

Acts 27–28:16 Suffering: A Matter of Perspective

Illustration: -

Dear Mom and Dad,

Just thought I'd drop you a note to clue you in on my plans. I've fallen in love with a guy called Jim. He quit high school after grade eleven to get married. About a year ago he got a divorce.

We've been going steady for two months and plan to get married in the fall. Until then, I've decided to move into his apartment (I think I might be pregnant).

At any rate, I dropped out of school last week, although I'd like to finish college sometime in the future. (On the next page the letter continued)

Mom and Dad, I just want you to know that everything I've written so far in this letter is false. NONE of it is true. But, Mom and Dad, it IS true that I got a C- in French and flunked my math class... and btw I need some more money for my tuition payments.

Failure can sound like success. It just depends on the perspective. Life is a matter of perspective. Likewise, the Christian life is a matter of perspective.

This was just a funny story, and the failures didn't even happen. BUT, sometimes life has a way of throwing a curve ball our way that looks like failure... but later we find out that it was actually part of the plan and led to something great. ***Has God ever turned failure into success for you? Have you ever went through a trial only to find out that God was doing something great?*** (DTS, relationships not working out... then I met Gina)

Acts 27 & 28 is a story of what looked like failure but what really was leading to success. Paul knew that he was going to Rome. He just didn't know how God was going to accomplish it. Imprisoned, hardheaded sailors, shipwreck, vipers, people on the Island of Malta telling him he got what he deserved... and he was like a rock the whole time... and God was glorified because of it.

Luke takes a whole chapter to dramatically describe Paul's near death on the seas. He began as a prisoner with no apparent power and turned into the leader who everyone followed in lieu of death. **Why?**

1. To demonstrate God's protection of Paul
2. To illustrate the increasingly Gentile nature of gospel expansion (uttermost parts of the Earth)
3. To document the sovereign Lord's building of His church.

Text

At the end of ch. 26, Luke implied that everyone present concurred that Paul was completely innocent of the charges from Jerusalem. This had previously been the verdict of the Pharisees (23:9), Claudius Lysias (23:29), and Festus (25:25). Now Agrippa, a Roman ruler with Jewish blood in his veins who was sympathetic to the Jews, voiced the same opinion (v. 32). In Agrippa's opinion Paul did not even need to be in prison, much less die for what he had done. This parallels Jesus' trial before Pilate (John 18), Pilate's wife, and the Centurian at the cross (Lk 23:47).

What kind of attitude would you have if you knew you were innocent and even the authorities knew you were innocent? (speeding ticket in front of the judge)

Have you ever thought you should do one thing but knew God was sending you in another direction? (Safest place is always in the will of God)

- **27:1-8:** From Caesarea to Fair Havens

Paul, under the control of Julius the Centurian, were on a grain ship (180 feet long, 50 feet wide, and 44 feet deep from the deck to the hold) with Luke, and Aristarchus when it was forced by wind to the island of Crete finally came to Fair Havens. It was piled high with “other prisoners” possibly going to Rome for the Coliseum games. If you’ve watched Gladiator, Russell Crowe’s character stood out like a sore thumb. Imagine Paul!!

- **9-20:** A Critical Decision, sudden storm, and loss of hope

Paul, a seasoned traveler (3,000 by sea) recommends that they wait until after winter to sail. The men wanted to go to Phoenix, but the violent winds pushed them south. They then jettisoned the wheat and cargo.

Humanly speaking, who would you listen to? (captain with experience)

Quick change of mind!! – v. 13 thought they were right – v. 20 hope gone – (19:21/23:11) HS and Jesus both confirmed that after Jerusalem, Paul was to go to Rome.

- To die at sea was shameful. They believed that they would not enter the afterlife.

- **21-26:** Paul’s Night Visitation and Words of Encouragement

Paul says “I told you so”... not to gloat but to tell them “you should probably listen.” Angel appears and confirmed to Paul what must happen. Paul then encourages the passengers. They still hadn’t bought what Paul was selling.

- **27-32:** Nearing Land & Sailors Stopped From Abandoning Ship

They were in the central Mediterranean Sea heading northwest. They may have smelled land, which sailors could do. “Took soundings” = “hearing the land” To determine the depth of water, they tied a weight to a string and dropped it. They were at 120 ft then 90 ft (1 fathom = 6 ft). They dropped four anchors so that they were pointing towards land.

The crew was about to leave in a dinghy, but they finally began to listen to him. The crazy guy making predictions has now become the guy in charge.

- **33-44:** Paul’s Encouragement, Ship’s Grounding, Paul spared

Why make them eat? (hungry men are useless) ***Why lighten the load?***

What does this say about the role of our responsibility when God knows the future and even directs the future?

They ran aground (reef = sand bar).

Paul spared. Soldiers pay with their lives if they lose a prisoner... unless they were "lost at sea."

Why did the Centurian spare Paul's life? (He either became a Christian or at least highly respected Paul.) ***What does this say about what he thought of Paul?***

- **28:1-6:** Paul gets bitten, those from Malta (or Melita = refuge) think he is a god

The inhabitants were non-Greeks (v.2 islanders/natives = barbarians).

Of all the places to land, why did God choose Malta? (God continues to use Paul to take the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth).

Vipers don't usually fasten onto their victims, but it may have acted different in the cold. They thought the snake was proof of guilt, but he was healed. So, they mistook him for a god, which has happened before (14:1-8).

Why is it important that Luke notes that they didn't know they were on Malta? (the sailors, with all of their experience, were completely clueless. Everything was out of their control.)

- **7-16:** Publius, Malta's chief official, has Paul to his house, Paul heals his dad - Paul went to Rome under house arrest.

Castor and Pollux, sons of Zeus. They were in the constellation Gemini, and anyone who saw it during a storm was supposed to have good luck. Perhaps Luke mentioned them to contrast God's real protection, as illustrated in the previous chapter and this one, with the protection the pagans superstitiously thought these gods provided.

These last verses bring Luke's account of the spread of the gospel to a climax. It had gone from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and now to the uttermost part of the earth (1:8). Paul was now able to bear witness in the capital of the empire.

The journey from Caesarea to Rome probably covered about 2,250 miles.

Application:

What was Paul's perspective while he was going through this trial? What does that look like in our lives?

What does this passage say about our responsibility in the plan of God? (Just because God is sovereign doesn't mean that He wants us to turn off our brains and abilities. Sovereignty and human responsibility are not mutually exclusive.)