

THE BIG IDEA: Storms won't scare you when you let the Lord prepare you.

The Take-Off

Something happened on Sunday, January 25, 1736 that altered the course of history.

On that day, a man stood on a sinking ship and observed something that impacted him so profoundly that he would later write about it in his journal:

At seven I went to the Germans (the Moravians). I had long before observed the great seriousness of their behaviour. Of their humility they had given a continual proof, by performing those servile offices for the other passengers, which none of the English would undertake; for which they desired, and would receive no pay, saying, "it was good for their proud hearts," and "their loving Saviour had done more for them." And every day had given them occasion of showing a meekness which no injury could move. If they were pushed, struck, or thrown down, they rose again and went away; but no complaint was found in their mouth. There was now an opportunity of trying whether they were delivered from the Spirit of fear, as well as from that of pride, anger, and revenge. In the midst of the psalm wherewith their service began, the sea broke over, split the main-sail in pieces, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks, as if the great deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans calmly sung on. I asked one of them afterwards, "Was you not afraid?" He answered, "I thank God, no." I asked, "But were not your women and children afraid?" He replied, mildly, "No; our women and children are not afraid to die."

From them I went to their crying, trembling neighbours, and pointed out to them the difference in the hour of trial, between him that feareth God, and him that feareth him not.

What this man saw eventually led to his conversion as a follower of Jesus, and from that day forward, John Wesley, the founder of what is today known as the Methodist Church, preached an average of 15 sermons a week totaling 40,000 sermons over his lifetime.

Along with his brother, Charles, the Wesleys went on to publish 56 collections of hymns over 53 years.

And all of it started by watching the way the Moravians reacted on the deck of a crippled boat during a life-threatening storm.

Today, we'll see something very similar in Paul's life, and it all starts in Acts 27. Here are 5 observations that we can make that will help us deal with the stormy times in life.

When we're done, all of them will help point us to today's Big Idea, which simply says that **storms won't scare you when you let the Lord prepare you**.

1. Trust the word of God

- a. There are a lot of places named in the first 8 verses, so let me try to make sense of them for us.
- b. They got on a boat in Caesarea and traveled 70 miles in one day to Sidon. That's where they are in verse 3.
- c. The next leg things got a bit tougher, and verse 4 says they went around Cyprus in order to get to Myra in Lycia. This took about 10-15 days and covered around 300 miles.
- d. NERD TRIVIA TIME!! There was a famous church bishop that lived in Myra who was known for his generosity and once threw bags of coins through the window of a poor man who had 3 daughters and couldn't afford a proper dowry. That act undoubtedly saved those girls from a life of prostitution. That bishop's name was Nicholas, and we know him as St. Nicholas, the real, live Santa Claus.
- e. Ok, back to the boats. The travel was too slow for Julius, the man in charge of getting all these prisoners to Rome, and so he had them all switch to another boat, but the weather was getting worse and they couldn't go where they had intended, and so they finally landed in a place called Fair Havens. That leg took the same time as the previous one (10-15 days) but only covered half the distance.
- f. Now, the centurion had to decide what to do: stay in Fair Havens for the winter or press on. It was the start of the stormy season. The Fast - the Day of Atonement - was over. That always happened in Sept/Oct, and travel from mid-Sept to mid-Nov was difficult. Every sailor would have know that.
- g. Paul - the man of God - gives the centurion a word from God.
- h. But the centurion didn't listen. Instead, he asked others what they thought, and Paul was outvoted 3-1.
- i. The majority may rule, but that doesn't mean the majority is right.

- j. The clincher in their decision to press on was a change in the weather. Verse 13 says they felt a gentle wind and thought they had what they wanted.
- k. So, instead of trusting in the message of God from the messenger of God, they relied on the popular vote and their senses. That was a move they would come to regret.

2. **Life turns on a dime**

- a. Verse 13 sounded so good, didn't it? And one verse later, life changed. "Before very long."
- b. The storm was so bad that they couldn't fight it, and had to let it take them where it wanted.
- c. It was a horrific storm (MAYBE SHOW SOME PICS OF NOR'EASTERS): they almost lost the lifeboat, they literally tied the boat together, threw over cargo and all their supplies, and in verse 20 we find 276 people drifting at the mercy of a storm and having no hope of being saved.
- d. Can you relate?
- e. Some of us have found ourselves adrift at the mercy of our situations simply because, like the centurion, we ignored a clear word from God
- f. Others of us are like Paul: stuck in horrible circumstances because of the bad choices others have made that have affected us
- g. Either way, you're here this morning and you're on a boat and you're hopeless.
- h. And the great news is that I can say to you what Paul said to those 276 people on that boat in verse 24: "God will graciously spare you."
- i. Notice that the prisoners didn't do anything to get that promise. It wasn't based on who they were or what they'd done, but on who God was, the God of Psalm 145:8.
- j. You say, "But I don't deserve that. I'm too bad."
- k. We already knew that. They were - and we are - prisoners. And even in that failed state, they did - and we can - receive the grace of God.
- l. And that's GREAT news!!

3. **Storms allow us to step up**

- a. Not only can we find God's grace in storms, but we also find ourselves with the unique opportunity to step up and lead
- b. Notice the reaction of the prisoners:
 - they threw up some "flare" prayers in verse 29
 - they tried to save their own skin in verse 30
- c. But Paul steps up and works to save them all in verse 31
- d. The 19th century theologian, Joseph Parker, said about this story that "Paul began as a prisoner and ended as the captain."
- e. Remember how the centurion had ignored what Paul said before they set sail? Now he listens and does what Paul says (vv. 31-32).
- f. Paul's example and leadership (vv. 33-35, he had a plan and instructed them and ate with them) encouraged them all (v. 36)
- g. There are times when ONE DEDICATED BELIEVER can change the whole atmosphere of a situation simply by trusting God and having visible faith.
- h. When life turns on a dime, allow God to use your faith in him to encourage even those around you who don't know Jesus

4. **Storms allow us to step down**

- a. This next observation sounds like it is exactly the opposite of the previous one, so allow me a minute to catch us up in the narrative and then explain what it means
- b. Eventually, the ship ran aground and by God's grace all the prisoners and soldiers - all 276 souls - made it to the shores of an island called Malta (located off the southern coast of Italy below the "boot")
- c. Look at what happened in verse 2 and the first part of verse 3: they built a fire, and PAUL GATHERED WOOD!
- d. This seems to be so small, and so it's easy to look past it, but after all that Paul had done to make sure that everyone on the ship had survived, if anyone deserved to insist he be served, it would have been Paul.
- e. But instead, he's helping gather fuel for the fire.

- f. No task is too small for the servant of God who has “the mind of Christ” (Philippians 2:1-13)
- g. Don’t miss opportunities to serve just because you’re tired. Sometimes, those are the best times to serve.

5. **At the worst times, your enemy is looking for you and the world is looking at you**

- a. So, after Paul has been a prisoner adrift at sea, without food for 14 days, buffeted by hurricane-force winds that shipwrecked him and then forced to swim ashore, he places some wood on the fire and a snake comes out of the fire and bites him.
- b. As we would be likely to say, “Are you kidding me?” Talk about your bad days.
- c. Listen, you and I have to get this: 1 Peter 5:8 says that we have an enemy who prowls around looking to devour us, and he’s all about piling it on in bad times. You can’t afford to let our guards down for a single moment.
- d. Paul is now on the island of Malta, and Malta means “refuge.” I would just about bet my left arm that more believers fall to the enemy’s tactics in safe places than stormy places.
- e. You have an enemy who is looking for you. He doesn’t take days off, and so you can’t afford to either.
- f. Ephesians 6:13 tells us how to make sure we’re ready for the day of evil - put on the full armor of God
- g. And not only is the enemy looking for you, but the world is looking at you
- h. They want to see how you’ll respond to another attack
- i. Acts 28:4 and 6 says that they watched him to see what would happen
- j. In fact, in verse 4 he was a murderer and in verse 6 he was a god! What made the difference?
- k. Verse 5 - how he responded. He could have complained, posted a status about how unfair life is or even Instagrammed a selfie with a snake, but he chose none of those things.
- l. He just shook it off and suffered no ill effects.
- m. By the way, for what it’s worth, I believe this is the real life application of Mark 16:18, not picking up snakes while we sing and preach.
- n. We would do well, when we find ourselves attacked, to shake it off into the fire.
- o. And as a result of how Paul handled that attack, he was given an open door to the highest leader on the island, who just happened to have a father who needed healing...from dysentery!!
- p. Let’s not be the people who are above the situations we’re entrusted with: sometimes we’ll get the “glamour” ministry jobs and sometimes we’ll get the call to pray for the dude with the bloody diarrhea.
- q. But when we’re faithful even on the days that we think we’ve earned time off, God will entrust more and more opportunities to us for ministry in the lives of people far from God.
- r. Because of how Paul handled the storm, he found favor and honor with the people in Malta and everyone with him was blessed as a result.
- s. Kind of like how the Moravians standing on the deck of a stormy boat in 1736 were being watched by a young John Wesley, and how they handled it opened the door for Jesus to save Wesley and use him to change the world.

The Landing

All of this is good, but let’s wrap it up with the Big Idea: **Storms won’t scare you when you let the Lord prepare you.** Some of you aren’t preparing for the storms that will come.

At the end of the greatest sermon ever preached, Jesus said there were 2 types of people building houses on 2 types of foundations. One would stand and one would fall, but BOTH WOULD BE BATTERED BY THE STORM.

How do you prepare for the storms that WILL COME? According to Jesus in Matthew 7:24, you do the word you know. So read the Bible and then do the Bible.

The result will be a life based on a strong foundation that even the toughest storm can’t destroy, and you will be the one standing on the deck of a ship in the middle of the fiercest storm pointing people to Jesus.