

# Life Is a Journey

Psalm 107:23–32, Acts 27:1–20

The title of the message this morning is “Life Is a Journey.” Last week, after I had already chosen that as a title, I noticed a plaque in someone’s home; it pictured a lovely sailboat under sunny skies and had the caption: “Life is a journey. Enjoy it.”

Well, in our chapter this morning there is a sailboat—not a pleasure craft, but a large, wood-hulled cargo ship carrying grain from Egypt to Rome (Egypt was the breadbasket for Rome). And for most of Acts 27 there are not sunny skies but violent storms. Furthermore, the 276 passengers and crew on this ship did not particularly enjoy the trip; rather, at one point they were so terrified that all hope that they would be saved was utterly lost. We’ll have more to say about the storm later.

Paul was on a journey. For some years it had been his heart’s desire to preach the gospel in the city of Rome. Rome was a strategic place to get the Gospel out.<sup>1</sup> In his letter which he sent to the church at Rome a few years before the events we are considering today, he informs the Roman Christians: “without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you” (Rom. 1:9–10). Paul wanted to go to Rome! In Acts 23, when Paul was first confined in the Roman barracks in Jerusalem, the Lord told him he would go there. He appeared to him and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.” So Paul knew that it was God’s will that he would safely arrive at his destination. He would not lose his life in a shipwreck; he was destined to make it safely to Rome. God had determined it, and it would certainly come to pass. In our present chapter Paul begins his journey. This time he does not have to pay the fare himself; as a prisoner his trip is funded by the Roman taxpayers.

Just as Paul is on a journey, so each of us is on a journey. Yes, life is a journey. For the Christian, it is a journey from earth to the presence of God in heaven. For the non-Christian it is a journey from earth to the pit of hell. Consider with me three biblical truths that we see in our text.

## **1. The God of heaven is Lord of the winds and storm.**

Why a whole chapter on the violent storms Paul encountered on his trip to Rome? Here is a long chapter of 44 verses, and when we finish it, Paul is still not yet in Rome. He doesn’t get to Rome till verse 16 of the next chapter. Sixty verses in all describing Paul’s trip to Rome! the Bible is not giving a travelogue. Luke is

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary* (Olive Tree Bible Software)

not meandering, getting distracted, losing his focus. Everything in the Bible is intentional, in there for a purpose. I do believe God wants us to focus on storms.

In our text this morning there is no mention of God, yet in the biblical context it is God himself that sends storms. A couple verses from the Psalms prove this conclusively:

“Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind” (Ps. 48:7). Here is a prayer, a direct address to the living God: “O God, you are the one who breaks the ships of Tarshish with an east wind.”

Consider the power of the wind! God is the one who exercises this power. A verse in Psalm 78 confirms this: “He caused an east wind to blow in the heaven: and by his power he brought in the south wind” (Ps. 78:26). Notice the verbs: “He *caused* an east wind to blow ... and by his power he *brought in* the south wind.” God is like an artist with a lot of colors in his palette, or like an expert musician playing a magnificent organ with many stops, some quiet and subdued, others so powerful that they shake the floor. God has all these resources at his disposal, and he uses them deliberately and intentionally. Don’t think for a minute that the God of heaven is passive, that he just started up the natural processes and now sits back watching everything play out. No! He is actively, intimately involved in running his creation, intentionally superintending the natural processes as he sees fit. He is Lord of the winds and storms, and uses them to bring glory to himself.

In the Gospels, when Christ stilled a fierce storm on the Sea of Galilee, his disciples marveled and said, “What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!” (Matt. 8:27). God uses the wind to get our attention.

Think of a sunny day in March. What a welcome change from the grey and cheerless winter! Maybe you think to yourself, *I’d like to get out and go for a walk*. You venture outside, perhaps wearing just a light jacket—after all, it’s sunny outside. The temperature may be in the middle 50s—but what a wind! As long as the wind is behind you, it’s tolerable. But then you have to turn around and head back home, and the wind blows right in your face, making your ears cold, blowing down your neck. Oh, the power of the wind!

In verse 14 of our text we read that “a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon.” The word in the original for “tempestuous” is τυφωνικός, from which we get our word *typhoon*.

Consider Jonah 1:4, “But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.” The Mediterranean storm that nearly sank the ship in which Jonah rode was sent out by the LORD—sent intentionally, to do his errand.

“God hath not promised skies always blue.” Winds and storms are inevitable, but God is Lord over them. Look at all the references to wind and storms in our text: “we sailed under the shelter of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary ...

we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed ... a tempestuous head wind arose ... we were exceedingly tempest-tossed ... 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.”

Christian, the God who is Lord over the winds and storms is *your* God. As you face the storms of life, do not lose heart—do not give in to despair—for your Lord is using them for his glory and your good. Are things not going smoothly in your life right now? Are you at the end of your rope? Then call upon your God.

If everything always went smoothly in our lives, we would think that we possess within ourselves the ability to manage everything on our own. We would not see our need for God to come to our aid. We would not see our need to watch and pray, and to beware the wiles of the devil. We would conclude that resisting the devil is child’s play—no sweat! So God sends storms to bring us back to reality, to remind us that *he* is in charge, to impress upon us the importance of prayer. The God of heaven is Lord of the winds and storm, and the Christian rejoices: “Lord, I’m so glad you’re in charge; if anyone else were in charge, we would surely be in a mess.” During a tempestuous storm on the Sea of Galilee, the disciples—experienced fishermen and sailors—were terrified, but Jesus was asleep in the bottom of the boat. He knew his heavenly Father was in charge, so why worry? “Be still my soul: the waves and winds still know his voice who ruled them while he dwelt below.”<sup>2</sup>

## **2. God has a plan for each of us.**

The apostle Paul had received assurance from God that he was going to witness for him in Rome. There was no doubt in Paul’s mind that he would finally set foot in Rome. Yet to get there, he would have to travel by ship. He would not have direct control over his circumstances. His life and fate were under the control of “the centurion ... the helmsman and the owner of the ship” (v. 11). So it is today. The life and safety of a passenger traveling by jetliner is in the control of total strangers—pilots, navigators, radar operators, air traffic controllers, and many others. If we travel by highway, we might operate the motor vehicle, but our safety also depends upon other drivers: are their eyes on the road, or are they distracted? Are they committed to follow the rules of the road, or do they have malicious intent?

We live in a world under God’s curse because of sin. God told Adam, “cursed is the ground for thy sake” (Gen. 3:17). Because of sin there is disorder, disharmony, selfishness, fighting and danger. Before the fall there was perfect harmony in creation. There was no war, no conflict. Everything was at peace between God and

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.trinitypsalterhymnal.org/hymns/be-still-my-soul/>

man, between man and man. But sin entered the world, and death by sin. Now, people must be on their guard. We must be concerned about our own personal safety. We need to teach our children to be wary of strangers.

God had a perfect plan for the apostle Paul, and this would involve going through storms. This mirrors his plan for each one of us. Yet God reassures us that he is our rock, our fortress and our refuge. He will protect us in the storms of life.

We can't guarantee the behavior of people all around us: are they friendly or hostile? Are they peaceable, or prone to pick a fight?

Ultimately, our safety and security are in the hands of God. We sing Psalm 46, "The Lord of hosts is on our side, our safety to secure; the God of Jacob is for us a refuge strong and sure."<sup>3</sup>

I heard the other day of a third-grade child in Michigan who brought a loaded gun to school. Where were the parents? Where did the child get the gun? Thankfully, no shots were fired.

As we go out in public we assess our surroundings; our eyes must be alert for danger. Is this a safe place? If not, do we have an exit plan? But if we belong to Christ, we have his promise that he will certainly bring all his sons to glory. The Savior says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:27–28). Christ gives his sheep eternal life—life that has a beginning but no end. It begins in time, when we are born again by his Spirit and brought to faith, but it continues in eternity—eternally! "And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 22:5).

If you belong to Christ—if you are his sheep, if you hear his voice and follow him, then you can rest in the promise of Hebrews 2:10, "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in *bringing many sons unto glory*, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." If you are the son or daughter of God by faith in Jesus Christ, then God has a wonderful plan for you: he is infallibly going to bring you to glory. You may suffer now for a little while, but your Savior, the captain of your salvation, suffered and died for you. You are his son or daughter—part of his spiritual family. He will never leave you or forsake you. He is the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep, and calls them all by name. At the final day, not one of them will be lost.

God had a plan for the apostle Paul. He might go through violent storms and winds, but he would at last reach Rome, where he would preach Christ. In the same way, he has a plan for each one of you, and that is, though you go through the storms of life, he will bring you infallibly to his heavenly kingdom, where, along

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 46B, *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*.

with the saints, you will look into the face of the Lamb who was slain, and sing the praises of Christ eternally. That is his plan for you. He is the God who is the truth and cannot lie. He has spoken, and he will surely bring it to pass. Amen! Thirdly, we have in this text

### **3. A lesson about friendship and kindness**

Look particularly at verse 3, “And the next day we landed at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him liberty to go to his friends and receive care.”

Here was a man that Paul had known for less than 24 hours. His name was Julius, and we are informed that he was “a centurion of the Augustan Regiment.” “Augustan” refers to Augustus, the first Roman emperor, who reigned from 27 BC until his death in AD 14. The Augustan Regiment was named after Caesar Augustus. Almost certainly, the centurion Julius who took a boatload of prisoners to Rome was not a Christian but a pagan; his native religion was paganism; he followed the Roman pantheon, but as an officer in the Roman army he had sworn that Caesar was lord; he had sworn full allegiance to Caesar.

Yet as he looked over the men he was assigned to guard he could sense that there was something different about this man Paul. Paul was not coarse or profane; he was not a liar but a man of his word. He was a man who claimed to be a follower of Christ. What was his crime? That he publicly claimed that Jesus was the Messiah, who had risen from the dead. He could have been released, had he not appealed to Caesar. Clearly Paul was not a dangerous criminal who was a threat to society.

As an idolator who failed to confess the true God, Julius was not a man whom Paul would have instinctively trusted. But on a human level Julius and Paul had connected.

They had just completed the first, very short, overnight leg of their trip, from Caesarea up the coast to Sidon. We read that “Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him liberty to go to his friends and receive care.” The word for “kindly” is the adverbial form of a word that comes into English as “philanthropy.” It comes from the roots *brotherly love* and *man*. Philanthropy means *the love of man*; it is the desire to promote the welfare of mankind. Biblically, philanthropy is the keeping of the second great commandment: the first is to love the true God with all our heart, and the second is to love our fellow man. Here, then, is a Roman—a pagan—whose heart is filled with philanthropy, who treated the prisoner Paul very kindly and allowed him to go ashore to his friends to receive care.

Because of common grace the wicked often do works that for their outward form are good and righteous, though the wicked can *not* do good works out of a pure desire to glorify God. Works that arise from the flesh fall short of God’s standard of absolute perfection. “All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.” That is why our salvation can never be grounded on what *we* have done, but only on the

perfect work of the Savior, whose righteousness is credited to the believer by faith. “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted unto him for righteousness.” Julius’ philanthropic kindness to the apostle Paul was for its outward form a good work. It was not enough to save him, but it was indeed a blessing to the Paul. In return, Julius got to hear the gospel and was perhaps converted, though this is unstated. So it is in our day that the good works done by the heathen can be of immeasurable blessing to the redeemed, making our life a whole lot richer and more comfortable, and resulting in a free and prosperous society. Christians are to pray that we might lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty. But on the flip side, a pagan who does good works may not realize the depths of his depravity and his need for God. He may think that he is pretty good—better than most—and can attain heaven on his own. What all of us need is for the Spirit of God to regenerate men’s hearts, so that we see our need of Christ and are drawn savingly to him. And while we would all like to live in a law-abiding society where we have a measure of safety and security, we must know that any lasting social change is a byproduct of the Spirit’s work of regeneration.

“Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him liberty to go to his *friends* and receive care.” The word for “friends” comes from the word meaning *brotherly love*; it is literally “lovers.” In French it is *amis*; in Spanish it is *amigos*. True friends love one another with a pure, wholesome love. This is the kind of love that we are to have in the fellowship of the church. Romans teaches us to “be kindly affectioned one to another with *brotherly love*; in honour preferring one another” (Rom. 12:10). Hebrews adds, “Let *brotherly love* continue” (Heb. 13:1). The word for “brotherly love” in both texts is *φιλαδελφία*.

Julius gave Paul liberty to go to his *friends* and receive care. The “friends” that are spoken of were undoubtedly Christians, members of the church in Sidon. As men and women born again of the Spirit, they were accustomed to do good works that are the fruit of a true and living faith. As the Savior taught, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). As a Christian church, the church in Sidon would have maintained a diaconal fund to take care of the needy, such as orphans and widows. Here comes the apostle Paul from the boat and Paul is in need of sack lunches and other foodstuffs to sustain him on his journey. This was not a pleasure cruise with a well-stocked kitchen to meet the discriminating tastes of vacationers. There may have been no kitchen at all for prisoners.

So Paul went to his friends—fellow lovers of Christ who also loved the saints as a reflection of Christ’s love. The Bible has a lot to say about friends. “Friends” is the name for fellow-Christians. The apostle John ended his third epistle with the words “Peace to you. Our *friends* greet you. Greet the *friends* by name” (3 John

14). Again, the word for friends is φίλοι, literally *lovers*—those who show true brotherly love to one another.

Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his *friends*. You are My *friends* if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you *friends*, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you” (John 15:13–15).

Life is a journey.

John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, tells the story of Christian, who is on a journey from his hometown, the “City of Destruction” (“this world”), to the “Celestial City” (“that which is to come”: Heaven). Christian is weighed down by a great burden—the knowledge of his sin—which came from reading the Bible. This burden, which would cause him to sink into Hell, is so unbearable that Christian must seek deliverance. He meets Evangelist as he is walking out in the fields, who directs him to the “Wicket Gate” for deliverance.<sup>4</sup>

In our Old Testament text, “Those who go down to the sea in ships” experience the storms of life. But God “guides them to their desired haven.” The Psalmist exhorts, “Let them exalt Him also in the assembly of the people, and praise Him in the company of the elders.” Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Pilgrim%27s\\_Progress](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Pilgrim%27s_Progress) accessed 5-13-23