



# 2023 Weekly Devotions

Week of: June 26<sup>th</sup> - July 2<sup>nd</sup>

Sermon: June 25<sup>th</sup>





June 26

**Luke 8:22-25**

Interestingly enough, I find a great deal of comfort in this passage as it relates to the wind and the waves. If you haven't already figured it out, the sovereignty of God is one of the most important "rocks" I stand on as I journey through my own life. The word "sovereign" describes an entity with supreme power and authority. In reference to God, it also includes the right to exercise His ruling authority over His creation. God created all things, so by nature, has the right to rule all things. We can rest in His sovereignty because of His omniscience (all knowing), His omnipotence (all powerful), and His omnipresence (everywhere present) combined with His absolute holiness and goodness. How does this relate to our passage from Sunday (Acts 27)?

The reason that this doctrine matters so much is that we should believe nothing happens in the universe without God's permission. He has the power and knowledge to prevent anything from happening, so everything that does happen is at least allowed by Him. He allows events to happen and causes others to happen to accomplish a perfect, just, and "right" outcome. His will is always furthered. So, when you read Acts 27 and picture in your mind the various winds blowing the ship that Paul and others were on all over the place, know that God is sovereignly using that wind to direct that ship where he ultimately wants it to end up.

There are times in Acts 27 in which the wind rises to hurricane force (v. 14) and other times when it becomes a "moderate south wind" (v. 13) that gently calls the sailors to action. In both instances, it is God who is controlling the wind in order to accomplish His will for the lives of all on the ship as well as those on the island of Malta and other places. The reason this comforts me so much is that I am able to see every event in my day as the loving hand of God "directing my steps." You may recall that Solomon wrote in Proverbs 3:6, "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight." It will be "straight" as far as it is straight in line with His perfect will. Psalm 37:23 also says, "The steps of a man are ordered by the Lord." This is only comforting as it is combined with His love for His children.

Another example of God controlling the wind and waves can be found in Luke 8:22-25. There we read of the time when Jesus and His disciples got into a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee. Jesus said to them as they boarded, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." He took a little nap as a strong storm was summoned up by the Sovereign of the universe. By the way, all storms are directed by our God. In Psalm 135:7 it says, "He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; who makes lightnings for the rain, who brings forth the wind from His treasuries." In the book of Jonah it is written, "The Lord hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up" (Jonah 1:4). When the Lord needs a strong wind to create destruction, fear, or dependence, He calls one up. Likewise, when He needs a gentle breeze to draw us from the shore into the water, He can do that too.

The Lord was teaching the disciples an important and necessary lesson for their future dedication and faithfulness to the gospel and the ministry to which they were called. He created a strong, fierce wind to demonstrate their dependence upon Him and His power over nature and all things in it. He calmed the wind and the waves to show that He, Jesus Christ, was God, Creator, and the ruler of the storms of life. We need to know this deeply when the storms hit. In Paul's life, every wind was sovereignly guided to direct the steps of His man to those who needed the gospel.

June 27

## 2 Corinthians 1:8-10

Yesterday I wrote about the sovereignty of God in directing a person's steps. Today I want to add to that the belief that as He directs our steps, He sets the stage for His chosen vessels to shine for His glory as He gives them opportunity to bear witness to biblical Truth. You see that crystal clear in the circumstances of Acts 27. Everything that happens set the scene for Paul to take center stage. I am reminded from this text once again that there is great value in first helping a person recognize, understand, and admit their "lostness" before the good news of Jesus Christ makes sense or has value.

When Paul first speaks to the centurion, the captain, and the pilot, they all disregard his advice (v. 10). We should see this as an example of a person who is not ready to hear the truth that we have to share about Jesus Christ and their need for a Savior. You see, at this point the leaders on the ship believe they can handle the situation and feel completely independent of an outsider's help, especially a prisoner. The Lord is about to change the circumstances and elevate His man to a place of prominence, influence, and leadership. I find it slightly humorous that a prisoner is going to be the one calling the shots shortly – just the way God was planning.

To prepare the people for the message that Paul would ultimately share about Christ, God had to raise him up in their eyes. First, God sent a calm, warm southern breeze that coaxed the crew into the deep waters. Feeling that they were in control and wise in their decision, they weighed anchor and set sail (v. 13). The time of year, likely October, was already a dangerous time to attempt this voyage. Paul, having sailed this way many times on missionary journeys knew from experience the dangers of such a voyage this late in the year. Of course, who was he to have any sage advice for the crew? Obviously, the answer was – nobody!

A short time after sailing along Crete, the Lord changed the wind. He had them where he wanted them and now, He lowered the boom. A violent wind so ominous that it had been given a name, the Euraquilo, began to blow hard against them (v.14). It was an old-fashioned nor'easter that blew so strong that the sailors could only give in to its force and let it blow them wherever it wanted. It literally blew them further out into the Mediterranean than they meant to sail, and they had lost all control of the vessel (v.15). The relentless storm did not let up, so the crew decided to throw its cargo overboard to lighten the weight of the ship (v.18). This continued for days until the crew "abandoned all hope for being saved" (v.20). This, dear friends, is precisely where God wanted them to be. Now, they were ready to listen to His chosen man – Paul.

Paul reminds us he is still just a man when he begins his admonition. It begins with, "I told you so. Ya'll should have listened to me" (v.21). After he gets that out, he proceeds to lead them with confidence and conviction. He encourages them to be brave and not to give up by pointing them to God. The people on board had been brought sovereignly and mercifully to a place of brokenness, humility, and need. They were ready to listen and Paul's position as a prisoner no longer mattered. He pointed them to God, and they were open to the message of hope.

Notice that it was all about what God said, in this case, through one of His angels. Paul did not take credit, but instead told them God's words. Friends, that is all we need to do today. Take your time to study and know the Word of God and then just tell people what He said. When they are ready, they will listen. Until then, pray that God will do whatever He needs to in order to prepare their hearts, even if that means bringing storms!

June 28

### Deuteronomy 8:2-3

Last week Pastor Aaron made a statement that resonated with many of us during his sermon. He stated, "Politicians don't lead, they follow." We all understood him to be making reference to the fact that most politicians tend not to do what is best for the country but what is best for themselves, considering public opinion. It is all about the votes and staying in power. Too many pastors "lead" congregations in like manner. They are more concerned with keeping their jobs, avoiding the ire of the powers that be, or simply taking the easy path.

A godly leader is going to be one who makes the decisions that are pleasing to God and best for the congregation. He is the man who speaks with authority because He is led by the Word of God and speaks that which the Lord has ordained. Paul stated in Acts 27:25 these simple words, "For I believe God." These words, spoken with confidence and conviction in the middle of a storm, served to settle the hearts of those around him and to produce in them the courage to keep fighting. At a moment when the masses were about to give up because all hope was lost, a true leader inspired the people around him to follow and to believe.

True strength, courage, and faith show up in trials and seasons of testing. Consider today how many times Paul had faced adversity that pressed him beyond his own strength. At the "end of his rope", he always found God faithful and so his faith and trust grew. As it grew, his boldness, confidence, and determination did too. He stated to the Corinthians, "For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life" (2 Cor. 1:8). Anyone who thinks that God will not allow more to come upon you than you can bear, misunderstands the Bible. There was a purpose for the excessive adversity which is found in the text. Paul went on to say, "We had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead" (2 Cor. 1:9). There was a purpose for the pain as is always the case.

God goes to great lengths to develop godliness in His people. The tasks that we are entrusted with hold great responsibility and importance. Jesus invested in and taught the disciples because He knew they would need to be "all in" after He ascended back to heaven. The challenges are many, the pressures are great, and the opposition formidable and relentless. For a man or woman of God to stand strong and faithful against such evil, they will need to be well tested, trained, and convicted that biblical truths are worth dying for. True leaders rise to the top when the most intense storms come crashing down. Paul was one such leader and we see in Acts 27 that God had prepared him for this moment and because of all that he had walked through with God, he was ready!

In Deuteronomy 8, it is written, "You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not" (v.2). Moses continues to write, "He humbled you and let you be hungry...so that you would know man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord" (v.3). In Acts 27, Paul said, "I believe God!!" That, dear ones, is what gives a man the steel in his spine to stand up and lead the way God wants him to. He is not driven by popular opinion, ungodly pressures, convenience, or personal gain. He does what is right in the eyes of God and what is necessary and right for the people of God.

June 29

**Genesis 18:32, 30:27, 39:5**

Solomon wrote in Proverbs 11:11 these words, "By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted." God only knows how blessed an entire city is because of the handful of His people who reside there. I sometimes think of how God will send rain on a godly person's yard or garden because He loves them, and at the same time, the lost family gets rain on their yard too simply because they are in close proximity to the righteous. The ungodly may never know that it was common grace and the blessing of the righteous in their vicinity.

In Acts 27, there is a fascinating verse given to us. Luke records what the angel of God said to Paul. He wrote, "Do not be afraid Paul, you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you" (v.24). God communicated to Paul that he did not need to worry even though they were experiencing days of hurricane force winds because He was going to get Paul safely to shore. The interesting part of the verse is the second half. There Luke said that God had granted that all the other passengers would be safe too because of Paul. Think about it for a moment. Because God was going to spare Paul, the rest of the men were going to be saved too.

My opening passage reminds us that an entire city can be blessed because of the blessings given to the righteous by God. Many verses exist in the Bible that confirm this truth. Today I have chosen several from the book of Genesis. In Genesis 18:32 we read the end of the conversation between Abraham and the Lord concerning the ungodliness of Sodom and Gomorrah. God decides to tell Abraham that He is going to destroy both cities because of the rampant wickedness found among the people. Abraham begins to plead with God to spare the city on behalf of the righteous few that might still live there. He starts with asking God if there are 50 righteous people left would He spare the entire city. God says yes, He would spare the city for the sake of the 50. This exchange goes back and forth until Abraham is asking God to spare the city for 10 and He agrees to spare the whole city for the sake of 10 (Gen. 18:22-33).

Again, we see in Genesis 30:27 the same truth. Laban is speaking to Joseph, and he says, "If now it pleases you, stay with me; I have divined that the Lord has blessed me on your account." Again, in Genesis 39:5 it is written, "It came about that from the time he made him overseer over his house, and over all that he owned, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph." This was a statement made by Pharaoh in reference to Joseph. This is Joseph who was sold into slavery by his brothers. I am sure that you get the point that I am making. Godly people are a blessing to the ungodly even if they don't know it and do not care.

We see this reality playing out on board the ship as it is tossed and tattered by the waves on the Mediterranean in Acts 27. God assured Paul that he would make it to Rome and those with him would reap the benefit of God's plan and favor on Paul's life. Dear ones, it is important that you understand how important and necessary you may be in your families' life. It may well be that you are the reason the blessings of God continue to fall on your family and why they are kept from harm or danger as much as they are. They may not be thankful for you, but you matter immensely. In a real sense, Paul was their connection to God just like you may be in many circumstances. After all, as children of God we are His ambassador's representing Him here on planet earth. Many will be the times when someone will listen to you because they think they are hearing indirectly from God. Live well church family because you may be the reason someone else is still living and breathing and still has a shot at getting it right.

June 30

**Psalm 19:13; Luke 4:1-12**

I wrote a few days ago on the subject of godly leadership. One characteristic of godly, spiritual leadership is that of good judgment. Godly leadership will certainly be courageous and faith-driven, but it will also utilize practical wisdom too. The point that I am making today is that godly leadership is not void of practical wisdom and reasonable principles of leadership. In verses 9 and 10, Paul is simply utilizing his own experiences on the Mediterranean and knowledge that he had gained about sailing throughout his life. When he tells them that he perceives it would not be wise to set sail from Fair Havens, that is not because he had a “word” from God. Paul did not say, “God told me so and so.” No, he simply said based on this time of year, it is extremely dangerous for a ship to be on the open waters of the Mediterranean.

It is mentioned in verse 9 that “the fast was over.” This is most likely in reference to the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur which fell in October this particular year (A.D. 59 most likely). Now, keep in mind that Paul knew he would get to Rome, but just because he knew he was going to get to Rome, he didn’t lose his sense of practicality. There was no need to put God to the test. Jesus told the devil as much in Luke 4 during His wilderness temptation (Luke 4:12). Paul saw no need to behave foolishly in regard to practical wise decision making. He never presumed on God to do what was stupid from a practical standpoint to gain what was promised from a divine one. He was not presumptuous, which simply means he was not inappropriately overconfident. Like David said, “Keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins” (Psalm 19:13). He was patient for God’s will to unfold in a natural manner. He didn’t test it. He knew that God could do the miraculous but that He most often worked through normal and natural means.

“Satan tried to get Christ in all three temptations to jump ahead of God. You’re the Son of God and You’re hungry. Turn those stones into bread. And, in effect, Jesus said, “He’ll feed Me when He’s ready. I’ll wait for Him.” Why don’t You jump off the temple, dive off the pinnacle of the temple and the people will acknowledge You as the Messiah. “God has a time plan, I’ll wait for Him,” Jesus said. I’ll give You the kingdoms of the world. “God will do that in His time, I’ll wait for that time if I have to suffer in the meantime.” You see Jesus could never be forced to presume to be foolish about taking something that had been promised to Him until God’s good time for it.” – John MacArthur

There are so many people who do this in our society today. Television evangelist are forever pleading with people for money and manipulating them with these words, “The Lord told me.” They intentionally lead people down a primrose path to a dead-end while they’re presuming on God and misleading people. They elevate their own thoughts and desires to “God said.” Too many people appear to have lost their sense of practicality and somehow think they can make poor decisions in the name of God and He will make it work. One of the reasons we are working hard to get our mortgage paid down before Nov. of 2026 is because the bank will have the freedom to increase our interest rate at that time. Practical wisdom simply says that is not good so work at eliminating the debt. God didn’t say in a dream that we should do this. It is simply smart for us to try. Now I hope that along the way, the Lord will do some amazing God-sized miracles to help us accomplish the task. But we will allow God to accomplish what God will accomplish in God’s own time.

July 1

**Isaiah 40:8**

We have pondered the way God sets the stage for His people to shine His glory into the world. We've considered how He sovereignly controls events, weather, and the steps of men. Today I want us to think about the way He manifests His prophetic ability to magnify His very existence to a doubting people. It is one thing and a necessary thing for the crowd to grow in their respect and confidence in Paul. The truth, however, is that Paul cannot save them. They don't need to believe in Paul for salvation. They need to believe in God and His Son. So, it is paramount that in all of these happenings in Acts 27, that the people with Paul come to believe in the God whom Paul is representing.

The way God proves Himself to them is by telling Paul what He is going to do and then relying on Paul to have the faith to tell them exactly what God actually said. The goal of course is to see that what God says is going to happen does indeed happen. After Paul told them that they needed to eat and trust God, that the ship would be destroyed, and that none of them would lose their lives, and it in fact happened, he had their attention! The first thought those people must have had is, "You know, that God that Paul talked about, He was right. His word must be true. He said this would happen and it has happened." You see how God not only credibly establishes the authenticity of His leader, Paul, but He established His own legitimacy as well. God keeps His word. Isaiah the prophet wrote, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever" (Isa. 40:8). He also said, "So shall my Word be that goes forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa. 55:11). Jesus said that heaven and earth will pass away but that His Word would not pass away.

God's word is reliable, and God established that once again in Acts 27 through all of the events that took place over those 2 – 3 weeks on the sea. Peter said, "The Word of God abides forever" (1 Peter 1:25). Jesus also stated in John 17:17, "Thy Word is truth." So, on the ship in the middle of a storm, God said to a group of sailors and prisoners, "Here's My word, watch and see if it is true." God has often used predictive prophecy to establish His divine authority in history. When God says it will happen and then it happens, that provides convincing evidence that He is indeed God. God moves and reveals Himself so that those who see Him will trust Him for salvation.

This matters to us today because we must also believe that God has revealed to us necessary truths through His Word and in particular the New Covenant. Christ has promised to prepare a place for us in heaven and to come again and gather His bride unto Himself (John 14:1-3). He has promised to resurrect us after death (1 Cor. 15, 2 Cor. 4:14-15). He has promised to never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5) and to protect our salvation by His power (1 Pet. 1:5) He has promised to provide all the grace we need to face everything we encounter in life (2 Cor. 12:9). He has promised to reward obedience and punish sin (1 Cor. 3:14-15). Brothers and sisters, this matters because it is upon these promises that we base our obedience. The precious promises that Peter speaks of in 2 Peter 1:4 become the motivation for our faithfulness. I hope that like the sailors and passengers on the ship in Acts 27, you have come to the place where you take God at His Word at every turn. I pray that you base your life, your decisions, and your hopes on His faithfulness, His goodness, and His power to bring to pass all that He ordains.



July 2

**Proverbs 16:7; Daniel 1:9**

Sometimes when we read the Bible, we can gloss over statements so quickly that we fail to see the spiritual significance in the verse. One such statement is found in Acts 27:3. There we read, "The next day we put in at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul with kindness and allowed him to go to his friends and receive care." Who was this Julius and why did he treat Paul kindly?

We know from previous passages in Acts that a church had been planted in Sidon, so it is likely that Paul was allowed to visit the church and his Christian "family" while he was there. It is roughly 70 miles from Caesarea to Sidon. I only mention that because I wonder what happened in those 70 miles that caused Julius to be kind to Paul. It isn't really likely that he got to know Paul during that time. One would not think that a Roman Centurion would "hang out" with a prisoner. Julius took quite the gamble by letting a prisoner go ashore with great liberty. If he had lost a prisoner, he would pay the prisoner's sentence himself. That was Roman law at the time.

There can only be one real reason that this happened. Obviously, Festus honestly believed that Paul was innocent and absolutely no threat to anyone. He must have communicated that convincingly to Julius before boarding, and Julius took it to heart. By the way, the Greek word translated in our text as "received care", is typically used in medical circumstances. This could mean that Paul was sick by this time. Keep in mind that he had been a prisoner for more than 2 years at this point and was likely rather worn down. I mention this only to emphasize the amazing grace given him and his deep faith to press on as a man of God carrying the mantle of the gospel for the glory of God.

Beyond the high likelihood that Festus had spoken well of Paul to Julius, there lies a deeper truth that encourages me today. Proverbs 16:7 says, "When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." That is such a comforting verse. Now, we all know people who simply do not like us and never will. This is why the Bible also says, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men" (Rom. 12:18). The Proverb does not mean that you will never experience the hatred of an enemy. BUT, there are plenty of times when God moves the hearts of even those who are not "in our camp" to act kindly towards us and in favorable ways for us.

We see that in the lives of men like Daniel and Joseph. Both men experienced captivity at the hands of enemy nations. In both cases, God moved the men in charge of them to look favorable upon them. For Joseph, it was the chief jailer who God caused to be kind towards him (Gen. 39:21). In Daniel's case it was the commanding official over the prisoners (Dan. 1:9). The Bible says, "Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials." Dear ones, do you see how even in your darkest and most difficult circumstances God can still actively and favorably turn the hearts of those "over" you. The heart of the king can be turned just like God turns a stream down a mountain side (Prov. 21:1).

If you have a difficult boss or someone standing in your way seemingly as a roadblock, remember to pray and to make sure your ways are pleasing to the Lord first. You cannot expect God to move the hearts of others if His truth and wisdom hasn't moved your own heart. Trust God and know that there is purpose to everything that He does and allows. You live right before God and let Him handle the people around you.