, imagination-stirring Scripture on intercessory prayer.

One of the things I feel God calling us to as a church is to a new level of prayer. Certainly we all pray. For many of us though, I feel like we're only dabbling around the edges— a little like playing in the kiddie pool when we are created to swim in the oceans of God's greatness. I don't believe we grasp the amazing power in prayer and it's essential nature in accomplishing God's will. We've especially lost the urgency of binding our hearts together in corporate prayer. I've quoted Charles Spurgeon before, the great British preacher of a century ago, but it is worth repeating here.

*The condition of the church may be very accurately gauged by its prayer meetings. So is the prayer meeting a grace-ometer, and from it we may judge of the amount of divine working among a people. If God be near a church, it must pray. And if he be not there, one of the first tokens of his absence will be a slothfulness in prayer.*

As you turn to this Scripture in Acts 27, I want to place it in context. This is the dramatic account of Paul's shipwreck on his way to Rome as a prisoner. Following two years in prison in Israel and lots of bureaucratic maneuvering, Paul appeals his case to Rome. It is getting late in the season for sailing, sometime in the first half of October. Sailing was difficult after September and impossible by November and wouldn't resume until March. During winter in that day, shipping pretty well ceased in the Mediterranean due to sudden storms that could arise. Also, the cloudy weather made charting a course almost foolhardy. At that time, the sun and stars necessary for navigation. While Paul gave a prophetic warning, *"Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also (vs. 10),"* the centurion ignored his advice. Instead, the voices of the ship's pilot and owners who were bent on risking this late season crossing prevailed. They were greedy for the profits that could be gained from slipping one more load of grain through before the winter hiatus. This was an Egyptian grain ship, and they typically were about 140' x 36' (roughly the size of our church building). These were single masted ships with a square sail that could not head into the wind. On this little cargo ship were crammed 276 people. They set sail from Crete when a brief southerly wind gives them false confidence. The narrative is in the first person, since Luke, the author of Acts, is at this time traveling with Paul. Either follow along in your Bibles or just close your eyes and picture this dramatic scene as we

listen to it read in a lightly dramatized version.

### Scripture Reading

This is a gripping scene as for fourteen days they are driven across the Mediterranean by typhoon strength winds— a distance of over 500 miles while the ship tossed like a twig in the sea. They have strapped the hull with hawsers and drawn them tight with winches to keep the ship from breaking apart. They have thrown everything overboard that could be cast away to keep the ship afloat. Everyone is panic-stricken and has given up all hope— except Paul. The ship's captain and the centurion in charge of the prisoners are frozen with fear. Paul stands on the bridge and takes charge:

*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 I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the 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.' So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me."*

(Acts 27:21b-26)

Even Paul can't resist a little, "I told you so!" But I want us to focus upon the central truth here, that Paul, in the midst of this huge crisis is interceding not just for himself, but the lives of all who sail with him. What an example of the power of the risen Christ. Paul knows the people around him need some kind of hope to cling to and he is given a powerful message to share with them.

We all face turmoil in our lives. A storm is a common image we use referring to difficulties. Some of you have some big problems in your lives and may even be thinking you're going down.

Most of us don't have to look far to find some distressing circumstances or something unsettling the peace of our lives. We can be driven by winds of adversity. We experience conflict in some relationship and the tumult of economic uncertainty. Maybe you have a messed-up marriage, or a child whose rebellion is throwing your life into chaos. Others may face storms of moral and spiritual confusion.

Wouldn't you like to stand in the midst of whatever may come with the grace, courage, confidence and poise of Paul and proclaim a Word from the Lord with real power— a liberating,

peace-  
restoring  
word, words  
of guidance  
and  
instruction?

Paul is  
able to do this  
because he is  
a man of

prayer. He gives us inspiring guidance in prayer. Let's consider four things prayer does for Paul here, things prayer can also do for us:

1. Paul knows to Whom he belongs.
2. He is confident in God's purpose for him.
3. He has a heart full of compassion for everyone with him.
4. Prayer gives him authority.

## **WE BELONG TO GOD**

*"Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me!"*  
(23).

"...the God whose I am and whom I serve..." Time in prayer helps us begin to understand who we really are. Paul refuses to let his chains and status as a prisoner define who he is. He gets his definition from the Creator. And that definition transcends everything that life can throw at us. He belongs to God.

In any storm or crisis, we need to be clear about who we are and to whom we belong. And this is often one of the gifts of the storm. It forces us to get this figured out and place God in His rightful place. Unfortunately, it often seems to take these times when we feel vulnerable and life is no longer working on our terms for us to get to this place. While we all belong to God in a technical sense, a personal choice is needed on our part to make this a reality in our lives. It means surrendering our hearts to Him— choosing Him as our God. It is a decision to orient our lives around what He wants and serve His purposes. Do you know for a certainty you belong to God and are serving Him? Has that penetrated your perspective so it is a living reality? If not, then this morning, make that choice.

With that choice comes the awesome reality of God's presence. Paul had a special experience of that in an angel visitation. *"Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me!"* (23). Often in the Bible, in times of crisis we see angels. Ps. 34:7 gives this assurance, *"The Angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him!"* Whether visible or invisible, angels are God's special agents from God sent on our behalf protecting, encouraging, and helping. It is wonderful to have God's love and care manifested in these ways.

Most often it is not a visible angel, but presence of Lord himself that we feel in our lives

in the times of crisis. It is commonly manifested as a deep, settled peace beyond all rational explanation. It is God fulfilling His Word, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."* (Heb. 13:5). Knowing He is with you in the storms of life is the best gift of all.

We all know that everyone and everything can forsake us in our lives. Friends and institutions can desert us. In that loneliness, when storms rage and it looks like its all coming down on us, it is hard not to panic. But, when we feel his presence near, we can stand firm, and courageous in the storm. I hope you've all known the power of Jesus' presence, those times when suddenly you feel the Lord standing by you. Circumstances seem the same, but you just know it's all right.

Peace and calm is restored to your soul. From your experience, perhaps you can speak the word of peace into the storm someone else is in, helping them discover His powerful presence.

### **GOD'S PURPOSE**

*'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar... (24).* This is a powerful reminder that God's purposes and plans cannot be thwarted. If that is the will of the Lord, nothing can stop it– not storms, shipwrecks, or the threat of death. Paul had something bigger to do than survive the storm. He was called to stand before Caesar and share Christ. Are you aware of your life's purpose? I hope our 40 Days of Purpose has helped you take hold of a sense of purpose for which to live. God has a plan for your life, something only you can do. Psychiatrist Victor Frankl quotes Nietchze, saying, "He who has a why can live with almost any how." When you are called to Christ, you are called to accomplish something special. God has a divine purpose for you, that only you can accomplish. It is dangerous to be more aware of your problems than God's purpose.

Paul is awesome in his certainty of God's purpose for his life. There is no need to panic. He knows where he's going and who's in control. His life is focused.

This is not like the world's version sometimes stated as, "When my time is up, I'll go [die]." That is a mere fatalism. The Christian version is a far cry from that. It is working creatively, hand-in-hand with God to accomplish something wonderful. It is not a passive resignation but a creative partnership; not a blind stab in the dark but a bold focus upon a goal.

What the angel reminds Paul of, involves a small step of deductive reasoning. Since God has decreed you must stand before Caesar, therefore you cannot die out here on the ocean. Nothing can stop God's Word from being fulfilled.

That focus and knowledge of God's purpose for us is born in serious prayer. Do you know what you were born to be and do?  
 God wants to reveal his plan and purpose for your life so you can  
 move with assurance toward it.

## COMPASSION

When our lives are threatened, it is easy to become preoccupied with our own safety. Did you know in the sinking of the Titanic, many of the lifeboats were only partially filled? Funeral ships from Nova Scotia came upon the awful scene of 328 people floating, dead in their life jackets. They did not die because the Titanic sank; they survived that. They died because people already saved in the lifeboats wouldn't go back to rescue those who were dying.

Here Paul models just the opposite spirit. He is not self-absorbed in all this, praying for his own deliverance. He is including everyone else with him on the ship. While we aren't told specifically that this is his prayer, the angel's response only makes sense if that is his passionate prayer: *and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.* Paul has been interceding for everyone on the ship— all 276 men. He is concerned about their physical well-being as well as their eternal salvation. Some of these are “the enemy”— soldiers of Caesar.

## AUTHORITY

Out of prayer and knowing who he is in Christ, Paul is given great authority in the midst of the crisis. Who takes charge?

As believers, we are “in the know” as to what is *really* going on in this world. Through prayer, God wants to make us bold leaders in the confusion of our age. God's people can stand tall, and utter words of wisdom, give guidance, and guide people to salvation— though a shipwreck of our world's systems is going to occur. God tells us that in His Word.

It doesn't matter what storm we face. Like Paul, you can stand tall, courageous, in command. You can feel besieged on every side with the enemy against you like a flood and wave after wave battering you. Maybe much of what you had confidence in is breaking apart beneath you. But, you know Whose you are and Who it is you serve. That gives you power and authority and leadership.

## CONCLUSION

Remember, it not just about our salvation. How about all those who sail with you? Our power is directly related to our prayer life. It's been said,

“No prayer, no power.  
Little prayer, little power.  
Some prayer, some power.  
Much prayer, much power.”

There is nothing our enemy wants to fight more than our prayer lives. If he can keep prayer superficial, light, rather unexpectant, there is little we'll accomplish for the

Kingdom of God. Let's not give him that kind of victory.

Coming together in prayer is a way of intensifying prayer. You have two opportunities this week to do this in addition to whatever other groups you may be in.

- Tonight, we have our prayer vesper service I'd like to see as a monthly event. We had one just prior to our 40 Days of Purpose, at the end of January, and it was powerful.
- Then, Thursday, our nation is called to prayer for the National Day of Prayer..

Do you care enough about those who sail with you to come together to release more of God's power? We all have those in our families, at work, friends, and others in our community who need saving. And, how about our nation on this good ship called the U.S.A.? Let's claim in prayer, as did Paul, "all who sail with you."