

“Promise and Deliverance”
(Acts 27)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last time we were in Acts, we saw Paul’s voyage to Rome become inevitable:
 - a. Paul had been acquitted by Agrippa and Festus – he wasn’t guilty of anything deserving imprisonment or death.
 - b. But earlier, to save himself from being handed over by Festus to the Jews, he had appealed to Caesar.
 - c. Because he had done this, he was cemented into that course of action.
2. At the same time, we were reminded that this wasn’t a bad thing:
 - a. This was how the Lord was going to get the Gospel to Rome.
 - b. There were still Jews that needed to hear the Gospel – to be given the opportunity to receive their Messiah – before God would pour out His judgment on that nation for their rejection of Christ.
 - c. There were elect Jews and Gentiles that needed to be gathered before Paul’s ministry was over.
 - d. This was all a part of God’s plan:
 - (i) Sometimes it looks like the bad things that happen to us all happen without plan or purpose.
 - (ii) But that’s not the case – the Lord is sovereign over all things and will work them all together for good (Rom. 8:28).

B. Preview.

1. This morning, we see the voyage begin.
 - a. Luke, as a good biographer, again showing his attention to detail, gives us a complete travel itinerary.
 - b. We’re not going to focus so much on the geography as we are the spiritual lessons we can take away from his trip. What we see is:
 - (i) The voyage took place at a time when bad weather was a very real possibility.
 - (ii) The sea did in fact become dangerous, to the point where Paul warned those in authority not to continue the voyage, but to spend the winter in a harbor – though Paul wanted to go to Rome, he wanted himself and all on board to arrive safely.
 - (iii) Disregarding Paul’s admonition, they sailed on, but quickly arrived at what appears to be a worse case scenario – they were stranded at sea, things were going from bad to worse, and they all lost any hope of being saved.
 - (iv) But the Lord intervened – for Paul’s sake – by giving Paul and the sailors a promise – if they all stayed in the boat, they would all be saved.

- (v) Finally, we see that promise fulfilled – though some of the sailors were tempted to disregard Paul’s admonition and tried to get off the boat, he persuaded them to remain, and they were all saved by God’s good Providence.

2. Let’s consider three things from this passage:

- a. First, Paul’s warning.
- b. Second, Christ’s promise.
- c. Finally, Christ’s deliverance.

II. Sermon.

A. First, let’s consider Paul’s warning.

1. His warning comes in the context of the time of year and the possibility of bad weather.
 - a. Paul was given to another centurion and placed on a ship from Adramyttium, a seaport of Mysia. He was accompanied both by Luke – the human author of Acts – and Aristarchus – a disciple from Thessalonica and a former traveling companion (Acts 20:4; vv. 1-2).
 - b. The voyage went smoothly as far as Sidon, where the centurion – Julius – allowed Paul to see his friends and receive care (v. 3).
 - c. But from there, the weather began to deteriorate.
 - (i) They traveled more closely to land because the winds were against them (v. 4).
 - (ii) They progressed, but slowly, sailing under the shelter of Crete, until they arrived at Fair Havens, a harbor in southern Crete (vv. 5-8).
 - (iii) A great deal of time had now passed and the seas were becoming more unstable (v. 9).
 - (a) Luke tells us that the fast was over – the fast connected with the Day of Atonement. This would put them in late September.
 - (b) The ancient navigators considered the Mediterranean to be unsafe from early October to the middle of March (A. T. Robertson , *Word Pictures*).
 - d. It was then Paul warned them, “Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives” (v. 10).
 - (i) Whether he said this by divine revelation, or from his own travel experiences, we don’t know.
 - (ii) But we do know this: they didn’t listen. The centurion believed what the “experts” had to say rather than this novice sailor (v. 11).
 - e. The result was desperation.
 - (i) The harbor was not suitable for wintering, and so they decided to move on (v. 12).

- (ii) It looked like smooth sailing at first, but a violent wind soon pressed down on them and stirred up the sea to the point where they had lost all hope of survival (vv. 13-20).
- (iii) And all because they didn't listen to Paul's warning.

2. Paul had warned these men because he wanted them to be safe.

- a. He didn't want them to perish, but live.
 - (i) When Jesus was nearing the time of His death, resurrection and ascension and was determined to go to Jerusalem, He sent some disciples ahead to make arrangements in a certain village of Samaritans. When they weren't received because of His destination, James and John asked Jesus, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them, saying, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:51-56). Jesus didn't want these Samaritans to be destroyed, but saved.
 - (ii) We see the same here with Paul.
 - (a) Paul wasn't embittered against the Romans for all they had done to him.
 - (b) He wanted them to be safe from this danger and so he counseled them regarding the sea.
 - (c) He also wanted them to be safe from hell, as we've seen, which is why he preached the Gospel to all men freely.
- b. Sometimes we're tempted to become angry and embittered at those in the world, desiring their judgment rather than their repentance.
 - (i) This is an easy trap to fall into, especially in light of the evil rampant in the world today.
 - (ii) But this anger and desire for judgment isn't from God's Spirit, it's from our flesh.
 - (a) The Spirit would have us love all men as we love ourselves and to do what we can to save them from the danger they're in.
 - (b) He wants us to warn them and point them to safety, even as Paul tried to warn these men that they might be spared from death and hell.
 - (c) He wants us to tell them about Christ, so that they won't become shipwrecked, but make it safely to heaven.
- c. For you without Christ here this morning – the Spirit is warning you. Are you listening? You must turn to Christ and trust in Him, if you are to be saved from the utter shipwreck of your lives.

B. Second, we see Christ's promise (vv. 21-26).

- 1. After despairing for days to the point where they couldn't eat anything, Paul stood up and gave them something to hope in:
 - a. First, he reminded them that they should have listened to him (perhaps this is an indicator that he said this by God's wisdom and not his own). If they had

listened, they wouldn't have suffered the loss of their possessions and put their lives in danger (v. 21).

- b. But even so, there was still hope: An angel from God had appeared to him and told him they would all be saved.
 - (i) God had a plan to bring Paul to Rome to stand before Caesar.
 - (ii) And because He did, He also graciously granted that all who were sailing with him would be safe (vv. 22-24).
 - (iii) All that would be lost was the ship (v. 22) – a small price to pay considering the value of a human life – it must run aground on a certain island (v. 26).
 - c. Though in other circumstances, they might not have been inclined to listen to him – since Romans, as Gentiles, consider the Gospel to be foolishness – they listened to him now.
 - (i) Men often turn to a “higher power” when they're in trouble.
 - (ii) This isn't always a bad thing – God uses circumstances like these to wake men up to their danger, providing us with opportunity.
 - d. There was one thing, however, they had to do: they had to believe what Paul said, at least enough to stay in the boat.
 - (i) If everyone listened and obeyed, they would all be saved; but if even one person left, they would all be lost.
 - (ii) Paul believed this promise and preached it to the others.
 - (iii) But they had to believe the promise, act on it and stay on board if they were to be saved (v. 31).
 - (iv) It's possible Paul would have been safe either way, since God intended to bring him to Rome.
 - (v) But if they didn't listen, they wouldn't survive.
2. The Lord gave them a promise they were to hold onto.
- a. We shouldn't confuse this with a promise of eternal life:
 - (i) It was a promise of temporal salvation – from the storm, from the sea.
 - (ii) If they believed, if they acted on that belief and obeyed, they would be safe.
 - b. We mustn't think for one moment, on the other hand, that another offer wasn't extended to them by Paul, while he spent those many days with them – the offer of eternal salvation through Christ.
 - (i) If they acted on that offer, took hold of that promise of eternal life by faith, they would receive what was promised, even as they would the safety He promised from the sea.
 - (ii) The same is true for each one of us: If we believe the promise and lay hold of Christ, we will be saved.
 - (a) Not only this, but if we hold fast to any of God's promises for this life, we will have them as well. God is faithful and will do what He said.

- (b) But we must not doubt, we must stay the course, we must not waver and jump ship or we will not receive anything. James tells us, “But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (1:6-8).
- (c) Sometimes God will bring us to despair before He reveals His promises to us in Christ. If we endure – and God will give us the grace to endure if we ask, if we seek Him – we will see His gracious answer.
- (iii) For each of you who haven’t yet trusted God:
 - (a) If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, trust in His obedience – which He will freely give you if you ask from the heart – and turn from your sins, He will save you.
 - (b) *If you haven’t done so, do so now.*

C. Finally, we see Christ’s miraculous deliverance.

1. Just because there is a promise of deliverance doesn’t mean that there aren’t going to be difficulties to overcome: the greatest is lack of faith.
 - a. Though Paul didn’t doubt, the sailors did:
 - (i) They had to deal with the storm, the shallow water (vv. 27-28), and the rocks that could destroy the ship (v. 29).
 - (ii) Their greatest obstacle was their own doubts over whether Paul’s course of action was the right one: some of them wanted to jump ship, thinking that would guarantee their survival, when it was just the opposite (vv. 30-31).
 - b. But God showed them mercy.
 - (i) He allowed them to do the right thing (at least He did the soldiers): they cut the ropes and let the ship’s boat fall away stranding everyone on board (v. 32).
 - (ii) He encouraged them through Paul to eat food. Paul ate first to show them how certain he was (vv. 33-36).
 - (iii) He encouraged them again by repeating the promise through Paul: “Not a hair from the head of any of you will perish” (v. 34).
 - (iv) Finally, He brought them in sight of land at daybreak (v. 39).
 - c. But there were two more obstacles:
 - (i) When they were trying to reach that land, the ship hit a reef, became stuck and began to be broken up by the waves (vv. 39-41).
 - (ii) Not only this, when they needed to abandon the ship, the soldiers wanted to kill all the prisoners so none would escape (v. 42).
 - d. The Lord graciously overcame these barriers as well.
 - (i) The centurion ordered the soldiers to spare the prisoners, to keep Paul safe.

- (ii) And he ordered everyone to abandon the ship and head for shore (vv. 43-44).
 - (iii) The result was they were all saved.
- 2. And so it is with everyone who will trust the Lord.
 - a. There will always be obstacles – things that appear to get in the way of God fulfilling His promises.
 - b. But if we believe God is faithful and will trust Him, we will receive what He promised:
 - (i) If you trust in Jesus Christ, you will be saved: you will see heaven.
 - (ii) If you take God at His Word with regard to any of His promises, you will see Him fulfill them.
 - (iii) As Paul writes, “For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes” (2 Cor. 1:20). Amen.