A Strange Place To Give Thanks

Acts 27:35 And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat.

The final two chapters of Acts deal with Paul’s journey to Rome as a prisoner.

- It is a fascinating and detailed report
  - of a perilous voyage at sea.
- The account of the voyage
  - is richly detailed
- and the particulars of the story
  - are consistent with ancient maritime practices.
- As a matter of fact James Smith,
  - a Scottish yachtsman and classical scholar,
    - spent years studying
    - the narrative of the voyage,
  - sailing the same route himself
    - in the same time of the year,
  - and he concluded
    - that the details of the biblical account
      - are both accurate
      - and authentic.

Paul’s adventure on this final journey

- begins when Festus decides
  - that Paul must be sent to Rome.
- Paul, along with a group of other prisoners,
  - is placed under the authority of a centurion named Julius.
- Together with their Roman guard,
  - they set out on a lengthy journey
    - that will involve passage on
      - two different merchant ships.
- The first ship was one of the smaller ships
  - that sailed along the coast
    - and was commonly used to transport
      - passengers and cargo.
- This ship had probably sailed
  - down the coast with its cargo
    - and was now returning home mostly empty,
  - which allowed it to take on
    - a large group of Roman soldiers and prisoners.

The first portion of their journey was uneventful.

- They sailed up the Phoenician coast to Sidon.
There they rested and resupplied before casting off again on the next phase of the journey.

- The writer in Acts notes that they sailed “under Cyprus” or “in the lee of Cyprus.”
- That means that they sailed next to the land, allowing Cyprus to help protect them from the wind.
- Then they journeyed north and west along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia.
- Their destination was Myra, a major port city where they would change ships.
- The journey took approximately 2 weeks and the winds were troublesome, but they managed to make a safe passage to the port of Myra.

At Myra, they changed ships.
- The Centurion found an Alexandrian ship that was sailing to Rome.
- Alexandria is in Egypt and Rome was huge importer of Egyptian wheat.
- The Romans imported 150,000 tons of grain from Egypt every year.
- Dozens of ships made the round trip journey from Egypt to Rome to transport those massive amounts of grain.
- Paul and his fellow travelers were given passage on one of those ships, a large seafaring vessel.

By this time the sailing was becoming difficult.
- The prevailing winds were from the west and northwest and, after leaving Myra, the ship was more directly exposed to the wind.
- This made sailing toward Rome very difficult.
- The biblical account says that it took them many days of slow sailing to make it to Cnidus, which was roughly a 2 day journey under favorable conditions.
- At this point, the seasonally bad weather...
forced them to take an alternative sailing route.

- They sailed south to the eastern tip of Crete,
  - then headed under the island,
    - traveling in its lee
    - to help keep the strong northwest wind off of them.
  - This route brought them
    - to the port of Fair Havens
      - on the coast of Crete.

To understand what is happening, as this story unfolds,

- you have to understand that
  - sailing on the Mediterranean Sea
    - was a dicey prospect
      - between the middle of September
      - and the middle of November.
  - But, after mid-November it became nearly impossible.
    - For this reason, ships did not sail the Mediterranean
      - between mid-November
      - and early February.
  - All shipping traffic was shut down for the winter.

The various parties in this sailing expedition

- have recognized, by this point,
  - that they will not make it to Rome
    - before the weather shuts them down.

- They will have to winter somewhere.
  - They were faced with a choice.

- They could hunker down
  - in the port of Fair Haven for the winter,
    - or they could press on
      - for the more favorable
        - port of Phoenix
        - and winter there.

- Their concern would have been the fact
  - that the port at Fair Haven
    - was not well protected
      - from the winter winds.

- Their ship would be battered
  - by those terrible winds
    - all winter long.

- Whereas, the port in Phoenix was well sheltered.

The decision was made to press on for the better port.

- Under good conditions
  - the run from Fair Haven to Phoenix
• could be made in a single day.

• Only one more day of sailing in bad weather
  o and they would be able
    ▪ to settle down in the safety of Phoenix.

• However, Paul was adamantly opposed to moving the ship.
  o He warned them that sailing into the coming storm
    ▪ would lead to disaster,
      • including great loss to ship and cargo.

• But, when a gentle south wind began to blow,
  o the sailors decided they knew more than Paul
    ▪ and they weighed anchor
      • and set out on their run to Phoenix.

About half way between Fair Haven and Phoenix,
• their ship would have rounded Cape Matala.
  o When it did so,
    ▪ the ship was exposed to the prevailing winds,
      • no longer in the lee of Cyprus.

• What happened at that juncture
  o caught everyone by surprise.

• A “wind of hurricane force”
  o came sweeping “down from the island.”

• The wind was well known to ancient sailors,
  o and it had been appropriately named
    ▪ the Euroclydon,
  o which would translate
    ▪ into an English phrase
      • that sailors everywhere
        • are familiar with.
  o It means “northeaster.”

The burst of wind was sudden and destructive.
• It slammed furiously into the ship
  o with such a force
    ▪ that it was immediately blown off course.

• But what made this wind so destructive
  o was the fact that it would not let up.

• It soon became obvious
  o that reaching Phoenix would be impossible.

• The ship “could not head into the wind,”
  o meaning that they were not able to adjust the sails
    ▪ to maintain their desired course.

• Instead they “let her drive”
  o meaning they shortened the sails
    ▪ and put themselves at the mercy of the wind.
The wind drove them hard and far,
  • and there was little they could do
    o to resist it.
  • At one point, during a lull in the storm,
    o while in the lee of an island,
      ▪ they undergirded the ship,
    o which literally means
      ▪ that they bound the ship together
        • with ropes.
  • Huge ropes were passed under the ship,
    o and then attached to devices on each side
      ▪ that tightened the ropes up
        • and effectively drew the planks
          o of the ship together.
  • The insertion of this little detail
    o lets us know what dire straights they were in.
  • For the ship's captain to employ such measures
    o means that he was afraid
      ▪ that the combination of the wind
        • and the waves
          o would literally break his ship in half.

Night and day passed with alarming frequency
  • as they endured the winds
    o and floundered in the waves.
  • Twice they attempted to lighten
    o the load of the ship.
  • Casting off most of their cargo the first time,
    o then casting off all of the ships
      ▪ excess tackle on a second occasion.
  • But things just kept getting worse.
    o The storm got so bad,
      ▪ that day could not be distinguished from night.
  • The clouds were so thick
    o and the storm so dense
      ▪ that for many days they saw
        • neither the sun nor the stars.
  • That was a very frightening prospect
    o for men who navigated by the celestial bodies.
      ▪ They no longer had any idea
        • where they were.
    o They had lost sight of their frame of reference,
      ▪ with no stars,
        • there was no way to know where they were.
or where they were going.

- The text tells us, at this point,
  - that they lost all hope.
- The situation was critical
  - and the outlook was dismal.
    - The circumstance was hopeless.

It was there, in the middle of that hopeless storm
- that the angel of God stood beside Paul
  - and, as the winds raged
    - and the waves beat their trembling vessel,
  - the angel reassured Paul
    - that he and all those that sailed with him
      - were under the protection of God.
- There would be a shipwreck,
  - they would be stranded upon an island
    - but there would be no loss of any man's life
      - as long as they stayed with the ship.
- Paul began to encourage the sailors,
  - telling them that as long as they stuck with the ship,
    - and stayed close to Paul
      - that God had promised safety
        - to all of his sailing companions.
- But his words,
  - though they were filled with hope,
- must have seemed somewhat hollow
  - as they were swept away
    - by the howling wind
  - and drowned beneath the sound
    - of the waves crashing across the deck.

Then, on the 14th night,
- as they were being driven by the storm,
  - the sailors heard a sound
    - that struck terror in their hearts.
- They could hear the sound of water breaking upon rocks.
  - The sound meant that land was near.
- It also meant that one of their greatest fears
  - could come to pass.
- The ship could be driven into the rocks
  - and ground to pieces by the storm.
- In the darkness of the night
  - There was no way for them to try to guide the ship
    - And miss the rocks
  - So the sailors did
the only thing they could,
  • in desperation, they threw 4 anchors
    o off the back of the vessels
  • to try to hold it back
    • as they raced towards the rocks
  • and then, having done that,
    • the bible says that they “wished for daylight.”

On that dark night,
  • after 14 long days
    o caught in the grip of a terrible storm,
      • with an uncertain future looming before them,
        • Paul did an incredible thing.
  • For fourteen days
    o they had been too scared
      • and, perhaps, too seasick to eat.
  • They had been so consumed with the storm,
    o that eating was the last thing on their minds.
  • However, right there,
    o caught in the grip of the storm of a lifetime,
      • listening to the ever louder
        • and ominous sound
          o of water breaking on the rocks,
          o bowed over by the fierce wind
            • and rolling with the assault
              • of the tremendous waves,
  • Paul, the bible says,
    o took some bread and “gave thanks.”

What a strange place to give thanks!
  • I understand eating in the middle of the storm.
    o I mean, I don’t miss too many meals.
  • But if ever there was an occasion
    o where it was OK to grab a quick bite
      • and forgo the “giving of thanks unto God”,
        • surely this was it.
  • But Paul, on what was, perhaps,
    o the darkest night of his life
      • took bread and gave thanks to God!

I’ve come to tell someone in this house today
  • that you can celebrate Thanksgiving,
    o even in the middle of your storm.
  • You can give thanks under any circumstances.
    o You can thank him no matter what is going on in your life!
If we were honest with each other today,
  • we have all been in places
    o like Paul was in.
  • We’ve been in that place
    o where what seemed like a routine day
      ▪ was blown hundreds of miles off course,
    o where we set out with a gentle south wind
      ▪ and out of nowhere a terrible storm
        • blindsided us
          o and drove away all pretense
            ▪ of peace and security.
  • We’ve all been where Paul and those sailors were.
    o Where that sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach
      ▪ makes it where you cannot eat
        • and you cannot sleep.
  • Where it seems like days and nights
    o become so dark and dreadful
      ▪ that they are hard to distinguish
        • from one another.
  • Where life becomes one long, dark, endless storm
    o that feels like it will never let up.
  • Where it seems as if the whole world
    o is crashing down on us.
  • And, if we aren’t careful,
    o we will become just like those sailors,
      ▪ we will become so consumed with the storm
        • that it will destroy all hope in our lives.

Fourteen days without a decent nights sleep.
  • Fourteen days without a warm evening meal.
    o Fourteen days of running on adrenaline,
      ▪ of doing everything that you can
        • just to keep your head above water.
  • Fourteen days of utter hopelessness.
    o [In that kind of setting],
      ▪ the apostle Paul took bread
        • and gave thanks.

I’m going to tell you what I believe, on this weekend after Thanksgiving.
  • I believe that there are some of us
    o who have enjoyed our annual day
      ▪ of feasting and fellowship
        • with our friends and family
    o but who have not really stopped
• to give thanks to God
  • in the middle of our storm.

• I believe that it is difficult sometimes
  o to really deal with
    • what is going on in our lives,
      • so we push it into corner somewhere.
    • We sweep it under a rug.
  o We put on our friendly face
    • and hide our hurt and pain
      • behind a smile and hand shake.

• But I want you to know today,
  o that you don’t have to pretend
    • that it isn’t storming in your life.
  o You don’t have to pretend
    • that everything is OK.

• He already knows
  o what is going on in your life.
    • And I’ve come to tell you today
      • that **you can praise God**
        o in the middle of your storm!

**Come on, somebody, the storm may rage, but God is still on his throne!**

• The wind may blow,
  o but he is still the master of it.

• The waves may be crashing in,
  o tossing you to and fro,
    • but he is still your God
      • and his promise rings true,
        o he will never forsake you.

• He has not abandoned you
  o in the middle of your storm!

Come on, you’ve got plenty to be thankful for.

• There may be some bad things going on in your life,
  o **but your blessings**
    • **still outnumber your tragedies.**
  o Your good days
    • still outweigh your bad days.

• There are still more mountaintops
  o than there are valleys.

• And, if you would really stop to consider
  o the goodness of God,
    • you would find a good reason,
      • on this Sunday afternoon,
        • to give thanks
A Strange Place To Give Thanks

Notes by Pastor Tony McCall

The Pentecostals of Lake City

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I think it is a wonderful testimony

- that Paul didn’t wait until the storm had passed
  - to give thanks unto God.
- There is a tremendous message
  - in the fact that,
    - on the eve of their deliverance,
  - while they were still caught
    - in the grasp of the storm,
  - while the shipwreck was still immanent,
    - **Paul broke bread**
      - and gave thanks unto God!

Some of us make the mistake of thinking

- that we are going to praise him
  - on the other side of the storm.
- Let me let you in on a little secret,
  - **if you can’t thank him**
    - in the middle of the storm,
  - **you won’t thank him**
    - on the other side of the storm.
- If you can’t trust him enough
  - to join your voice with that of Paul
    - and say, “in everything” I will give thanks.
  - then you will always find something
    - that can rob you of your thanks!
  - There’s always going to be something
    - to rob you of your joy.

Life, on this side of glory,

- is always going to be short
  - and full of trouble.
- You better learn to give thanks
  - in the middle of your storm!
- I’ve watched folks backslide and lose out with God
  - because they couldn’t learn this simple principle.
    - **God deserves your praise ALL THE TIME!**

1 Thessalonians 5:18

*In every thing give thanks:* for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

In everything give thanks!

- In every circumstance give thanks:
  - in joy and in sorrow;
In sickness and in health;
o in poverty and in provision;
o in good times and in bad.
  ▪ In everything give thanks.

• You can thank God in any circumstance
  o because the circumstance has no bearing
    ▪ on the thank-worthiness of God!
      • He still deserves your thanks!
  o You can thank him under any conditions
    ▪ because, under any conditions,
      • he is still good
        o and he still deserves your thanks!
  o If he never blesses you again,
    ▪ you could spend the rest of your life
      • thanking him for what
        o he has already done for you!
  o If he never provides for you again,
    ▪ you still would never have
      • a valid reason not to thank him
    ▪ because he has already
      • done far and away more
        o than you could ever begin to thank him for!
  o Our whole lives ought to be
    ▪ one continued thanksgiving offering
      • for all of the blessings of redemption
        o that God has already given us.

In everything, Paul said, give thanks!
• Yes, that includes where you are right now.
  o In the middle of your storm,
    ▪ in the midst of your trial,
      • in the course of your catastrophe,
      • in everything give thanks!
  o You can thank him in the worst storms of your life.
  o You can thank him in the deepest valley of your life.
    ▪ You can thank him in the darkest night of your life.
  o You can thank Him in any circumstance.
    • In everything give thanks.

Ephesians 5:20
Giving thanks at all times, for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, even to God the Father.

Not only can you thank God in your storm.
• You can even thank God for your storm!
Oh, now pastor, you’ve done gone off the reservation.

> It’s what the word says.

> It doesn’t just say to thank him in everything.

> **It says to thank God for everything.**

How can I do that?

> How can I, in the middle of the worst storm of my life,

> with the knowledge that the rising sun

> is going to bring a terrible shipwreck,

> how can I thank God for the storm?

Let me tell you how.

> **In order to thank God FOR everything,**

> **you have to believe that God**

> “works all things together

> **for good to them that love him.**”

> You have to be able to trust him.

How can you thank God for storms?

> How can you thank God for valleys?

> How can you thank God for the terrible trials

> that burden your soul?

> **You have to trust him!**

> You have to be willing to believe

> that nothing in your life

> has taken God by surprise.

> That the wind that broadsides you

> and shook your world,

> didn’t take God by surprise.

> He already knew it was coming.

> He already knew you’d face this trial;

> that you would walk through this valley;

> that you would struggle against this storm.

> And he has already made a way to bring you through!

> You have to believe that God knew

> that the storm was coming

> and that God is going to take care of you

> in the middle of the storm.

That’s the kind of mindset that you have to have.

> That’s the kind of mindset that Paul had

> when he took bread and gave thanks

> on the deck of a ship

> that was being tossed by a terrible storm.

> **You have to be willing to trust**
in the divine providence of God!

- You have to be willing to trust
  - that God knows what he's doing.
- You have to be willing to say,
  - I am not the master of my life,
  - I don't order my own footsteps,
  - I don't determine my own path
    ▪ and I CAN TRUST THE ONE WHO DOES!

So I will give him thanks
- because I trust him
  - in the middle of my storm!
    ▪ I can thank Him FOR the storm!
- Nothing establishes your trust in God,
  - like your praise and thankfulness
    ▪ in the middle of adverse circumstances.
- That's when you establish the fact
  - that the storm doesn't rule my life,
    ▪ God does!
  - And I will give him thanks!

Corrie ten Boom in *The Hiding Place*
- relates an incident that taught her
  - always to be thankful.
- She and her sister, Betsy,
  - had just been transferred
    ▪ to the worst German prison camp
      • they had seen yet,
        ▪ Ravensbruck.
- On entering the barracks,
  - they found them extremely overcrowded
    ▪ and flea-infested.

That morning, their Scripture reading
- in 1 Thessalonians had reminded them
  - to rejoice always,
  - pray constantly,
  - and give thanks in all circumstances.
- Betsy told Corrie to stop and thank the Lord
  - for every detail of their new living quarters.
- Corrie began to tentatively thank God
  - for everything in her new home.
    ▪ Until she got to the fleas.
- Corrie flatly refused to give thanks for the fleas.
  - But her sister, Betsy, insisted
that the word said to give thanks for everything.

- So little Corrie ten Boom
  - finally gave in
    - and thanked God for the fleas.

They spent several long months in that particular camp

- and, though the conditions were atrocious,
  - one thing about that camp was special,
- the Nazis never came into their barracks
  - and broke up their Bible Studies
    - or prayer meetings.
- They were shocked.
  - Never before had they found such latitude.
- The guards pretty much left them alone
  - once they were in their barracks.
- **It was not until several months later**
  - that they learned that the reason
    - the guards left them alone in the barracks
  - was because
    - they didn’t want to endure...
      - the fleas.

What is it in your life that you are having a hard time thanking God for?

- Have you ever stopped to consider
  - that your life isn’t ordered by chance
    - and random circumstance.
- The very thing that you struggle to be thankful for
  - has been placed in your life for a reason.
- Why don’t you try, this afternoon,
  - to lift your hands to heaven
    - and thank God for your storm?
      - Thank you, Jesus, for the trial.
  - Come on, somebody!
    - It’s time to break bread and give thanks.
      - Even though the storm isn’t over yet.
      - Even though the trial hasn’t passed yet.
      - Even though the shipwreck is still coming.
        - **It is time to give thanks!**

CLOSE

They tell me it is poor form to end a sermon by introducing a new text.

- However, for every rule there is an exception
  - and today must be the exception.
- The One Hundred and Third Psalm starts this way:
Psalm 103

1 Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.
2 Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:

Forget not all his benefits.

• DL Moody once pointed out
  o that the psalmist doesn’t say
    ▪ that you have to remember all of the benefits of God.
  o He just says don’t forget them all.

Who could remember all the benefits of God?
• You could never even begin to list the many things
  o that you should be thankful for.
    ▪ But that’s not the command.
• The Psalmist didn’t tell you to remember them all,
  o he just warned you against
    ▪ forgetting them all.

Surely you can remember some of them!
• Surely, if you stop and consider
  o the goodness of God in your life today,
    ▪ you can remember a good reason to be thankful.
• Surely you can remember at least one good reason
  o to give thanks to God,
    ▪ even in the middle of your storm!

STAND

It is Thanksgiving weekend
• and we’ve spent time with friends and family.
  o We’ve enjoyed the meals
    ▪ and shared some quality time together.
• We’ve laughed and reminisced
  o and enjoyed our holiday.
• But tomorrow is Monday
  o and tomorrow life returns to normal.
• And whatever storm you were going through is still there.
  o Tomorrow morning the wind is going to howl,
    ▪ the waves are going to rock your boat
      • and the shipwreck is going to loom over the horizon.
• Here we stand, in the middle of the storm.
  o There’s nothing that we can do about the storm.
    ▪ We can’t change the circumstances,
      • as much as we would like to.
But we can put our faith in God.
  • We can find in our hearts
    • the kind of confidence in our God
      o that allows us to thank him for the fleas.
  • It is time, this afternoon,
    o to break bread and give thanks unto God
      • in the middle of your storm!!