

“THAT OLD TIME RELIGION”

“Surviving the Storms of Life”

Scripture Reading– Acts, 27:9-15, 21-25

Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Fast. So Paul warned them, “Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also”. But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. Since the harbour was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbour in Crete, facing both south-west and north-west.

When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had obtained what they wanted; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the “north-easter”, swept down from the island. The ship was caught by the storm...

After a long time, Paul stood up before them and said: “Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you’. So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island”.

‘And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.’

Romans, 8:28, NIV

This series, based on THE BOOK OF ACTS, is entitled ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’.

The reason I want to call this series ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’ is that we need to look back in order that we might really look to the future. The OLD TIME RELIGION needs to become the NEW TIME RELIGION because it is the ALL TIME RELIGION. If we get back to the basics of life in the Christian Church, we might better understand what the Holy Spirit can do through us today.

THE BOOK OF ACTS is the story of success; the story of a church triumphant.

It is the story of a small group of uncultured and generally unlearned people with meagre resources – very little money, no prestige, and no church buildings. This small group of people went out to tell the story of a publicly executed Jew. They went out against three obstacles – the imperial might of the Romans, the intellectual sophistication of the Greeks, and the religious bigotry of the Jews. They turned the world inside out and upside down for Jesus Christ.

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The New Testament\Acts\That Old Time Religion\25 Surviving the Storms of Life

The Acts of the Apostles is the story of a church on fire with evangelism and growth...

“SURVIVING THE STORMS OF LIFE”

Chippie the parakeet never saw it coming. One second he was peacefully perched in his cage. The next he was sucked in, washed up, and blown over. The problems began when Chippie’s owner decided to clean his cage using a vacuum cleaner. She removed the attachment from the end of the hose and stuck it in the cage. The phone rang, and so she turned to pick it up. She had barely said “hello” when “ssssopp” Chippie got sucked in. The bird owner gasped, put down the phone, turned off the vacuum, and opened the bag. There was Chippie – still alive, but stunned.

Since the bird was covered with dirt and dust, she grabbed him and raced to the bathroom, turned on the shower, and held Chippie under the running water. Then, realising that Chippie was soaked and shivering, she did what any compassionate bird owner would do... she reached for the hair dryer and blasted the pet with hot air. Poor Chippie never knew what hit him. A few days after the trauma, the reporter who had initially written about the event contacted Chippie’s owner to see how the bird was recovering. “Well”, she replied, “Chippie doesn’t sing much anymore – he just sits and stares”.

Ever felt that way? Sucked in, washed up and blown over? Sure you have!

Like Paul and these men, you have been on stormy seas, and if you have not yet, then one day you will! Like these men, your boat has been thrown around by the wind and the waves. You have been plunged deep into the eye of the storm – and if that has not happened yet, just wait – one day it will come! Maybe it will be a family storm – a death, or disease, or divorce. Maybe it will be a financial storm – you will lose your job, or get yourself heavily in debt. Maybe your tempest will come in the form of depression – whose gale force winds can rip down your sails, leaving you dead in the water, feeling overwhelmed and overpowered.

We skip forward in THE BOOK OF ACTS and conclude with Paul’s eventful journey to Rome.

Have you ever wondered why an entire chapter of the Bible is devoted to a shipwreck? Whilst it is history, it is much, much more. Through the Holy Spirit, this story can serve as an illustration, with a spiritual application, which will help us to ride out the storms of life. I do not know what the storms will be for your life, but I know that they will come.

The lesson of **Acts, 27** is not primarily that God delivered 276 men on the Mediterranean Sea, but that he can deliver us today from the storms of life...

Life is like a voyage... We are sailing on the sea of time between two eternities. Sometimes there is smooth sailing. Other times there are storms. The circumstances of life are like the weather. Sometimes the sea is calm, the sun is shining, and the wind blows softly. Do not forget to thank God when you are experiencing smooth sailing! But sometimes the wind rises, the sky darkens, the sea swells and before long, you find yourself in the midst of a terrible storm. The question is: WILL YOU SURVIVE?

 **Sometimes we find ourselves in storms because of DISOBEDIENCE.**

Like Jonah, we disobey God's voice and head off in our own direction. When we will no longer listen to the word of God, then we will experience the wind of God. We will find ourselves in the midst of a terrible storm with a great fish awaiting its dinner below us!

Sometimes we find ourselves in storms because of DEVELOPMENT.

Difficult experiences come our way not because we have done wrong, but because we have done right. God often uses difficulties in order to help us grow. It is during times of trial and testing that we grow. It is impossible for our faith to grow if it is never challenged. Only when we successfully come through trials of faith will our experience develop.

Sometimes we find ourselves in storms because we are DRAGGED.

God had previously promised that Paul would one day preach in Rome, and the apostle was trusting God to get him there safely. But Paul was a prisoner and under the authority of another. Whilst he was free to speak, he was not free to choose whether to go to Rome this way – despite the fact that it was contrary to the will of God. Paul was dragged into the storm by the actions of the centurion, the master of the ship, and the passengers.

1. REASONS FOR THE STORMS OF LIFE

There are five guaranteed ways that you will sink your ship during life's storms...

COMPULSION

'MUCH TIME HAD BEEN LOST, AND SAILING HAD ALREADY BECOME DANGEROUS'

They had stayed for so long in Fair Haven discussing the pros and cons about whether or not the voyage to Rome should continue, that they arrived at the point of wanting to do something for the sake of doing something. They wanted now to just get on with doing something – even if what they were going to do was dangerous.

Many people act out of compulsion.

They drop out of school; they get divorced; they quit their job; they move from one church to another. They are in a place of indecision and act without either the peace of God, or the will of God. It is as though some think they are just wasting their time waiting so they go off to do something else. However, you are never wasting time when you are waiting upon God.

If someone asks me to do something or commit myself to a course of action straightaway, I often feel uneasy. There are times when I want to think things through and pray about it. You see, if you feel as though you are being pushed into action that is not the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit guides us and leads us; he never pushes or shoves us.

CONSULTATION

'PAUL WARNED THEM, "MEN, I CAN SEE THAT OUR VOYAGE IS GOING TO BE DISASTROUS AND BRING GREAT LOSS TO SHIP AND CARGO, AND TO OUR OWN LIVES ALSO"'

The centurion consulted with the ship master rather than the soul master.

The Roman centurion in charge of the prisoners heard Paul's dire warning not to go. But, the master and the owner of the ship wanted to go full steam ahead. The centurion had to make up his mind. You can imagine him thinking: *"Am I going to listen to this preacher and his so-called revelation from God, or am I going to listen to the shipping expert? He knows the ways of the wind and the waves of the sea. After all, you do not get to be a shipmaster overnight. What does this preacher know about sailing anyway?"*

I want to say that we must thank God for the experts.

We must thank God for those who truly know their business. We should not discount the advice of lawyers, or doctors, or teachers. However, we must always weigh their counsel in the light of the Scriptures and the revelation of God. When you consult with other people and get advice that is contrary to his will, you are on the way to sinking your ship. The centurion made his decision contrary to the word of God. It was a terrible mistake.

COMFORT

'SINCE THE HARBOUR WAS UNSUITABLE TO WINTER IN'

Comfort was one of the reasons that caused them to want to sail.

The port they were in was not a good place to spend the winter in. They wanted to do what was best for them and were keen to have things easy. They wanted all the creature comforts. The easy way is almost always the wrong way. The devil encourages us to take the easy way, so avoiding anything that requires discipline or restraint. But, we are called to **'ENDURE HARDSHIP LIKE A GOOD SOLDIER OF CHRIST JESUS'** (see II Timothy, 2:3).

Too many people make their decisions based on their instincts.

An animal eats because it wants to eat. An animal drinks because it wants to drink. An animal sleeps because it wants to sleep. An animal cohabits because it wants to cohabit. An animal reproduces when he wants to reproduce. That is living on animal instincts. The sad thing is that there are many people today who will accept no discipline at all and will do just whatever their instincts dictate.

The reality is that when you make your decisions based on a desire to be comfortable, before long you will be very uncomfortable. The easy way never leads to comfort.

CONSENSUS

'THE MAJORITY DECIDED THAT WE SHOULD SAIL ON'

By now there was obviously a big debate on board the ship.

The centurion put the plan to a vote and the vast majority thought they should set sail. There were 276 people on board the ship when it sank later, so you can guess that only five or six people were against the sailing. The problem was that the majority were wrong.

Do not make your decisions by majority vote.

The majority is almost, not always, but almost always wrong. When on the verge of the Promised Land, the Israelites sent twelve spies into the land to see whether they should go in and possess it. When they reported back, ten said it was too dangerous and only two were in favour of taking possession of the land God had promised to their forefathers.

The advertisement implies that fifty million Frenchman can't be wrong!

The reality is that they all can! When some people make decisions and try to arrive at a consensus, they go around asking people who they know will agree with what they have to say. Others have already made their minds up about their course – but they won't take it until someone agrees with their idea. This does not mean that God agrees with you. Do not settle for the majority and fail to consult the mind, the Word, and the will of God.

CIRCUMSTANCES

'WHEN A GENTLE SOUTH WIND BEGAN TO BLOW, THEY THOUGHT THEY HAD OBTAINED WHAT THEY WANTED; SO THEY WEIGHED ANCHOR AND SAILED ALONG THE SHORE OF CRETE'

Now came the 'coup de grace'. Somebody said, *"Would you look at that? I am certain that we should sail now. There is the south wind blowing softly. What a wonderful time it would be to sail. If we set off now, the sea will be calm and the crossing will be smooth"*.

Circumstances are the most deceiving of things to rely upon.

I am certain that when Jonah went down to the port of Joppa to set sail for Tarshish and found that there was a boat about to sail heading for Southern Spain, he would have thanked God for what he found and took it to mean that God was not serious in his call to preach the Gospel in Nineveh. He may even have claimed to be in the centre of God's will because of circumstance.

When you take off whichever way the wind is blowing – depending on signs or circumstances instead of God's will – you may find that the soothing south wind soon turns into a horrible, howling, hurricane.

Compulsion, consultation, comfort, consensus, and circumstances all lined up, so the centurion decided to set sail. It was not Paul's will to set sail, nor was it God's will or plan, but they sailed anyway – right into the teeth of a terrible storm...

2. REACTIONS TO THE STORMS OF LIFE

Those without Jesus lose all hope as the storm rages around them...

THEY WANDER

'The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along.'

Acts, 27:15, NIV

As dreams dissolve, many people realise to their dismay that they have no control. The man without God is going to get blown off course! All the dreams, plans, ideals, and visions simply go down the drain. Then all he can do is to allow circumstances to drive him along – he allows life to wander out of control.

THEY WORK

'We were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure. When the men had hoisted it aboard, they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Fearing that they would run aground on the sand-bars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along.'

Acts, 27:16-17, NIV

The mariners worked hard. They pulled on the boat. They pushed on the beams. They bailed water. They under girded the ship. They worked, strived and strained to keep things together. Some people think it is hard to be a Christian, but that is a lie peddled by the devil. In reality, people take more pains to go to hell than the Christian does to go to heaven. Sin is a cruel taskmaster. People strive and work hard when they are sailing contrary to the will of God.

THEY WASTE

'We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands.'

Acts, 27:18-19, NIV

First they tossed out all the cargo, and when that was not enough they tossed out the furniture, the tools, and the tackle. Now they were concerned solely for survival, not profit. The cargo that once meant so much to them was worthless when compared to the saving of their very lives.

When we labour hard we can find ourselves sinking deeper and deeper into the water. Sin is terribly costly. It can cost everything we have – there are those who would give everything they own to have their son sober, their wife back, their job restored, or their health returned.

THEY WISH

'Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight.'

Acts, 27:29, NIV

Do you feel sorry for them? They were like scared little children, wishing the sun would come up, wishing that they could see the daylight. But Paul knew how to get alone and pray to God. He was not just hoping for the light to come, he was basking in the light of God's presence and revelation. The sailors cried out for light, but they had rejected the

offer of the light of God's word. Wishing will not make it so. We can wish good luck on someone, but there is no substance at all in a wish. We need something substantial to survive the storms of life.

THEY WITHDRAW

‘In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved”.

Acts, 27:30-31, NIV

We cannot escape the storms of life by withdrawing into a lifeboat. When the stars fall out of the sky and the unsaved are blown off course by the storms of life, unbelievers withdraw into alcohol or drugs. They withdraw by dropping out of society. Young people withdraw by running away from home. The ultimate act of withdrawal is suicide.

As the storm raged, Paul did not withdraw. Neither did he wander out of control or wish away his troubles. He had a smile on his face and said, “KEEP UP YOUR COURAGE, MEN, FOR I HAVE FAITH IN GOD”.

3. RESULTS OF THE STORMS OF LIFE

There are three lessons that we must learn from Paul about surviving the storms of life...

GOD GUARDS IN THE STORM

‘AN ANGEL OF THE GOD WHOSE I AM AND WHOM I SERVE STOOD BESIDEME’

No one realised it, but they were all saved because of Paul.

Paul told the terrified crew that no one's life would be lost despite the fury of the storm. God still had plans for his man. What God said to Paul was in effect: “I know that you did not want to sail, and that you wanted to do my will. You were swept up in circumstances beyond your control, and I am going to take care of you. Furthermore, not only am I going to take care of you, Paul, but I am going to save all the others on board because of you”.

It was only the presence of Paul on board that stopped them drowning.

The world would be rid of Christians – and it is the devil's desire and delight – but after the rapture, the world will be a dreadful and terrible place to live. When the Lord Jesus comes to collect his Bride, the world will be left open to the wrath of God's justice and judgment. The only reason it has not happened yet is because of God's wonderful mercy.

God has given us an illustration here that just as God was with Paul through that storm, he will bring us safely through every storm. We can be as sure and certain of his presence as Paul was when he was comforted by an angel.

GOD GLADDENS IN THE STORM

‘BUT NOW I URGE YOU TO KEEP UP YOUR COURAGE’

The ship was about to sink when Paul encouraged them to cheer up.

Paul was probably the only calm person on board the ship – he may even have had a smile on his face. Others may have wondered if he had gone mad, but Paul had the joy of the Lord down in his heart in the midst of that terrible storm. If I had been there, I would have wanted to know the source of his joy. Of course, it was the same God who gave him the wonderful ability to sing songs of praise at midnight locked up in a dirty prison cell.

When the storms of life are over your head, remember they are still under his feet.

If you really know the Lord, then you know that there is no storm that can take the joy out of your life – unless you allow it. Paul himself exhorts us to **‘REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS. I WILL SAY IT AGAIN: REJOICE!’** (see **Philippians, 4:4**).

GOD GUIDES IN THE STORM

‘DO NOT BE AFRAID, PAUL. YOU MUST STAND TRIAL BEFORE CAESAR’

The angel of the Lord came to Paul on the ship with comforting words that echoed the Lord's words to Paul in the dungeons in Jerusalem: **“YOU MUST ALSO TESTIFY IN ROME”** (see **Acts, 23:11**). The Lord wanted Paul to proclaim the salvation message in Rome, but this journey was not in the will of God. The sailors were out of the will of God, but they did not stop the will of God. Where man rules, God over-rules. A Sovereign Lord will have his will done.

‘Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.’

Romans, 8:29-30, NIV

As a Christian I may disobey God. I may stumble, falter, and even fall. But one thing is certain: because I am saved, God has predestined me to be like Jesus and all hell cannot stop that! I am going to be like Jesus because that is the sovereign will of God. Yes, I have free will and sometimes that free will gets me into trouble. I backslide and disobey, and sometimes I get in a terrible storm. But one day I am going to stand faultless before the throne of God.

*We have an anchor that keeps the soul
Steadfast and sure while the billows roll;
Fastened to the rock which cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love.*

Pricilla Jane Owens, SASB 280:Ch