

Gospel Triumph: The Sea, The Prophet, and the God in Charge

Acts 27

I'd imagine that many of you know just how important an anniversary was celebrated this past week. November 10th 2025 was the 50th anniversary of the sinking of the Edmund Fitzgerald in Lake Superior.

I did not grow up in Michigan and so I will not attempt to recount the story of how this ship sank. I feel like that is a story reserved for natives and Gordon Lightfoot to tell. However, I will note that this was not a small ship. It was 730 feet long and 75 feet wide and was built to carry 26,000 tons of weight as it traversed the Great Lakes. It's hard to fathom the strength of the storm and waves that could have broken the ship into two pieces, which is how they found it. And yet, history is filled with stories like this of the shocking power of the sea.

Of course, a ship like the Edmund Fitzgerald had radio communication, radar, and weather reports to help navigate. People have been sailing for thousands of years without any of those helps and were very much at the mercy of the sea.

That's exactly where we find the Apostle Paul in Acts 27 and he officially begins his journey to Rome that will bring us to the end of the book of Acts. Look at 27:1. Not only is Paul at the mercy of the sea in this chapter, he's also at the mercy of the Roman Empire. He's appealed to Caesar to stand trial before Caesar, and it's been determined that he will go to Rome. But the journey he will take to get there will be anything but easy. Paul is still a prisoner and he's under the command of a Roman centurion Julius. Moving a group of prisoners from Caesarea to Rome would have been a long and difficult process for Julius and nearly all of it would take place on the sea.

So, we are going to do something similar today to what we did last week. I want to give you the 3 main points up front and then I want to walk you through the story in Acts 27. Then we will return to the main points and go into more detail of how they apply to our lives today. So, here's what we will see **3 Perspectives to Sustain You through Life's Troubles.**

1. The Creator Rules Over Chaos

2. God Keeps through Challenges

3. We Gratefully Receive from Him

Now, let's return to verse 1 for a moment and notice that the pronoun "we" is used in this verse. This tells us that the author of Acts, Luke, is back with Paul again and going to make the journey with him to Rome. Where has Luke been during Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea? No idea. But he's going with Paul to Rome. You will notice in this passage that there's a great amount of attention to detail. This is clear evidence of an eyewitness and that's what Luke provides. But Luke and Paul aren't the only two Christians on this journey. Look at verse 2.

Aristarchus was with Paul in Ephesus during the riot there. Listen to Acts 19:29. He's a seasoned travel companion of Paul's and once again he's going to accompany him. So, how did this work as far as the boat goes? There weren't commercial liners you could pay for passage on during this time. Julius found a boat of Adramyttium, a city along southern modern-day Turkey that was returning home. He ordered the crew to make room for the soldiers and prisoners and Luke and Aristarchus had to pay for passage on the vessel on their own.

They begin their journey toward southern Asia or modern day Turkey. Notice in verse 3 that Julius treats Paul with kindness, most likely because he's a Roman citizen and an important prisoner. Let me show you a map here of the first part of this journey. Listen to verses 4-5.

They arrive in Myra and change ships. Look at verse 6. Alexandria, of course, was a major city in Egypt. Ships would sail from Alexandria to Rome carrying tons of grain in order to feed the people of Rome. The Roman Emperor would attempt to keep the citizens of Rome happy by providing bread each day as a gift from the Emperor. A lot of this grain came from Alexandria by these ships. Paul and his group end up on one of these ships headed for Italy. Once they leave Myra things start to move slowly and get difficult for them. They are at the mercy of the sea here. Look at verses 7-8 and notice how many words for problems and difficulty are used here.

Look at the map again. They've made it all the way to Crete, but it's taken longer than they wanted. Look at verse 9. When Luke mentions "the Fast" here he's talking about the Day of Atonement, which would have landed somewhere in late September or early October. It was dangerous to sail after Sept. 15th and impossible from November 11th to March 10th. Paul understands this based on his own experience. Look at verse 10.

But since this ship has so much grain on it and the chances of financial gain are many, Paul's recommendation gets outweighed. Look at verses 11-12. They want to get to Phoenix for the winter and they think they have a perfect weather window to make this happen. Look at verse 13. But this is the point in the story where everything goes haywire for them. Verse 14.

The mountains in the middle of Crete would tunnel strong winds down and into the sea and this boat gets caught into one. The winds would have been nearly hurricane force and if the boat got turned, as it does, the sailors would have no way to steer it. Verses 15-16. The lifeboat would have been towed along behind the ship, but it created a dangerous situation in these winds so it had to be hauled onto the ship. The crew tries a number of things to secure the ship. Verses 17-19. But they end up in a nearly hopeless situation. Verse 20.

With no sun and stars they would have had no way to navigate. They were hopelessly lost in the dark and driven wherever the storm would take them. This is the low point in the story. It's the moment when you can't see a way out of the predicament and certainly this would have seemed hopeless for those on board this ship.

It's at this point that Paul stands up and begins to inject hope into the situation. Now, Paul isn't saying "I told you so" but he is reminding them of his advice earlier to get them to trust him now. And he wants them to trust him now because he's going to bring hope because he trusts the God who rules over the sea. Look at verses 21-26. The prediction that they must run aground on some island was not just a pretty good guess. Paul was asserting this because God was overseeing this entire journey.

Look at verses 27-32. They are obviously close to land at this point, which Paul had predicted. So, Paul injects further hope and encouragement into the situation.

Verses 33-38. They finally jettison the wheat, which was the point of the trip to Rome. But they believe Paul and trust that their lives will be saved.

Verses 39-41. At this point some of the soldiers decide to save themselves by killing the prisoners, but Julius won't let that happen to Paul. Verses 42-44. And where are they? Look at 28:1 and here's a map to show you where this storm has driven them.

Alright, now, let's return to our 3 Perspectives now that we understand the story and have experienced the story as Luke tells it.

1. The Creator Rules over Chaos

It's not accidental that we get an entire chapter here with all the details of this difficult sea journey and storm in the book of Acts. Paul has been dealing with the Jews and the Roman Empire and now he faces the chaotic sea. If you zoom out to the whole of Scripture, the sea is nearly always presented as a place of danger, chaos, and unrest. Think of the flood story in Genesis 6-8, the Exodus story in Genesis 14, the story of Jonah, and even the storms on the Sea of Galilee in the life of Jesus. In fact, in Revelation 21:1 one of the ways that John describes the defeat of sin and death and the ushering in of God's kingdom is by pointing out that there will be no more sea.

In Acts 27 we have Paul being carried along like cargo onto different boats and those boats being tossed and driven along the sea. The sailors have no control, and the story reaches a hopeless point in verse 20. And yet, the rest of the story tells us that behind the chaos, God is in complete control, even over the mighty sea.

Listen to some passages from the OT that speak to God's rule over the chaos of the ocean. Job 38:8-11; Psalm 104:24-26; Isaiah 51:15. Let's also remember this story from Mark 4:35-41.

I have been reminded this week in very real ways that even though I want control in life and many times I fancy that I do have control, even the smallest parts of life

are out of my hands. Listen to Psalm 127:1-2. You just don't have control and neither do I. So, you have two options this morning. You can keep trying to control the sea in your life. You can tell the waves to stop it. You can get anxious and frustrated and mad that things won't go the way you want them to. Or, you can humbly recognize that you can stay up all night and watch and it still be in vain. And then you can open your hands and give up control and let the God who made it all and rules over the chaos do what He does, which brings us to our second perspective.

2. God Keeps Through Challenges

They landed on Malta. So close to Italy and Rome. This takes us all the way back to Acts 19:21 and 23:11. God controls the sea and the storm, and he directs it all for his purposes. It will always be for your good. It may not be comfortable, and it may not be fun. But it will be from His loving hand. And that brings us to our 3rd perspective.

3. We Gratefully Receive from Him

Throughout this story Paul is keenly aware of God's providence and provision, and he quickly acknowledges God's care for him with grateful thanksgiving. The part of this story that is maybe most amazing to me is as they are getting close to landing. Let me read verses 33-38 again. I know Trevor preached from Numbers and talked a bit about complaining a few weeks ago. This is the counter punch to the habit and perspective of complaining. Instead of constantly seeing the negative and bad, we gratefully acknowledge the good gifts from God's hand. Being thankful is not an action as much as it is a perspective, a set of lenses, and a way of life.

When Paul insisted that others eat bread at the critical moment of nearing land, he is acknowledging that eating bread—in the context of giving thanks to God—not only sustains the body but instills hope and fuels courage. A eucharistic life proclaims to the world—whether we are standing on dry land or on a ship in a rolling sea—that everything is infused with the grace of God and controlled by the will of God. This requires a radical reorientation of vision—even for many

Christians—but I would argue it is the implicit, if not the explicit, intent of this episode in Acts and even of the story of the gospel. – Dean Pinter

So, what do we learn from this travel story across the Mediterranean sea? God controls the chaos, works for our good in challenges, and that the fitting response is a life controlled by Thankfulness. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 11/16/25

9:15am Service

- Have you ever been on a boat on dangerous water before?
- Describe the background of how Paul finds himself on this boat under the command of Julius the centurion.
- How do we know Luke was with Paul on this journey toward Rome?
- How does the response to Paul change throughout the journey?
- What is the biblical background regarding the sea that informs how we read this story?
- How does Psalm 127:1-2 inform our desire to control?
- Is there a particular area you are prone to try and control that you know you must give up to God?
- How does Paul demonstrate thankfulness in this passage?
- What is the difference between thankfulness as an action and thankfulness as a perspective?

- How could you grow to be a more thankful person?

11:00am Service

- Do you remember giving a show & tell presentation in childhood that you could share with us?
- How is baptism “showing” the good news of the gospel?
- What’s the connection between physical death and spiritual death?
- Explain how “eternal life” isn’t primarily about duration but the quality of life.
- Explain how baptism demonstrates cleansing and what this means for the Christian.
- How do I receive the forgiveness that has been secured through Christ’s death?