

Do Not Be Afraid . . . God Will Fulfill His Purpose for You! (Part 1)

Introduction

The Text

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. (Acts 27:1–44)

Stuck on a Ship in a Storm at Sea

- A. I chose this text to focus on this week (and likely even next week as well) because I imagine a lot of us have been feeling lately a little bit like Paul and his shipmates must have been feeling here.
 - 1. It feels like we're lost at sea, adrift in the currents, tossed by the waves, driven by the wind. Everything is upside down and turned around. We don't know where we're headed or what we're supposed to be doing.
- B. It's been a crazy couple months, right? It's so wild to think about just how quickly everything has changed. We went from life as normal to life as most of us have never seen it before practically overnight.
 - 1. I've been cleaning up my emails and I saw some of the threads where John, Tolu, and myself were going back and forth just as this was all starting to hit. And we're trying to figure out what to do, what to say, etc. And the rate at which stuff was changing—information, suggestions, requirements, etc.—it was all just blurry-fast and totally disorienting.
 - a. And I think we've all been experiencing this sort of thing lately in one way or another.
- C. So again, my guess is, if you had to try to describe what these past couple of months have been feeling like for you, when you come to a text like this one in [Acts 27](#), you might find yourself saying: "This is it! This is what it's like! It's like being stuck on a ship in a storm at sea! There's a lot of wind, a lot of waves, no ground, no bearings. Just madness."

1. And, if that's true, then what's so helpful about this story here is that we learn how God meets us in these sorts of circumstances and moves with us through them. We learn once more, from yet another angle, why we don't have to be afraid.
- D. So there are three things on the agenda for this morning as we make our way through this. I want to look at: (1) The Chaos (vv. 1-20); (2) The Comfort (vv. 21-32); and (3) The Calm (vv. 33-44).

(1) The Chaos (vv. 1-20)

- A. My only goal under this point is to simply make sure we see the chaos that's going down, that we're clear on just how crazy of a situation Paul finds himself in.
- B. Let me start with some quick background and then we'll look at these verses in a bit more detail.
1. The book of [Acts](#), of course, is about how Jesus, after dying, rising, and ascending to the Father, He pours out His Holy Spirit upon the Church, and then through the church He begins to spread the gospel and advance His kingdom throughout the world.
 2. Paul, unlikely as it first would seem, becomes a key player in this and from [ch. 8](#) on the narrative of the book is almost entirely focused upon him—his conversion and his ongoing missionary endeavors.
 3. And now in [ch. 27](#), we're nearing the end of the book. Paul's been on many missionary journeys up to this point. And his last one just came to a close there in Jerusalem—where he was nearly killed by the Jews, later imprisoned by the Romans, and then, ultimately, as a Roman citizen himself, he appeals to Caesar, desiring that his case be heard there in Rome.
 - a. And his point in all of this isn't to save his neck or get acquitted or something. He knows that if he can get to Rome he will have an opportunity to preach the gospel on the biggest stage of his day.
 4. The Holy Spirit back in [Acts 19:21](#), says: "You've got to go to Rome." Jesus Himself back in [Acts 23:11](#), says: "You've got to go to Rome."
 - a. And now, in our text, the plan is finally starting to come to fruition. He boards this ship with other prisoners, along with soldiers and sailors, to go to Rome . . . and everything just goes crazy!
- C. I suppose at first it starts off somewhat mild. They leave from Caesarea there and are looking to sail up the Mediterranean coast stopping at ports along the way. There's minor setbacks, but nothing that seems too concerning.
1. Luke writes in [v. 4](#) that "the winds were against us."
 2. Then in [v. 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."

3. Then v. 8: “[It was] with difficulty, [that] we came to a place called Fair Havens . . .”
- D. This opening stretch of the trip took more time than anticipated. The winter months were approaching—months when the sea would be too treacherous and unfit for sailing.
1. Paul, having actually been in a few shipwrecks prior to this (cf. 2 Cor 11:25), could see the writing on the wall. In v. 10, he speaks up with a warning: “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.”
 - a. But they didn’t listen. He’s just a prisoner after all. Plus, they wanted a harbor more suitable to spend the winter in. So they push it towards “Phoenix, a harbor of Crete” (v. 12).
- E. And it’s here where everything especially seems to just dissolve into chaos.
1. We read of a “tempestuous wind” (v. 14) that pushed them out away from the land into the open sea.
 2. They “gave way to it and were driven along” (v. 15).
 3. They were “violently storm-tossed” (v. 18).
 4. So much so that, just as Paul had predicted, they found themselves with no choice but to “jettison the cargo” (v. 18) and the “tackle” (v. 19). The assumption here is that the ship may indeed have been taking on water, and you’d have to do whatever you could to keep the weight off, lighten things, help lift the ship up, as it were.
 5. Probably the most bleakest of all statements comes in v. 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.”
- F. Now, pause on that for a moment. Really, I’ve just been recounting all of this to get us to this point. It’s dark, it’s stormy, it seems like it’s all over. There’s no more reason to hope.
1. And I just want to ask: Have you ever felt like this? Are you feeling like this in some ways even now?
 - a. Well, if that’s you, let’s just sit back and watch what happens next . . .

(2) The Comfort (vv. 21-32)

“Do Not Be Afraid . . .”

- A. In v. 21, everything in the narrative starts to shift . . .
1. It begins with a sort of rebuke from Paul: “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’” (v. 21).

- a. To be clear: I don't think this is Paul rubbing in their faces the fact that he was right and they were wrong. This is him making a case for his credibility as he is about to make another much stronger prediction—even, as we shall see, a prophecy . . .
- 2. He goes on in v. 22: “Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.” But how Paul?! How can you be sure of such a thing?! Against all odds?!
- 3. Vv. 23ff: “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.”
 - a. “It’s still not going to be pretty, but we will escape with our lives. I know. Because God has told me so. Take heart. Do not be afraid!”

Belonging and Destiny

- A. Now, when it comes to being unafraid, even in the face of such fearsome circumstances, there are two things that emerge in these verses which I should very much like to draw our attention to and consider for a bit. I’m referring to the ideas of: (1) Belonging; and (2) Destiny.

(1) Belonging

- A. I wonder if you noticed this. For some reason, it leapt out at me. Did you see how Paul speaks of himself here? “For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong . . .” (v. 23).
 - 1. Right there! Paul knows he belongs to God. And, in that, there is such incredible security, stability—even in the most chaotic of times . . . even when he’s stuck in the black out at sea.
 - a. No stars to navigate by. No sun to light the way. But this truth remains fixed as a lamp in his heart and mind: “I am God’s”—“the God to whom I belong . . .”
- B. It’s a beautiful thing, though we may initially balk at such language. We tend to think belonging to another is a sign of weakness. It feels dehumanizing, humiliating, subjugating. It may conjure up ideas of servitude or slavery. And all of this is so contrary to the American way and spirit, right?
 - 1. We still fly high the Gadsden flag, if not on our flagpoles than in our hearts at least. Have you seen this? It’s bright yellow and it has that picture of a coiled rattlesnake ready to strike. And underneath it in all caps are the words: “Don’t Tread on Me.” It was a flag designed during the American Revolution as we were throwing off the yoke of the British.
 - a. And that still captures, I think, how we feel about things today—with everyone and everything, no less with God.

- i. We will not be owned, we will not be possessed, we will not be controlled or directed by another.
 - ii. We will be our own boss, we will be captain of our own souls, we will control our own destiny and fates. We do not belong to another. We are free.
- C. But in our passion for independence and freedom, even from God, the tragic irony is that we end up becoming slaves to all manner of things.
 - 1. We become slaves to our jobs, slaves to our sexual preferences and pleasures, slaves to our Facebook personas, slaves to our comforts and luxuries, slaves to our pocketbook and possessions, and so forth.
 - a. Whatever else we are in all of this, we are certainly not free.
- D. The only way to truly find freedom, it turns out, as Paul has discovered here, is to belong to another, to belong to God.
 - 1. You and I are not able to possess and captain our own souls. Like the pilot of this ship, we press for things unwise and commandeer it into the crags. We run our lives into the rocks. We don't know how to get from A to B. We don't know how to steer this thing. We gain the whole world but we lose our souls in the process.
 - a. But here, with Jesus, we though we lose our life for His sake, in Him we actually end up finding it.
- E. The difference between what we fear this ownership might mean and what it truly means is made clear when we consider the way we've come to belong to God in the first place.
 - 1. You see, any other time in this world, when we are possessed by another it is always with a view to what they can get from us.
 - a. It was this way with the British over the American colonies. It was this way with the slave trade. It's this way with our bosses and leaders so often. They are concerned with what they can get from you. They exploit and subjugate. So it makes sense why we're initially turned off by the idea.
 - 2. But God's ownership doesn't work this way. And this comes out in the fact that we've been purchased by Him, not with money or stuff, but with the blood of His only beloved Son.
 - a. As Paul says in [Acts 20:28](#): "[God] obtained [Gk. = purchased] [the church] with his own blood."
 - i. That is how we come to belong to Him. He gives His life. It is not about Him taking life from us, robbing us, pillaging us, exploiting us, it is about Him giving to us, and He's willing to be exploited, pillaged, robbed, and killed on our behalf.

b. Peter puts it this way in 1 Pet 1:18-19: “¹⁸ [Y]ou were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”

i. The Greek translated “ransomed” here, *Lutroo* means: “to free by paying a ransom” (BDAG)—which means, as we’ve been saying, quite paradoxically: in the very same moment, with the blood of His Son, God is both purchasing you that you might belong to Himself and setting you free that you might no longer be enslaved to sin and the things of this world.

(1) To belong to God and to be set free by God are the same thing!

3. Which is why, for example, Paul can say what he does in Rom 7:4: “Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.”

a. To belong to God means that we have been moved from the place of slavery and sin and death to the place of true freedom and life and fruitfulness! He is not taking, but giving; not wounding, but healing; not destroying but restoring.

F. And when you get that, there’s no reason to be afraid in anything. You belong to God. He’s got you for good.

1. And this really dovetails into the second idea . . .

(2) Destiny

A. This piece comes out in what the angel says there to Paul. Did you catch it? “Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar” (v. 24).

1. I mentioned earlier that Paul had heard from the Holy Spirit and Jesus that he needed to go witness to the gospel in Rome. Well, now here that’s just reiterated by this angel. “God’s purpose for you brother is going to come to pass. He set his hands on you for this work. He’s going to bring it to completion. Don’t be afraid.”

B. When in Christ we come to belong to God we also come to find that we have been given a particular purpose and destiny, as it were, from God.

1. Now certainly, we can talk about our destiny being the new heavens and new earth and a life with Him in glory.

2. But there’s also an aspect to it, it seems to me, that is more specific and particular with regard to this life here and now. God has you here for a reason, for a purpose, and He’s going to see that it is fulfilled.

a. As David cries out in Psa 138:8: “The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.”

- C. I think of how Paul speaks of himself in this light in [Gal 1:15-16](#): “¹⁵ [H]e who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace,¹⁶ was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles . . .”
1. There you see it don't you? Belonging and Destiny. They come together—it's a package deal. God calls Paul to Himself as His own through the gospel, and then He sets him on a particular mission to the Gentiles—which, of course includes, those in Rome.
- D. And we see this idea strung throughout the Scriptures—whether you want to talk about Joseph, or Esther, or Jeremiah, or Jonah, or John the Baptist.
1. But since we might be prone to think God may do this with these key biblical players but not for the likes of ordinary people like us, I figured I should get more personal and take us to [Eph 2:10](#).
 - a. There we see that Paul, after discussing the way God has come to redeem us and take ownership of us in Christ by grace, turns things towards this idea of Destiny. He writes this: “[W]e [you and I included] are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”
- E. Now, what does that mean?
1. It means that, in Christ, you don't just belong to God, you have a destiny with Him—good works He's prepared for you to walk in here and now.
 2. It means that in the midst of this COVID-19 crisis you have a role to play and God is going to see to it that you fulfill that role. And He would say to you as He said to Paul: “Don't be afraid. My purposes for you are not being sidelined by all of this. Even if your job is going under, your finances are thinning, your plans are failing. My plans are not failing. They're right on target!”
- F. The image in my mind, and I hope it doesn't confuse you, is that you and I, brothers and sisters, in Christ, it's as if we're in a ship within a Ship. Bear with me.
1. By the first ship I mean, we will at times feel like Paul here—like we're on a ship being just thrown about in chaos and it seems like we're going nowhere but down.
 2. But by the second Ship, what I mean is that even while we're in these ships tossed by trial and storm, we are at the same time in yet another Ship, a bigger, broader, sturdier Ship. It's Ship with a capital S, you might say. We're in a ship within this Ship.
 - a. I suppose what I'm trying to say is this: Regardless of whatever chaos is going on in our lives, regardless of how aimless and cross-winded we feel, God is still taking us somewhere. He has not abandoned us. He is still in control God is captain. God is commandeering and piloting and steering—doing something, going somewhere, and He's going to bring what He's begun to completion ([Phil 1:6](#)).

- i. We're on a ship within a Ship. The former feels crazy and aimless and wind-blown. The latter is right on track and proceeding according to plan. Do you get that? Do you see that? Do you feel that?
- G. So what God does with Paul here is take him from that lowercase s ship and remind him of the uppercase S Ship, that Paul belongs to him and He has a plan for Paul's life that will, that "must" (v. 24) be fulfilled—indeed, even now it's being fulfilled!
 - 1. And when you get this, while it doesn't mean that you can sit back and do nothing (cf. v. 31—more on that next time), it does mean that you can let down your hair a bit. There can be a notable calm to your heart and life, even in the fiercest storms.
 - a. And that's really what I wanted to bring out at the close here . . .

(3) The Calm (vv. 33-44)

Sabbath in the Storm

- A. Think about it. When the storm hits in your life, isn't that when you usually you get more snappy and irritable, depressed and low, angry and aggressive, and things like this?
 - 1. What is that all about?
 - a. Well, I'll tell you. You're busy worried about the stuff in that first ship. You're doing what these soldiers and sailors are doing. You're trying to steer, you're dropping anchors, you're jettisoning cargo, you're trying to figure it all out, and it's stressful.
 - b. But the key to the peaceful and fruitful life is letting God settle you down into that Ship beneath the ship, and learning to live there, trusting, even in chaos, that God has you and it's still going somewhere.
 - i. When you get there, you can relax a bit, right? Now you have time for another person—their thoughts, their needs, etc. Because it's not all on your shoulders and it's not all falling apart, even if it seems like it may be.
- B. Now, this Calm we're talking about here is brought out in our text in particular with this idea of a meal. Look at vv. 33ff: " 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."
 - 1. Undoubtedly, they hadn't eaten because they were so intensely involved with the tossing and turning of the ship. They felt there was no time for things like food and sleep. Life was on the line.

- a. But then the promise comes in—"not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you"—and suddenly they can stop, they can eat, they can rest.
- C. It's a powerful picture. Do you see it? They're brought from the lowercase s ship, into that uppercase S Ship, and everything shifts in their heart. They know God has them. They can stop. They can sabbath even in the storm.
- D. And I suppose this is where I wanted to leave you. Here's your practical application for the week: Enjoy a good meal. Sit down with your family or those maybe you've been sheltering in place with, or get on a zoom call with a close friend, and eat together, relax together. Let it linger into the night.
- 1. Don't wait until you get all your stuff in line. Don't wait until you have all your ducks in a row. Don't worry about the wind howling outside your window. Don't obsess so much over the waves. Don't worry about what's going to come tomorrow.
 - 2. God has you. He's going to keep you. He's going to fulfill His purpose for you. It's going to be okay.
 - a. "And so it was that all were brought safely to land." (v. 44).