

Success by shipwreck

God's unexpected ways of provision

Introduction

One of the most quoted verses in the Bible is “My God shall supply all of your needs”, which was made by Paul, the apostle around 61 AD. He made it after about 26 years of serving God. It was a statement he could make looking back over his life...for he had seen and learnt its truth for those who are on God's mission for their lives.

About 2 years before he wrote it, in AD 59, he went through a series of what must have seemed like major setbacks. He had been imprisoned in Caesarea, unjustly tried and finally, having appealed to Ceaser as a Roman citizen, he is shipped off to Rome by boat.

The account is covered in Acts 27:1 through to Acts 28:15 in what is acclaimed to be one of the masterpieces of shipwreck literature.

Acts 27:8-12 (ESV Strong's)

8 Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.

9 Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, 10 saying, Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.” 11 But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. 12 And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

Acts 27:20-26 (ESV Strong's)

20 When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.

21 Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. 22 Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among

you, but only of the ship. 23 For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, 24 and he said, Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you. 25 So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. 26 But we must run aground on some island.”

Acts 27:30-37 (ESV Strong's)

30 And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, 31 Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.” 32 Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go.

33 As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing.

34 Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you.” 35 And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. 36 Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. 37 (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.)

Acts 27:41 - 28:9 (ESV Strong's)

41 But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf. 42 The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape. 43 But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, 44 and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

Paul on Malta

1 After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. 2 The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold. 3 When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. 4 When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live.” 5 He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. 6 They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had

waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

7 Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days. 8 It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him, healed him. 9 And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured.

Paul had always hoped to get to Rome...but he didn't realize **the way he would get there**. These were God's unexpected ways. Sometimes we may have some idea of what God is calling us to and then all kind of things seem to threaten it in our lives.

This account is to assure us and to teach us to be a people who live more by the reality of what God wants to accomplish than by the factors, even of great proportion that seem to have the power to throw us off course.

1. The decisions of authority figures in your life cannot stop God's plan for you

Paul advised them, 10 saying, Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives." 11 But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said.

- Paul heard God but only to the point that he knew this was going to end in disaster. He must have been anxious and feared for his life and the lives of others
- Paul had a view and he expressed it. As believers we can have a view about what is right and what is wrong in this time. Maybe if people would listen to us they would be better off.
- The authority figure however consulted the "experts" and would rather listen to those familiar with the seas and shipping than to a prisoner.
- They take a decision driven by various reasons we can speculate about. Money certainly was a driving force, human wisdom another, opportunism...

Yet like so many characters throughout the Bible we see that the decisions made by governments and authority figures could never hold back the purposes of God

- Take Elijah under Ahab and Jezebel
- Take David under Saul

- Take Joseph and Mary under Herod

Their wrong decision led to a shipwreck and much hardship.

Maybe in this time you feel government took the wrong decision regarding their implemented measures and maybe it has caused you great trouble or even a seeming disaster.

The key is to live more in the reality of the hand of God over your life than to live in the sense that the decisions of governments and authorities can hold back God's purpose for your life

24 and he said, Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.

2. There's a way for believers to live before others when the storms of life hit us all

The detail Luke goes into is phenomenal..“Perhaps God would have us know what His servant was like when sharing the dangers of life with others.”

A. He bore the Name of His Lord just as well in the hurricane as in fair havens

You might recall in the days after Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, how God spoke to ananias to go and pray for him with the words in the ESV...

Acts 9:15(ESV Strong's)

he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel

Paul lived out his entire life as a name bearer of Jesus no matter what the situation he was in. In prison...he worships, writes letters to encourage the churches, prays for the jailer and his family... Before kings he witnesses of Christ, here in the storm, even though they did not listen to his advice, he carries on living out a testimony for Jesus

The world is watching us like the passengers on the boat were watching Paul. We are to live as the ones who bear the Name of Jesus as we do not know who is watching and who we may be influencing

B. Despite the storm he could quieten himself to hear God

You and I might say that we are not Paul. Yet the promises of God are for everyone

Psalms 23:5 (ESV Strong's)

5 You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

At this time more than ever we need to be able to calm ourselves down in the Presence of the Lord and to receive from Him what He is saying.

Then God will use what he tells us to bring great guidance and encouragement to others.

It is important who we are giving our ears out to and what information we are allowing to have the most influence on us.

Sons of God are called to be led by the Holy Spirit yet it is very easy to be led by fear.

Can you ask yourself now what is the predominant voice influencing my state of mind, my outlook on this trouble, my view of the future?

We are a Shepherded people as Christians at our most basic level we are all sheep under the Chief Shepherd. So do not say "I am not Paul". No, but do say "I am the sheep of His pasture"

C. He learnt to shake things off and keep on mission

When Paul had first landed in Europe a number of years earlier a python spirit tried to discredit his ministry until eventually he drove out the spirit with one command

When he lands in Malta, a physical snake bites him. This was now the umpteenth stone thrown in his path but he shakes it into the fire and carries on with the mission

Sometimes as believers we can get so caught up with what the devil is throwing at us. Sometimes we can be so distracted by "why is this happening to me?"

Though there may be a place for that, Paul's view was that opposition was part of the journey and most times, we need to realize the worst thing to do is to focus on the problem and put off the call of God.

**** It is particularly important when someone "bites" you. How many still carry issues attached to us even about other brothers and sisters years later?

Still carry resentment about what someone did to you or your family

After two weeks at sea in a hurricane and a wrecked boat out there behind you at sea and you are still alive...you know you are going to Rome snake bitten or not.

This also shows the ordinariness of Paul. Just a while back he had met an angel and got the news of the shipwreck the island and all. Yet now he has no revelation of the snake amongst the brushwood. He was just a human being but God's provision was there to supernaturally get him to finish his mission

D. Despite his own challenges he held a deep concern for those around him

Consider those on board..

There were the deceitful sailors who tried to sneak off in the lifeboat and save themselves

Then there were the Roman soldiers who were the oppressors

Then there was the second in command who wanted to kill all the prisoners to stop them escaping

Then there was the guard, Julius

The captain who hadn't listened to Paul

There were a host of death-row prisoners on their way to the circus in Rome

Then there were men and women passengers

Yet Paul's care and concern is for everyone

Acts 27:31 (ESV Strong's)

31 Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved."

Acts 27:34 (ESV Strong's)

34 Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you.”

When they get to shore, we find Paul gathering sticks to make a fire to warm them up..

There was a tenderness and a kindness that strikes me.

Kindness towards sinners, prisoners, oppressors and selfish sailors.

I have heard Christians have such hard hearts to the sinners of this world, yet here is a man with more reason than us to be hard yet he is kind to them. Perhaps he remembers the road to Damascus...when “the chief of sinners” met the Lord of glory.

This is the kind of leadership God wants us to exhibit. Leadership based on a deep love for all people. Strong, decisive leadership based on kindness.

E. He remained thankful

Acts 27:35 (ESV Strong's)

35 And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat.

An image none of them surely would never forget...lifeboat gone, 14 days without eating, storm raging and there before them the man of God looks to heaven and says thank You Lord for your provision.

There was no doubt that Paul was giving God the glory...they would have known it then and it would have filled their stories from that day on.

Thankfulness is often associated with the presence of God in the Bible. A thankful attitude

3. God’s provision achieves abundantly more than what we hoped for

276 people had a story to tell....each one had their life saved

A number of them would end up in Roman dungeons and prisons

Roman soldiers would end up in legions all over the world

From Rome, Paul writes letters read to this day...Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Timothy, Philemon...

The people of Malta...who spoke another language could now communicate what they had heard across the island..

The ship captain ...what do you think he would do the next time a storm came up??

Conclusion

Who's purposes are you living for?

No matter how big your boat and how well you know the seas, no matter how much grain you have stored up...it's all insecure

By contrast...for those living for the purposes of God...ordinary people but bearing the name of Jesus...no matter what hurricane comes, no matter how many setbacks...God's purposes wil prevail

Maybe some have suffered great loss... let's call on the Lord of your purposes to steer you through