

Let's turn now to the Book of Acts, chapter twenty seven. Paul, realizing that he is getting the run around in the Roman courts, exercised his prerogative as a Roman citizen and appealed his case directly to Caesar.

And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to one named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment. That is that he was one of the personal guards of Caesar. And at that point that was Caesar Nero. So he was one of the elite and one of the elite of the elite! Being a centurion meant that he was over a hundred or so men. The centurions were hand picked men. And they were all of them very fine men. Whenever we meet a centurion in the Scripture, he is always cast in a very good and positive light. You remember in the gospel (Matthew 8:5-13) how that there was a centurion there in Capernaum whose servant was sick. And the people came and told Jesus and said he was a good man. He helped them build their synagogue. Jesus said I will come and heal the servant. As Jesus was on the way, other messengers came and said, Lord, our master said it is not necessary for You to come. He understands authority. For he is a man under authority and he has under him men. He can say to one go, and he goes. And to another come, and he comes. Lord, all you have to do is just to say the word and my servant will be healed. Jesus said I have not found so great a faith, not in all of Israel.

It was the centurion standing by the cross that said, surely this was the Son of God. It was a centurion in Caesarea, Cornelius, to whom the gospel first came to the Gentile world as Peter was sent to the house of Cornelius. And there the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the Roman centurion Cornelius.

And now Julius, but he is one of Caesar's personal guards. No doubt a very seasoned and brave soldier. And so there came an instant bond between Julius and Paul because it was one brave soldier meeting another. And they had a mutual respect for each other. Paul had a respect for Julius and Julius, no doubt, developed a tremendous respect for Paul. A soldier of the cross of Jesus Christ.

²*So, entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us.* Aristarchus was one of Paul's traveling companions. No doubt waiting on Paul and helping Paul. Back in the nineteenth chapter of Acts we met Aristarchus when there was that uprising in Ephesus because of Demetrius the silversmith, who got together other men from the same crafts. They said this Paul is ruining our business because they made little silver goddesses, which were representations of their goddess, Diana. And Paul was teaching them that these little silver things weren't gods. And so their business was declining. So they began to raise an uproar. And they grabbed hold of Aristarchus and Gaius, Paul's traveling companions and they brought them into the arena. That is where we were first introduced to Aristarchus. But later on, he accompanied Paul to Rome. But then when Paul is in prison, in Rome, writing his letters, he brings Aristarchus into the end of the letters as he says, Aristarchus sends his greetings and so forth. And so he remained with Paul there in Rome. No doubt attending still to Paul's needs there in Rome. So a companion of Paul. A traveling companion, one who was from Thessalonica, perhaps converted on Paul's first trip to Thessalonica.

³*And the next day we landed at Sidon.* From Caesarea to Sidon is a short distance. Actually from Caesarea to Sidon is only about thirty five miles or so. So they touched the next day in Sidon.

And Julius (that is the Roman centurion) treated Paul kindly and gave him liberty to go to his friends and receive care. There in Sidon a body of believers. Paul was given the liberty by Julius to go and visit with the Christians there to be refreshed and strengthened.

⁴*When we had put to sea from there, we sailed under the shelter of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.* Now their intention was to sail up the coast remaining close to the coast, because it's much smoother water than getting out into the more open sea. So they were not able to fulfill their intentions. They sailed sort of directly across, but that put them on the southern side of Cyprus rather than sailing around the eastern and then on the

northern side of the island where they are more or less protected. The winds would not allow that so they were going more or less directly across, passing under Cyprus as they were on their way to Myra.

⁵*And when we had sailed over the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia.* Now the winds were contrary, he says. We have a hard time imagining the slowness of the journey. From the time that Paul left for Italy, which was August, he did not arrive in Italy until the first part of March. So he was almost six months on this journey. It's hard for us to fathom that because, you know, we get on these modern steamships or whatever and we travel at eighteen or twenty one knots per hour. Well they were lucky to make nine knots a day. And when the wind was contrary, it was even worse. And it was slow going. So a long time at sea. So it was a long time getting over to Myra from the area of Caesarea.

⁶*There the centurion found an Alexandrian (that would be Alexandria, Egypt) ship sailing to Italy, and he put us on board.* Now the us is Paul and Aristarchus and Luke, who is the writer. Notice Luke is using the personal pronoun indicating that Luke is also traveling with Paul.

⁷*When we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under the shelter of Crete off Salmone.* Now you will find this is at the eastern end of the island of Crete. It isn't very far from Myra but because of the wind they were a long time just making it. That very short distance. ⁸*Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea.* This is on the south side of the island of Crete. About mid way along the island, the Fair Havens.

⁹*Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over,* The Fast referred to here is the Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. In this particular year it came in the middle of October. Now they would not consider sailing past the month of November. They just would find good winter quarters and they would stay in port through the winter months. It wasn't until the latter part of March that they would venture out on the Mediterranean again. And so it's already past the middle of October. The time for sailing is over. It's time to find a port. And just prepare yourself for winter. And so the sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already past.

Paul advised them, ¹⁰*saying, "Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives."* It's precarious to sail now. I advise against it. It's interesting that Paul was so respected that he was brought into the decision making processes of Julius.

¹¹*Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul.* ¹²*And because the harbor was not suitable to winter in,* It wasn't the most ideal port for winter, especially because it wasn't near any major city. The closest was Lasea. It was not really that attractive to sailors to stay in this little city.

So the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, (There they wanted to winter, which was still on the island of Crete, but it was a much better, much more protected port. It was protected from both the south and the north. They decided to try and make it as far as Phoenix for the wintering.) a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, and winter there.

¹³*When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete.* (Hugging the shore, hoping to get to Phoenix.) ¹⁴*But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon.* ¹⁵*So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let her drive.* Now the ships of those days were about a hundred and forty feet long. The beam was thirty six feet and the draft was about thirty three feet. This particular ship carried a cargo of grain, taking it from Egypt, which was sort of the bread basket of the world, to Italy. With the cargo of grain there were two hundred seventy six passengers aboard. So it was a fair sized ship. But it had only a single sail and a single mast. The sail was in the center of the ship. It was square, usually made of skins or linen. And so it really wasn't great for going against the wind. You pretty much needed to have the wind behind you. And so it was hard to steer. In fact they did not have a rudder on these ships. They would steer with oars out of either side of the stern. And so the ship was caught and we could not bear up into the wind, so they just let her drive.

¹⁶*And running under the shelter of an island called Claudia (Which is just off from Crete. Not too far. Just a small, small little island.), we secured the skiff with difficulty.* That is they were dragging the little life boat

behind them. But with the storm they wanted to pull it into the ship, lest, you know, there in the storm, it would crash against the ship. But it was a difficult task getting this life boat up on the ship. That is what he is referring to there. We had a difficult task to secure the boat, that is to bring the life boat up on the ship.

¹⁷*When they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship* (It's known as fraffing the ship. Taking these huge ropes, bringing them under the ship and tightening them with the wenchies by which you sort of just bind the ship together. Because of the rough seas the ships would just be broken apart. The planks would be broken apart. So they would use this undergirding. They called it fraffing the ship with these ropes. Just tying the ship together so that it wouldn't be broken apart in the heavy seas.); *and fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis Sands, they struck sail and so were driven.* There were of course, on the African shores these sand bars which were a death to many ships. They were afraid of actually being blown over to Africa to the sand bars. So they just took the sail down and let the ship be driven wherever it would go.

¹⁸*And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next day they lightened the ship.* ¹⁹*On the third day we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands.* ²⁰*Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up.* They all began to fear that they were never going to get out of this alive. There was the general consensus, we've had it. We are all going to die. We are not going to make it out of this alive.

²¹*But after long abstinence from food* (That is abstaining from food. And in a storm like that, believe me, you don't want to eat. You are so seasick that the food just is repulsive. Like the sailor who was up on the bridge as sick as could be and someone came up and said, "Has the captain come up yet?" He said if I swallowed him, he has. I mean you can really get sick), *then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss.* ²²*And now I urge you to take heart* (To be of good cheer. You know sometimes there is the urge to kill. And when you are in this kind of a situation and for a guy to stand up and say, you should have listened to me. But cheer up. Yeah, come on, you know.), *for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.* Paul is now taking charge. They didn't listen to him. They left Fair Havens against his advice. And now they have given up hope. So Paul takes charge.

Paul tells them the reason why. ²³*For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve,* ²⁴*saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.'* ²⁵*Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.* There in the midst of the storm, the Lord ministered to Paul. The Lord encouraged Paul. The Lord assured Paul of his mission. In the next chapter there is an interesting verse, that just said "And so we arrived at Rome." A lot of storms, a lot of difficulties getting there. When Paul was in Ephesus, he said I'm going to pass through Macedonia and Achaia. Then I'm going to Jerusalem. I want to be there for the feast. But I must also see Rome. When he got to Jerusalem and had this attempt of the Jews to kill him, he attempted to share with them the gospel and his conversion. He created a riot. While he was sitting there in prison in the Antonio Fortress, the dark hours of the night, despondent, discouraged, filled with a sense of failure. The Lord stood by him. And said be of good cheer, Paul, even as you have born witness of Me here in Jerusalem, so must you bear witness of Me in Rome. So there is the first assurance that Paul was going to get to Rome. The Lord assures him that you are going to bear witness of Me in Rome.

Two years later when Paul is standing before Festus and he is getting the old run around, he said I appeal to Caesar. Festus answered, you have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you shall go.

Now when all hope is given up of surviving again the Lord assures him. You've got to bear witness before Caesar. So he has the promise, the word, that he is going to get there. And of course in the next chapter it's fulfilled, so we arrived in Rome. I sort of love that. You know, there are times when you have doubts and you wonder if it's going to come to pass. But so we arrived in Rome.

It's wonderful to have that assurance of the Lord, of purpose for life. So that when the storms come and we are prone to despair. When we are filled with anxiety and fear and doubt, we can rest upon the promise of God. So shall you bear witness of Me in Rome also.

It's quite often necessary that we pay close attention to what Jesus says, it would save us a lot of panic. You remember (Mark 4:35-40) when Jesus was going across the Sea of Galilee with the disciples, He fell asleep in the

back part of the boat. When the fierce storm came up, they were trying to bail the water out. The ship was just getting lower and lower in the water as the waves were crashing over and it was coming in faster that they could bail it out. They came back and they woke Jesus up. They said, "Master, Master, don't You care if we perish?" And Jesus stood up and He rebuked His disciples for their lack of faith. Now, that seems like a strange thing to do. The ship is going down. They are concerned for their lives. They are fearful. We're are going to go under. But Jesus rebuked them. He said oh, you of little faith. Why? Well at the beginning Jesus said, let us cross over to the other side. Let us go over to Gennesaret. He didn't say let us go under. Let's go over. And if the Lord says, let us go over. You cannot go under! When you have that sense of purpose, the calling of the Lord, it can sustain you in the darkest night. It can sustain you in the roughest storm.

So here again the Lord repeats to Paul. The intention of the Lord that Paul is to give his defense before Augustus. He is to stand before the emperor. You're going to be brought before Caesar. And God has given to you all of those who are sailing with you. You know it is sort of good to have a man like Paul on board because God is going to preserve him! So you get the benefit of it. Every once in a while on a plane, people go, oh I am glad to see you on the plane. This is the first time I have ever flown. And I'm just scared silly. But I see you are on the plane and I know God isn't through with you.

So they were fortunate that Paul was on board. Paul said how be it. For I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. That confidence in the Word of God! I love that.

In the earlier part of the book of Acts, Peter, standing with the rest of the disciples, said, men and brethren, this Scripture must needs be fulfilled which was spoken by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of David. Peter was declaring first of all, the inspiration of the Scriptures. It was spoken by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of David. But also he was declaring his belief in the inerrancy of the Scripture. This Scripture must needs be fulfilled. If God said it has to happen, I believe God! God gave me His word. God has promised me. And he is standing upon the promises of God. Oh, that we would learn to just stand on the promises of God in the midst of the storm when it looks like there is no way out. When it looks like there is no hope. The place of strength is the Word of God, the promises of God. And you can rely on them and you can stand on them. And it is important that we do just that! That we stand on God's Word and God's promises. I believe God! It shall be even as it was told me.

²⁶*However, we must run aground on a certain island.*" We must be cast on a certain island. And God's hand is in this. The ship isn't just being carried by happenstance. God is directing. Directing this ship to a particular island, to a particular group of people. God is in control. Overall, God reigns. And in the circumstances of our life when it seems like things are out of control, not so! God reigns. God rules. And God's hand is guiding.

²⁷*Now when the fourteenth night had come, as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land.* They could probably hear the waves crashing on the shoreline.

²⁸*And they took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms (About a hundred and twenty feet.); and when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found it to be fifteen fathoms.* ²⁹*Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come.*

³⁰*And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff (That's the one they had brought in earlier.) into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow,* 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 skiff and let it fall off.* Paul is in control. He is directing now. There had developed that confidence in Paul. He probably had more experience than any of them, as far as traveling on the Mediterranean. He was shipwrecked twice. Actually he spent a day and a night out in the water. I mean this guy has had his experiences on that Mediterranean.

³³*And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored them all to take food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing."* ³⁴*Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you."* Paul is also very practical. He is a Spiritual man. He is a Godly man. He is directed by the Lord, but he is also a very practical man! And I believe

that the Lord intends that we be practical. I don't think that we walk around in some ethereal spiritual kind of a state. But there are just practical things to consider. And God expects us to be practical. And here they are. They have been fourteen days without eating. They are going to be out in the water soon. Some of them swimming to shore. Some of them grabbing onto boards and all, floating in. It's going to take some energy. It's going to take some strength. You know you are weakened because you haven't been eating anything. Now eat! It's for your health. And so he encourages them to eat.

³⁵*And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all* (I love this! You know Paul is not embarrassed to pray over his lunch. How about you? You know when you are there at work with all the other guys, do you sort of say, Lord, bless the sandwich. Or do you bow your head to let them know that you really thank God for His provision. In the presence of them all, Paul gave thanks.) ; *and when he had broken it he began to eat.* ³⁶*Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves.* Paul was a positive kind of influence and he cheered them up. He had encouraged them. He had told them that not a hair of their head was going to be lost. They were all going to get into shore safely.

³⁷*And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship.* ³⁸*So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea.* The cargo that they were bringing all the way from Alexandria was scuttled. Again to lighten the ship even more because they knew they were going into shallow water, they wanted to ride as high as they can as they go into the shallow waters to get as close to shore as possible. So they wanted to lighten the ship so it would just really ride high on the waters. So they tossed all of the wheat into the sea.

I told Kay that one of the adventures that I would love to be on. I would love to go over to the island of Malta (Miletus) and just check out where a creek runs into the sea. To just try to find this place where this ship was wrecked. I told her I would love to see if we could find the four anchors that they had let out. Wouldn't that be a neat find? You know, just get some diving gear and all. You are not in too deep water, fifteen fathoms. It would be a lot of fun to just try to discover this and all. With all of the new technology and all that they have for these things. I thought that would just be a neat kind of a thing to do. It would be fun, anyhow. I've been on gold expeditions and have never found anything, but it was fun.

³⁹*When it was day, they did not recognize the land; They didn't know where they were. It was strange. but they observed a bay with a beach, onto which they planned to run the ship if possible.* So they saw this little creek where it came in and they thought they would try to make it in there.

⁴⁰*And they let go the anchors and left them in the sea, meanwhile loosing the rudder ropes; and they hoisted the mainsail to the wind and made for shore.* ⁴¹*But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves.* (There was still a heavy storm.)

⁴²*And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners,* (Now this is understandable because if a soldier had a prisoner entrusted to him, should that prisoner escape, the soldier would be killed. So they feared for their own lives. If the prisoners escaped, it meant their lives. So rather than to take that chance they were saying, let's just kill the prisoners.) *lest any of them should swim away and escape.* ⁴³*But the centurion*(that is Julius), *wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land,* ⁴⁴*and the rest, some on boards* (and as we mentioned this morning this is the first mention of surf boards and riding the surf, you know) *and some on parts of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land.* Now this is the end of the chapter. It's been a very dark chapter. It's been filled with difficulties. Months have passed since they first set out for Italy. They have been in this vicious storm. They haven't seen the sun or stars for over fourteen days. The winds have been howling with huge waves crashing over the ship. They despaired of life itself. They weren't able to govern their own destiny. They had to sort of leave themselves to the mercy of the winds and the heavy seas. Now they have come to a strange island. The ship, which is stuck fast is being broken apart by the fierceness of the waves. They make it safely to shore. Still a driving rain. It is still cold. But God has a purpose in it all. He has a purpose in landing right where they did.

God's hand is guiding this whole affair. God is with Paul in the storm. God is bringing Paul deliberately to the island of Malta because God has a work for Paul to accomplish here.

As we get into the final chapter of Acts, next week, suddenly we will see the whole story. And what a difference it makes when you can see the whole story. When you can understand now, the purposes of God in the trials. The purposes of God now fulfilled in all that has transpired before. Now you can look back and you can follow the hand of God in all of the circumstances because now you see what God had intended. Now you see the plan of God as it will be unfolded in the next chapter and it suddenly gives new life and new understanding to all of these difficult experiences. And as we go through difficult experiences in our lives, when all seems to be in upheaval. When all seems to be dark, we despair in ever getting out of it. God hand is at work. Guiding and directing. And one day as the purposes of God are fulfilled, you will be able to look back and you can see how God's hand was leading in all of those difficult circumstances. Where you thought you were deserted by God. That God had forgotten you. That God didn't care. That maybe God didn't love you anymore.

In looking back on those experiences you'll see how God was guiding and preparing you all the time unbeknownst to you. I'm at that stage of life where I can look back. And oh my, how much better do I understand life from this perspective. Going through many of those experiences in the earlier years of the ministry, you began to question the call of God, the purposes of God. You are uncertain about the future. You wonder why you had to go through so many trials, so many hardships. But then as God begins to work His work through your life, you look back and you realize that everyone of those experiences were necessary. They were part of God's preparation to bring you to that place where you might minister for His glory. Even as He had intended from the beginning and took you through that difficult route. Going against the wind, being driven by the wind, and things that you did not understand and could not understand, but suddenly you see them in a new light. And you sing with real earnestness, "All the way My Savior leads me, what I have to ask beside? Shall I doubt His tender mercy? Who through life has been my guide?" And you see the hand of God and it's exciting. Now many of you are younger, the storms are still ahead. The heavy seas, some of you are in them right now. But know this, you are never alone. The Lord was with Paul in the dark night, in the stormy sea. And the Lord will be with you and is with you in the dark nights and in the stormy seas. He's got a purpose. He's got a plan. Paul you are going to witness of Me in Rome. Paul, you must appear before Caesar. I've got a plan for you, Paul. And in the next chapter, God unfolds the plan for their being even on the island of Miletus, as we get into that exciting ministry that Paul had for three months. For three months he will be there ministering to these people, establishing a strong work for the Lord.

Oh, it's exciting when our lives are yielded to God and we are dedicated to the purposes of God. The steps of a righteous man are ordered by the Lord. And He delights in His way. And if in all of your ways you will just acknowledge Him, He will direct your paths. He is going to bring you through. You are going to come out victorious. The Lord will not desert you. He has a purpose in all of this. One day you will discover it and you will rejoice in what God has wrought.

Thank You Father, for Your hand upon our lives. Guiding, directing, even in the storm. You are in control that nothing happens Lord, by happenstance, but all things are working together. There is a pattern in all of these things, although we can't see it. So to us it looks confusing. Yet Lord, there are purposes unbeknownst to us that You are working out for Your glory in our lives. So Lord we just commit our ways to You. In Jesus' name. Amen.