

Acts 27-28:10 • Allowing God to Control the Path

Introduction

How many times have we seen great men and women of the Bible make plans and decisions that fulfilled the will of God, but the path to the results did not turn out as expected? Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, Nehemiah, the Apostles....the examples are so frequent it's almost a pattern in and of itself. On the one hand we're to make our plans to the best of our ability, but we're to commit the outcome and the path to the Holy Spirit. Paul is going to Rome. What could the Holy Spirit possibly reveal in pursuing such a "simple" plan? It's just a routine boat ride, right?

¹When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, they proceeded to deliver Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan cohort named Julius.

[Read 27:1]

Q: Right away there is something special about this trip. What is unique in the person of Paul's bodyguard, Julius?

A: He's a member of one of many cohorts designated "Augustan", an indication that he belongs to units that, on a rotating basis, serve the Emperor of Rome as his personal bodyguard. During Paul's years in Rome awaiting trial, Julius most certainly will be a powerful witness corroborating Paul's testimony among the court.

Point: *The work of the Gospel on this trip has already begun.*

⁷When we had sailed slowly for a good many days, and with difficulty had arrived off Cnidus, since the wind did not permit us to go farther, we sailed under the shelter of Crete, off Salmone; ⁸and with difficulty sailing past it we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.

[Read 27:7-12]

Q: Does Paul's advice come from a special revelation to him, warning of the storm ahead?

A: No. It comes from his own common sense. (As we know, Paul was very experienced in sea travel.)

⁹When considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast was already over, Paul began to admonish them, ¹⁰and said to 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." ¹¹But the centurion was more persuaded by the pilot and the captain of the ship than by what was being said by Paul. ¹²Because the harbor was not suitable for wintering, the majority reached a decision to put out to sea from there, if somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

Q: Was this a unanimous decision to leave and go to what seemed to be a better port?

A: No, in v.12 it says "the majority reached a decision". More people than just Paul alone had reservations. What transpires is a difference of opinion, not an absolute difference of faith.

¹³When a moderate south wind came up, supposing that they had attained their purpose, they weighed anchor and began sailing along Crete, close inshore. ¹⁴But before very long there rushed down from the land a violent wind, called Euraquilo; ¹⁵and when the ship was caught in it and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and let ourselves be driven along.

[Read 27:13-15]

Q: This is more than a rainstorm, something approaching gale-type forces. What is the symbolism of them allowing themselves to be driven along by this overwhelming storm?

A: Sometimes we have no control over circumstances and must "go with the flow". We need to recognize when our plans are no longer relevant and acquiesce to the Spirit's greater plan.

¹⁶Running under the shelter of a small island called Clauda, we were scarcely able to get the ship's boat under control. ¹⁷After they had hoisted it up, they used supporting cables in undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might run aground on the shallows of Syrtis, they let down the sea anchor and in this way let themselves be driven along. ¹⁸The next day as we were being violently storm-tossed, they began to jettison the cargo; ¹⁹and on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. ²⁰Since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing us, from then on all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned.

[Read 27:16-20]

There are nautical procedures they're following in order to cope with the severity of the circumstances:

- The ship's "boat" referred to in v.16 would be something like a lifeboat or dinghy used by the larger ship. Normally towed alongside or behind the ship, it was probably filling up with water and placing a dangerous drag on the mother ship.
- Wrapping cables around the ship to reinforce the boat is very unusual by today's standards but the number one problem with ocean transportation at that time was leaks, even under "normal" sea faring conditions. This would be an attempt to tighten the boards and get the leaking under control. (A lot of manual pumping was probably taking place as well.)
- Dragging the anchor would provide an opportunity to grab something on the sea floor to prevent the ship from being carried straight to the shore if they neared land as supposed in v.17.
- First, personal cargo was jettisoned, and then as much of the ship itself (tackle) as possible, a probable indication that they were still taking on water in spite of the cabling and pumping.

Q: Of all the measures they took, however, what was the worst situation that they faced as explained in v.20?

A: Hope was gradually being abandoned.

Point: *Having submitted to the overwhelming whims of the storm, they still tried to carry out every reasonable and prudent action attending to the situation. Resignation to a new, unforeseen result of their original plans was taking root. They were still in the process of submitting to something bigger than themselves.*

²¹When they had gone a long time without food, then Paul stood up in their midst and said, "Men, you ought to have followed my advice and not to have set sail from Crete and incurred this damage and loss. ²²Yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. ²³For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, ²⁴saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.' ²⁵Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told. ²⁶But we must run aground on a certain island."

[Read 27:21-26]

Q: Is Paul saying "I told you so" in v.21?

A: It's more likely that on a ship filled with both believers and non-believers that he is eliciting from one audience a call to trust in his proven good judgment and from the other audience their trust in God's Word through him. In this situation, Paul is a leader in every sense and meaning to everyone on board regardless of their spiritual condition.

Q: What is the good news/bad news conveyed by Paul in v.22?

A: There will be no loss of life but the ship will be lost in the process. (Do you see a similarity to the process of salvation in this?)

Q: To receive such a visit from one of God's messengers, what must Paul have been doing during these frantic days?

A: He must have been praying. While the passengers and crew engaged in the work they deemed necessary to cope with the situation, Paul engaged in the work he saw as necessary. (Are we so overwhelmed by conditions that sometimes we forget to inquire of the Lord? Paul's example is to submit to "something" higher.)

[Continued on the next page.]

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Q: Within Paul's testimony in v.24, why would anyone on board this sinking, desperate ship care to hear the information that it's God's plan for Paul to stand before Caesar? Isn't that unnecessary information at this time?

A: It would be an important part of Julius' testimony later on. As we have studied throughout the Old Testament, Luke and Acts, signs **CONFIRM** the message. This would be a powerful witness to Nero's court coming from Julius and the other soldiers aboard that the message through Paul has been accompanied by attesting miracles.

Q: Paul exhibits his personal faith that he believes God will save them, but is it faith that he asks of the rest on board?

A: It's not blind faith he's asking for but faith in God's new plan for all of them. Through Paul, God has given them focus: To look for an island, to exchange their sinking vessel for their lives, to take courage that there's an actual plan. (Anyone else see the symbolism in these events in leaving the old life for the new? Or in obtaining real hope?)

²⁷But when the fourteenth night came, as we were being driven about in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors began to surmise that they were approaching some land. ²⁸They took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms; and a little farther on they took another sounding and found it to be fifteen fathoms. ²⁹Fearing that we might run aground somewhere on the rocks, they cast four anchors from the stern and wished for daybreak.

[Read 27:27-29]

Point: Like many examples of plans that we've seen in the Bible and to this point, these plans were coming true as God predicted through Paul, but it was probably not happening in the way or timing they envisioned.

³⁰But as the sailors were trying to escape from the ship and had let down the ship's boat into the sea, on the pretense of intending to lay out anchors from the bow, ³¹Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, "Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved." ³²Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it fall away.

[Read 27:30-32]

Q: What were the sailors trying to do?

A: Abandon ship and leave everyone else behind.

Q: What was Paul's response?

A: If they allowed the sailors to flee the ship they would all die. Paul knew that the sailors were needed to fulfill God's plan of rescue.

³³Until the day was about to dawn, Paul was encouraging them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have been constantly watching and going without eating, having taken nothing. ³⁴Therefore I encourage you to take some food, for this is for your preservation, for not a hair from the head of any of you will perish." ³⁵Having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to eat. ³⁶All of them were encouraged and they themselves also took food. ³⁷All of us in the ship were two hundred and seventy-six persons. ³⁸When

[Read 27:33-38]

Q: Was Paul performing Communion?

A: No. He was providing both physical **AND** spiritual nourishment as well as being a natural **AND** spiritual leader.

Q: Paul must have been praying to have received the visit from the angel; and what other thing does Paul, in the midst of this chaos, also stop to do?

A: Give thanks to God. If we cannot change the circumstances leading to the fulfillment of His purpose, we are therefore completely **IN** His purpose and should never forsake communicating with and acknowledging Him.

Q: What might be significant about finally throwing the main cargo overboard?

A: It might be interpreted that they're finally going to trust Paul's plan

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they had eaten enough, they began to lighten the ship by throwing out the wheat into the sea.

³⁹When day came, they could not recognize the land; but they did observe a bay with a beach, and they resolved to drive the ship onto it if they could. ⁴⁰And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea while at the same time they were loosening the ropes of the rudders; and hoisting the foresail to the wind, they were heading for the beach. ⁴¹But striking a reef where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern began to be broken up by the force of the waves. ⁴²The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none of them would swim away and escape; ⁴³but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, ⁴⁴and the rest should follow, some on planks, and others on various things from the ship. And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land.

^{28:1}When they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta. ²The natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all. ³But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. ⁴When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live." ⁵However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm. ⁶But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god.

completely. Up to this point, holding onto the wheat is also holding onto the original plan to deliver the wheat and achieve their original plans. Everything is now forsaken from the past for the new hope in the future.

[Read 27:39-44]

Q: Did the Holy Spirit's new plan come true?

A: Yes. They lost the ship but all lives were saved as they ran aground on an island.

Q: Did Paul's assertion in v.31 also come true?

A: Yes. Without the sailors they would not have been able to cut the anchors, loosen the rudder, hoist the sail and direct the ship towards shore. (It might be worth asking, "Why does God make us dependent on other people?")

Q: Why would the soldiers consider killing their prisoners? Why is that notion actually not as barbaric as it sounds?

A: According to Roman law a guard's life was forfeit if his prisoner escaped. It was still a matter of life and death, so to speak, for the soldiers to not just reach safety but still have their prisoners in tow. If not, there was no use being rescued from the ship as their life would be forfeit on land.

[Read 28:1-6]

Q: Does Paul follow Jesus' own example and explanation of what a leader in His church should be?

A: Jesus said to be a leader one must become a servant. Notice that Paul thinks nothing of foraging for kindling. As he has demonstrated throughout this trip, he is attune to the needs of those around him and willing to adjust however necessary to meet them.

Q: Speaking neither Latin nor Greek, these people are called "barbarians" in some translations. But what is the real indication of their spiritual condition?

A: They have a strong belief in "fate" or "God's will" in their first interpretation of seeing a man rescued from impossible circumstances only to be delivered to the same fate again. But in their interpretation of Paul being some kind of god in the wake of no affect of the snake bite they're also showing that they have an inherent belief in some greater deity. [Hint: These people are ripe for the Gospel.]

⁷Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us courteously three days. ⁸And it happened that the father of Publius was lying in bed afflicted with recurrent fever and dysentery; and Paul went in to see him and after he had prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him. ⁹After this had happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases were coming to him and getting cured. ¹⁰They also honored us with many marks of respect; and when we were setting sail, they supplied us with all we needed.

[Read 28:7-10]

Q: Paul could still work miracles! Why not calm the storm? Why not save the ship and its cargo? Why wasn't an obvious miracle worked in the course of their shipwreck on Malta?

A: Perhaps because the **GREATER** plan hid from Paul and everyone aboard that ship was to plant a church on Malta. By the circumstances under which Paul and his companions arrived and their need for the natives of Malta's help, Paul's humanity was confirmed. Therefore the signs confirmed **THE MESSAGE**.

[Tradition holds that Publius became the head of the church founded on Malta by Paul during his 3 month stay there.]

For Discussion:

- *Do we truly live, in every circumstance and under every adverse condition, as an example of Christ to all those around us, to both believers and non-believers? (Q: Who was the **REAL** anchor on the ship? A: Paul.)*
- *What have we not yet "thrown overboard" in acknowledgment that we're going wherever the Spirit leads?*
- *On our list of "Things To Do In A Crisis", where have we placed "prayer" **AND** "thanksgiving"? Or even, "the needs of others"?*
- *How do we view our circumstances and all those around us? Are we rarely dependent or often dependent on others? Are we feeding and encouraging them?*
- *Paul started in the right place and arrived in the right place; the journey between was a different story. Is our faith fixed on God's goals while submitting to His achieving them in His time, His way?*
- *Does being swept **WAY** off course mean we're no longer on the path to His goals?*
- *What are the ministry opportunities in the midst of our crises? Or are we even looking for or recognizing such opportunities under those conditions?*

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