



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

UNSTOPPABLE: God's Work in the World

Good News, Bad News
Acts 27:1–44

Jon Culver | March 24, 2019



I get asked a lot, “What is it like to have seven children? Do you know how that happens and what’s going on?” I do and I respond by stealing a line from the comedian Jim Gaffigan: “Imagine that you’re drowning and someone hands you a baby.” That’s how I would sum it up. Then I would add that I felt that way with our first, our second, our third, our fourth and our fifth... It doesn’t matter. You still feel like you’re drowning and somebody’s handing you a baby.

Seriously, we love the joys and challenges that come with seven children. We love our family. Yeah, it’s a bit chaotic in the moment, but we are so blessed and grateful. We’re also thankful to be at a church that welcomes us, values families and helps equip and encourage us in this journey. We’re grateful for you and for God’s provision through this family.

Speaking of drowning, that’s where we’re going today. We’re going to talk about a guy who had some experience with some near-death drowning experiences in his life—the Apostle Paul. You know we’ve been studying the book of Acts for the last two years and we are almost done. For some of you, that’s encouraging. For others of you, you’re thinking, “I’ve loved this. I want more. I love narrative-based sermon studies.”

We’re seeing a story played out in the books of Acts. We see what God is doing and we get to know the characters, especially Paul. But we are coming to an end. I’m going to hit Acts 27, just leaving Acts 28 between now and Easter. We’ll culminate on Easter Sunday when Tim will finish up our series.

Last week, you might remember that Tim’s title was “Guess Who?” He was addressing the question of how do we respond to the gospel? Who is Jesus? We saw that Paul obeyed the gospel, which changed his life and the lives of so many around him. We’ve almost been in a holding pattern over the last few weeks. Paul was in a stationary place, but he was having opportunities to share the gospel and we’ve seen God’s sovereignty through that.

Paul had been told by God to go to Rome—yet he was still waiting. Last week we read how he defended the gospel before King Agrippa and Bernice. The story ended by Agrippa saying, “If this guy had not wanted to appeal to Caesar, I would have no reason to keep him in prison. I’d let him go.”

But now we get to the place where Paul is heading to Rome and I’m excited to be able to open Acts 27. It’s a fascinating passage, not just for the story, but how it applies to our lives. It’s a long passage with 44 verses, but we need to read it so we’ll understand the story. I’ve asked one of our high school students, Belle Miller, to read this for us.

¹ 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. ² 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. ³ The next day we put in at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for. ⁴ And putting out to sea from there we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against

us.⁵ And when we had sailed across the open sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia.⁶ There the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy and put us on board.⁷ 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.⁸ Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.

⁹ Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over, Paul advised them,¹⁰ 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."¹¹ But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said.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.

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.¹⁴ But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land.¹⁵ And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along.¹⁶ Running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the ship's boat.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo.¹⁹ And on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands.²⁰ 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.

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.²² Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.²³ For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship,²⁴ 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.'²⁵ So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told.²⁶ But we must run aground on some island."

²⁷ 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.²⁸ So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms. A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms.²⁹ And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come.³⁰ 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,³¹ Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved."³² Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go.

³³ 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.³⁴ 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."³⁵ 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.³⁶ Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves.³⁷ (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.)³⁸ And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.

³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ So they 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.⁴¹ But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf.⁴² The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape.⁴³ 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,⁴⁴ and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

Thank you, Belle. The real reason I had her read that was because in those first 12 verses there are more words I can't pronounce, but she nailed it. Great job! It was nice to hear it as one story.

Now, in the Culver home, we like to play a game called "Good News, Bad News." We're probably not the only home that does that. You say, "I've got some good news and I've got some bad news." For instance, "I've got some good news; there's going to be a snow day tomorrow. I've got some bad news; you're homeschooled, so it doesn't matter." Or "I've got some good news; we're going on vacation. I've got some bad news; it's not to Disney World. It's going to be a 24-hour road trip through the night all together in our van. Sorry." Or may this one: "I've got some good news; your grandparents are coming over for the weekend. I've got some bad news; that means we're going to clean all day long now to get ready for them."

I thought of that as I was reading this passage, because I felt a little bit like I was in that scenario. Here's some good news; here's some bad news. It's almost like the waves of the sea. We're back and forth, back and forth. Finally, we get some good news. Paul

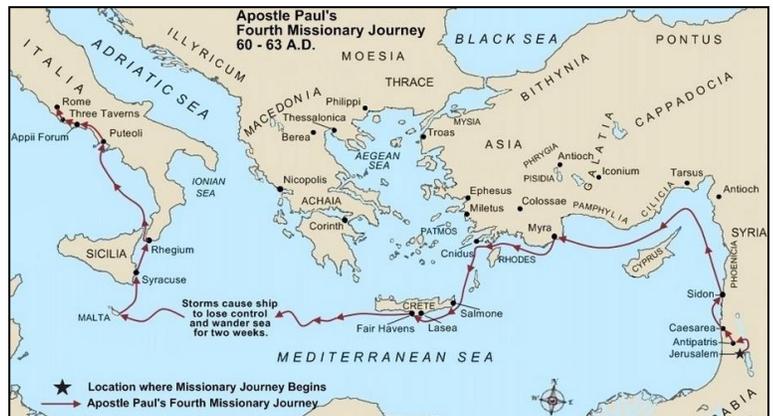
was going to leave after waiting for several years; he would soon be sailing off to Rome. He even got the favor of Julius, the centurion who was in charge, who was kind to Paul and looked after him.

Then there was bad news in the form of a major storm. Then there was worse news as they sailed for days with no sun, no food, and no hope. Then there was good news, when an angel came to Paul to tell him he was still going to get to Rome and that in fact no one would lose their lives.

I love verse 25 where Paul said to the crew, *“So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told.”* They were going to be saved. The bad news? *“But we must run aground on some island.”* Seriously? They had literally been through hell on the sea and now they were going to be saved. But instead of the heavens opening up and everything being calm, the bad news was they would be shipwrecked. Then there was good news again, as they were actually rescued after they ran the ship aground. It’s a crazy story only God could write.

Let’s look at a map of their journey. They took off from Caesarea and at Sidon they boarded the ship. They made it up to Myra where they changed to a grain ship sailing to Italy. They moved on to a couple other places, then when they reached Fair Havens in Crete, Paul warned them not to continue on. He had a sense that winter travel was not a good idea. But they didn’t listen to him. Julius instead listened to the owner of the ship, who thought they could at least make it to Phoenix.

Ironically, I was in Phoenix this past week and now I get why everybody wants to go there during the winter. So it’s biblical as well, for people to spend their winter vacations in Phoenix. It was 85 degrees and I was glad to be there.



These men did not listen to Paul’s warning and as we saw in the story, the weather soon became terrible. We’ll look a little more closely at those details a little later, but you can at least see where they were going.

So why does God have Luke give us 44 verses to tell this story? Is it so we can be better sailors and avoid these mistakes? I don’t think so. I think there may be several reasons. I’m not inside God’s head exactly, but one of the reasons we’ve seen throughout Acts is that God is all about displaying His sovereignty. He’s in charge and we’re not. What He does often doesn’t make sense to us, nor does He do things the way we would. But that’s what makes Him God. Yet God is in this story and is in total control of everything, especially the things that don’t make sense. God is sovereignly able to use whatever conditions there are for the most amount of glory to come to Himself.

The second reason I see for this long story is that Luke is on the ship with Paul. We don’t know if he signed on as the ship’s doctor, or if he and Aristarchus were Paul’s attendants as slaves. Prominent Romans citizens might be allowed to bring one or two slaves with them. Either way, Luke certainly knew the details of what was happening and apparently knew a lot about sailing as well.

I also think part of it is that there are certain times when God gives us more details than we might expect to remind us that these things really happened. This was illustrated to me this past week when I came across a story that talked about a group of scholars from Scotland who were actually sent out to make this same voyage in an attempt to disprove the account we just read from Dr. Luke. They thought, *“This couldn’t have happened the way it was told. There have to be errors.”* So they decided to find out. In the process, one of the men—an archeologist named Sir William Ramsey—actually became a Christian because he saw how this story was one of the most accurate descriptions of seafaring he had ever seen. Again, I love how God describes things in His Scriptures that really happened exactly as He says which increases our confidence that His Word is true and trustworthy.

Let’s look more closely at this “good news, bad news” story. After a long season of waiting, Paul was finally on his way to Rome. This shouldn’t surprise us, because God had told him he would go there. Paul’s confidence in God’s promise was strong, but as usual for him, the process wasn’t an easy one. Has anything in his life been simple? My heart went out to him in this passage, as it seemed the man couldn’t catch a break. Even as Paul was obeying his commission, God kept permitting curve balls to come.

Instead of being frustrating to us, this should remind us again that what we might see as bad news—difficult and discouraging things—is often the very means God uses to eventually encourage us as we see Him working things out in our lives. In this passage I have two main points: the bad news and the good news.

In our home, we typically like to lead with the bad news. If I tell my kids, “I’ve got good news and bad news,” they ask me to tell them the bad news first to get it out of the way, so they can focus on the good news. We’re going to follow that pattern, then I want to leave you with a few takeaways I think we can find in this passage. Again, I don’t want to get lost in the details of what happened to Paul, but I want to know how it relates to us here and now in Village Bible Church in Sugar Grove and the surrounding area. How will this story make a difference in our response to the gospel and God’s call in our lives?

The bad news

Paul, Luke and the others on the ship certainly experienced deep discouragement. I see four sources in this passage for the discouragement that came to them and can come to us.

Discouragement may come from storms we experience.

It’s pretty clear that the storm they encountered was really awful. We may not have the same type of storms. I personally have very limited experience of being at sea. I’ve been on a couple cruises and on some boats, but it’s not my best place. I remember one time when I was in middle school or high school and we were off the coast of California. Our friends had a boat, so we went out for a ride. It was a pretty nice day, but because I was starving, I ate a whole bunch of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Then the waves got a little rockier. I leave it to your imagination what happened next; everything that went down came back up. That was not pleasant for me.

But that’s nothing compared to what we’re seeing here in this passage. Day after day went by and they couldn’t even tell light from darkness. We’ve seen movies that try to depict this for us. I can’t begin to imagine what that was like. Maybe you’ve been in other kinds of storms—cyclones, hurricanes, tornadoes or snowstorms. I’ve driven through or been in some of those. It can feel pretty desperate and hopeless, can’t it? Again, I keep thinking, “My goodness, Paul, you can’t ever catch a break.” My heart goes out to him.

Of course they were discouraged. They were finally heading to the destination God had called them to, to stand before Caesar in Rome, but then bam! What should have taken about four or five weeks took four months, with all kinds of twists and turns where things didn’t go their way.

They felt afraid. How do we know that? In verse 24, when the angel appears to Paul, what’s the first thing he says? “Do not be afraid.” He wanted to reassure Paul that he didn’t need to be afraid, because Paul felt fear. I’d love to get inside Paul’s head to know what he was really experiencing, because he trusted God would keep His promises, but in that moment he still felt afraid, wondering if this would be how his life would end.

If you’re like me, you’ve been through storms before. Your storm might be a job loss or some kind of relational issue—strife with your spouse or children or even going through a divorce. You might have lost a loved one. Nowadays with social media, students are being shamed, and we even hear stories about how they end up taking their lives as a result or responding in other painful ways. Or your storm might be something physical or circumstantial. We all experience storms and in those times we can feel unsettled or fearful or discouraged.

Discouragement may come from suffering we endure.

Closely aligned with our experience of storms is our experience of suffering. We hit a storm and experience some level of pain. We suffer when we lose a job, as we deal with financial pain. When we are in a relational storm, there is deep emotional pain. Shame can bring psychological or even physiological suffering when people make untrue assumptions about us or even attack our identity. There’s also the suffering in our storms as we question God—Who is He and what is He doing? We read His promises, but they don’t seem to be working out and we don’t understand. Another storm might be a physical ailment like cancer, or perhaps a miscarriage, or the loss of a loved one. It could be any number of things. I imagine some of you are thinking about the storm you’re in right now. It’s not a storm that lasts 14 days in the middle of the sea wondering if you’re going to survive, but we’re usually either in a storm, coming out of one or about to head into one—yet God uses all of these. Storms are real, fear is real, and a feeling of hopelessness is real.

Luke records in Acts 27:20, *"All hope of our being saved was at last abandoned."* Have you ever felt that way in a storm, in a season of suffering? You start to wrestle with hope. Hope is a powerful thing when you have it, but it's powerful when you don't have it as well.

I've not experienced hopelessness too many times, but when I have, it's been short-lived. I know some of you have experienced deep seasons of hopelessness when you felt God was gone, when you even despaired of surviving or getting out of the circumstance. Those are dark places and that's where Paul, Luke and the others were on this ship. I tried to imagine what was going through Paul's mind in that moment. "God told me I would be in Rome, yet I see no reason to hope for survival." Sometimes we might think if we trust God, everything will work out and we shouldn't feel hopeless. Yet even men who loved and believed and obeyed Jesus had their moments of fear and doubt. I wonder if Paul thought they would sink and God would raise them from the dead. I don't know.

I remember one moment like that in my life a few years ago. I was in the midst of quitting my job, so we had been trying not to get pregnant. Then Sarah got pregnant. Of course we were excited, but then in the middle of her second trimester we went to the doctor and were told there was no heartbeat. What in the world? We had no way of making sense of this. Why would God give us a child we weren't trying to have and then take it away? I remember we came home to tell our kids and one of them said, "Well, I'm going to pray that Jesus brings the baby back to life." Seriously, I wondered if it was okay to pray like that. I liked the faith, but it just didn't seem possible. I didn't want to hope, but I agreed that we would pray. Then I actually began to get excited. What if God would do that? That would be amazing—an unbelievable evidence of His goodness and grace.

A few days later Sarah went in for another check-up and again, there was no heartbeat. Our hope began to fade, but we still held on. Maybe God wanted a bigger miracle, because she hadn't fully miscarried the baby at that point. But then the miscarriage finally came—and all hope was lost. That was a dark place for us. I was angry and frustrated. I thought, "God, this was an opportunity, but You didn't take it."

Still, that experience pales in comparison with what some of you are experiencing now or have in the past. Storms and suffering are real, and they can be very discouraging.

Discouragement may come from seasons of waiting.

Paul had experienced seasons of waiting. He waited a lot, didn't he? We can read through Acts in an hour or so, like a story book, but we forget that Paul was five years here, eight years there, two years here, six months there. He spent most of his time waiting.

If I'm honest with you, I can deal with the storms and suffering, not perfectly and not always well, but I can get through the big stuff. Do you know what's hardest for me? When I get the most discouraged? It's in seasons of waiting—waiting on God to see what He's going to do and how He's going to do it, or even if He's going to do what I want Him to do.

We see in this story that the people on the ship waited 14 days. Can you imagine that? I have a hard time waiting 14 minutes. But they waited 14 days without knowing what was going to happen. They were afraid, losing hope, in the middle of a dark abyss. They must have been sick and emaciated. How awful it must have been during those days. We can't even begin to describe how awful their circumstances were. They weren't even sure they would survive. They might even have been wishing for death, which would have seemed better than what they were going through.

Waiting is hard. I truly think waiting is the hardest part for me—waiting to see if and how God is going to come through as I perceive He needs to. It's very difficult. We see it in verse 30, after the men chose to do the winter travel, even when Paul warned them not to, and what should have been a five-week trip to Asia Minor it ended up being four months. That was a season of waiting in itself. Then Paul heard from the angel that all 276 of them were going to survive—as long as they stayed with the boat. But in verse 30 we read about a couple guards who had another plan and they started to sneak away on a lifeboat to escape the ship. Paul told them they need to stay with the ship, so they cut the lines and let the boat go. Part of following God means you've got to play by His rules. You need to trust His sovereignty and stay in the boat until the time comes. You've got to wait.

What I see here is a balance between pragmatism and faith. Anybody here struggle with that—being pragmatic versus waiting on God? I do. "Okay, I've waited long enough. Now it's time for some action. Let's be pragmatic here. I don't know how this is going to work, but let's take matters into our own hands." Part of the discouragement in waiting is that I want to solve the problem my way, in my timing, so I have a tendency to jump ship instead of waiting.

Discouragement may come from others not listening.

Finally, along with suffering and storms and seasons of waiting, how about the discouragement that comes when some people don't listen to you? That's discouraging. Early on in this situation, Paul said, "I've got a bad feeling about this. I don't think this trip will go how we expect. I think we should wait until we get past the stormy season of winter travel." But they didn't listen to him, did they?

This reminds us of a couple things. First, the majority is not always right. Sometimes they are, but we have to be careful and not just automatically go with what the majority says. In the story, the majority felt they should leave right away, that it was the best time, but they were wrong.

Second, those in charge are not always right either. This is not intended to encourage us to rebel against authority. But we need to be discerning and have wisdom, making sure we're hearing God's voice, not just man's voice. We need to pray that those in leadership over us are following God's directions.

Maybe for you it's another circumstance where you're seeking to share the gospel in obedience to God, but those around you are just not listening. It can be discouraging when you want to share truth—as Paul did—but not have people listen to you.

Discouragement is real, isn't it? You have it and I have it. Some of you here today may be dealing with deep discouragement in one of these areas. Paul, Luke, Aristarchus and the rest of the people on that ship experienced fear and loss of hope. That's the bad news. We see it. We get it. It's illustrated for us extremely well in this story. As we read in verse 20, all hope was lost.

The good news

But here's the good news—and this is why the gospel is not only good news, it's great news! It's life-changing, life-transforming news. First and foremost, the good news is that God redeems our bad. What seems to be bad is often not bad in His economy and His sight. Rather, He uses these things for real good. I see four sources of encouragement in this story; four areas where we should trust God.

Encouragement comes from trusting God's promises.

God had promised Paul that He was going to take him to Rome. He told Paul he would stand before Caesar and would be given the opportunity to share God's truth with him. Paul was all about spreading the gospel to both the Jews and the Gentiles, to the ends of the world. God used him as His missionary to reach those who had formerly not been reached. So this is all part of His plan and His promise to Paul was, "I'm going to get you there."

In my opinion, He does it in a sweet way. He sends an angel to Paul to say, "I know you're getting scared and losing hope, but you're going to make it. You're going to get there. What God promised will come through." God fulfills His promises, doesn't He? We've seen that throughout Acts 27. God's promises are true, time-tested and trustworthy. We see it all through Scripture. This is why we can trust what He's told us in His Word. Even when, in the moment, it makes no sense or little sense from a human perspective, we can trust that God will see us through.

In that process, we don't need a new promise from God. Often we're searching for a new promise. In the middle of the storm, we can be convinced, "I need a new promise." Or if you're like me, "I need to know how the promise is going to work. I agree that the promise is true, but God, help me out. I'm a planner. It would be helpful if I could know the details—just some Cliff Notes. How is this going to work out?"

God comes to us and says, "You don't need a new promise. You need to hear the same promise again. I've promised you will reach your destination safely through Jesus Christ." But in Paul's case, they were still going to run aground. God didn't suddenly make everything calm and easy. Storms are still storms, but we can trust in the middle of them that God will care for us. Even when we want to know the "how," God instead reminds us that we don't need a new promise, but that He is faithful to do what He said He would do.

Consider the promise He gives us in Philippians 1:6, where Paul wrote, "*And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*" Or Isaiah 41:10, "*Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*" He doesn't tell us how He's going to uphold us with His righteous hand; He just says, "I will. I promise you I will."

Again, Paul wrote in Philippians 4:19, *“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”* And in 1 Corinthians 1:8, *“He will sustain you to the end guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Our God keeps His promises. He may not show up with an angel in the midst of your despair and hopelessness and fear to speak audibly to you, but He has given you His Word chock full of His promises and stories that prove Him to be faithful. We don't need new promises; we need to be reminded of what He's already said He would do.

At the end of the day, all 276 people on the ship were brought safely to land. If we're honest, we would assume that's how it would end. It's funny, isn't it? When we read God's Word, we never wonder how the story will end. It's a foregone conclusion that God will keep His promises, because He always does. But how will He keep them? That gets to the heart of the question, doesn't it? That's what we find ourselves asking over and over again in the storm: How? When Paul needed reassurance that God was going to deliver him, God didn't tell him how. Instead, God simply reminded him of the promise He had already made.

Some of us here—myself included—need to be reminded that God has already promised that He will see you through. He may not tell you how, but He's faithful. You can take this to the bank: He will fulfill His promises to you.

Encouragement comes from trusting God's provision.

Secondly, I see in Acts 27:2—that our encouragement comes from being reminded of God's provision. We've seen God care for Paul in different ways throughout the journey in Acts. Sometimes He provided friends to come around him and people to support him. Here again, even Julius looks kindly upon him and before they set out on this awful, treacherous journey, he allows Paul to be released and cared for by his friends. Even in the middle of his imprisonment, Paul was allowed to bring Luke, Aristarchus and others along with him to care for him.

Isn't God good in that way? That even in the midst of our difficult experiences He provides moments of encouragement through His provision. Sometimes this is provision of physical things; at other times it's the provision of encouraging experiences or words from others or through His Word. But we can trust God and trust His provision.

Encouragement comes from trusting God's purpose.

God's purpose in this process was to spread the gospel. He was using Paul in a very specific way to help His gospel reach the uttermost parts of the world, or at least to reach Rome, which was the epicenter of the Gentile world.

Our encouragement can come in knowing that God will fulfill His purposes. I see some pretty fascinating things in our passage. One is that God used Paul on the ship to share the gospel with these men. Even when Paul was in a holding pattern, he had opportunities to share the gospel with different people, some of them in positions of high authority. He also was able to share with the other slaves in the household. People were coming to know Christ.

God's purposes are being accomplished even in the middle of our times of waiting, or our storms, or our suffering, or when people don't listen to us.

It's likely that some of the prisoners on that ship were headed to the Colosseum to die. They weren't going to be sent to some cushy prison to live out the rest of their lives; they were going to Rome to die. How gracious of God to allow them to intersect with Paul and for him to be able to share the gospel with them and encourage them.

How many people on that ship do you think came to know Christ? I have no idea, but I believe there were a number of them. Maybe Julius or others who had influence. Part of God's purpose may have been using that storm so others might not only hear but experience the truth of the gospel. Praise Him for that. That's how He works in our storms.

Let's think about suffering again. It can be hard to understand why we suffer. I struggle with it in the times when I've suffered. Yet I find that God uses our afflictions in unexpected and surprising ways. As we turn to Him for comfort and love in the middle of trials, it also empowers us to help others. No wonder Paul learned to see purpose in his suffering. It gave him the opportunity to receive God's comfort, which he then was able to share with others and bless them.

We're not being asked to deny our pain or suffering, but we can take heart when we consider God's ability to use it for good. We can be encouraged by what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 1:4: *“God comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”* I'm not saying this is a pleasant process. I'm not jumping for joy in the midst of my suffering and pain. *“Yes! Another opportunity to now bless someone else. Thank You so much for this storm and suffering!”* I'd love to get closer to that, or to see that a little bit sooner. But as we know, it's a difficult place to be. Yet we can hold to truth in

that moment, knowing, “My God will redeem and use this and bring good out of it.” Often that works better in hindsight, where our vision is 20/20.

I mentioned our situation earlier. We’ve actually had four miscarriages and each one has felt hopeless. Yet out of all of them we’ve seen good. We’ve had opportunities to care for others, to share and encourage them. I’ve also mentioned that I had cancer a few years ago and I can now genuinely say that God used cancer in many ways to save my life, because it made me deal with things I never would have dealt with otherwise—and still am dealing with. He’s used it to root out sin issues and character struggles. Also, Sarah and I have had opportunities to encourage and care for people we never would have had because we’ve experienced these things. God loves to remind us of His faithfulness and trustworthiness in His purposes, even in suffering and storms.

Encouragement comes from trusting God’s peace.

Finally, we find encouragement through trusting in God’s peace. You know, peace is a funny thing. If you’re like me, peace is one of those things I tend to equate with everything being calm. When we speak of wanting a peaceful home, that means everybody’s in line, sitting nicely at the dinner table, with no mess in the house—that’s peaceful, right? No; that’s really a misnomer.

Peace is not the absence of storms or the absence of suffering or the absence of conflict. Do you know what peace is? Peace is God’s presence in the midst of those things. We can find encouragement because God gives us more of Himself in the midst of the suffering, the storms and the seasons of waiting. He doesn’t often take them away, but He says, “You get more of Me in those times.” So I’ll add another “p” to the list: His presence. We can be encouraged in the darkest, deepest storms, because He offers us more of Himself.

I like to convince myself I can do things on my own, if I just work harder or try harder. Yet not one of these things—His promises, His provision, His purposes, His peace—are things I can manufacture. I am 100% dependent on the Holy Spirit meeting me in those places and bearing His fruit in and through me.

The gospel is never about what we did or what we can do or what we bring to the table. The gospel is all about what Christ has done on our behalf. Our encouragement comes not from what we’ve done or even what we’ve endured; it comes from what Christ did for us on the cross in giving us more of Himself.

So that’s the good and the bad news. The bad news is that discouragement is going to come. The good is in the midst of that, God is going to show up in big ways. It’s not often how we plan for it, or what we would suggest He do. I do that all the time. “God, this would be a really good scenario, if You’d just listen to me. If we work through the storm and the suffering this way, I think everybody wins—especially me.” But God responds, “Thank you, I appreciate your insights, but how about I just do it My way, because I’m faithful and good and I’ve proven Myself throughout all of history.”

Let’s look at four takeaways as we finish. If we gather what I see in these verses and put a bow on them, here are four things that come to my mind.

Take heart and trust God.

This might sound a little pithy but stay with me: take heart and trust God. Even as I say that, I’m thinking, “Man, if I’m in the middle of a storm and someone says that to me, I don’t know that I’d like that.” Yet two times in this passage, in verses 22 and 25, Paul says to those around him, “Take heart. Be courageous. It will be just as the angel said. This is the God I serve and I trust Him, so take heart and trust God.”

Right now some of you are struggling to take heart and trust God and have courage, because you’re beat down, you’re in despair and you’re losing hope. I can’t fix that for you, but I just want to wrap my arms around you and say, “Take heart. God is good. He is faithful. His promises, provision, purposes and peace are available to you. He is doing something, even if you can’t see it. He’s a God of comfort and grace. Don’t give up. Trust Him. He’s trustworthy.”

John Piper is one of my favorite authors and theologians. He said something that resonates with me: “Occasionally you need to weep deeply over the life you hoped would be. Grieve the losses, then wash your face. Trust God and embrace the life you have.”

Some of us sitting in here today regret the life we have, wishing we were living somebody else’s life. We wish the circumstances were different. I get that. I have had moments of that in my life. Take heart and trust God. You are living exactly the life He designed and desired for you to have. Go ahead and take a moment or two to weep over the things you wished, the regrets you have, the

things that haven't played out—then wash your face, trust God and take heart. He loves you and He's intimately involved in the details of your life.

Wait hopefully.

My initial thought on this point was to say, "Wait patiently," and that's still true. But the idea of waiting patiently to me is more like, "I've got to grind it out." There's a lot in the Christian life that can feel that way. What I want to help myself do better and ask the Lord to help me with is to wait hopefully. In the seasons of waiting, I want to say, "All right God, what do You have next?" It's not always with a smile on my face, but with an expectation that says, "God, right around the corner, what do You have?" In those seasons of waiting, I want to wait expectantly and hopefully, believing again that we serve the God of the universe Who created the world and the One Who gave us His Son. I want us to wait hopefully.

Encourage or be encouraged by others.

Some of you right now are not in a major storm or maybe in a season of waiting or suffering, but you know people who are. I want you to find somebody to encourage and love; someone to come alongside and care for. Encouragement is a powerful tool, isn't it? It's a powerful emotion and a powerful way to support others.

Some of you need to be encouraged, though, because you're in the midst of that suffering and storm, but you've surrounded yourself with all the wrong people. They're not people who are building you up. You're not faithfully part of a community and you're wondering why you're feeling so hopeless. Part of it is you need to get yourself around people who are going to build you up and encourage you with truth, at times get in your face and at other times wrap their arms around you—people who know when to push and when to pull back.

Paul did that with the guys on that ship. He had them gather together and told them to eat some food. He told them, "You know what? We're going to be okay. God is faithful." There's probably somebody in your life this week who needs to hear that—and maybe you need to hear that yourself.

Give thanks.

In that moment of breaking bread, when Paul was with those guys, he said, "I know it's been a long time and everything looks hopeless, but it's going to be okay. Trust God." Then what did Paul do in verse 35? He gave thanks to God.

I was reflecting on that this week, because I'm not naturally prone to give thanks. I'm more critical, always looking for the problems, what's not working, trying to figure out all the reasons why it could be better. Yet, the research out there is fascinating on the power of gratitude—even from the secular perspective. In a lot of ways, the world gets this and we as Christians should understand it even more.

Even when things aren't going well, there is power in saying, "What can I find to give thanks for? Yes, God, there are things I'm struggling with, but I pray that You'll help me give thanks in all things, especially when it's difficult." In that moment, Paul gathered the men together, gave thanks that He had brought them through and that He had promised to keep all 276 alive. At that point, they still had to run aground and still had to get to shore.

Spoiler alert, it still didn't get better for Paul right away in the next chapter. He still has to hold on to God's promises, provision, purpose and peace. Paul's life would still have hardships. It won't be a storybook ending. Yet it will come. Take heart and trust God.