

## SIX CHARACTERISTICS OF IMPACTFUL CHRISTIANS

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Acts 27:1-12

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Since ancient times, writers have pictured life as a journey or a voyage. *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan is based on this theme, as is Homer's *Odyssey*. We sometimes use the voyage metaphor in everyday conversation. We say things like, "Smooth sailing!" or "Don't make your life a shipwreck!" or "Sink or swim!" When a Christian dies, we might say, "She has reached the other shore."

Sailing, even on the most modern of ships today, is rather like human life—sometimes slow, sometimes calm, sometimes stormy, sometimes romantic and restful, sometimes dangerous, and even sometimes disastrous; sailing is always full of surprises. Twelve years ago, Becky and I went on a Caribbean cruise for our 30<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, during what was supposed to be one of the calmest times of the year. Suddenly out of nowhere, a tropical storm hit. That ship was tossed around so much that many of the crew who were to serve us our meals couldn't work due to seasickness! So sailing is like life, an adventure.

As we come to our study of **Acts** beginning with **Acts 27:1**, the next fifty-four verses read like a travel log, recording the Apostle Paul's course leaving Caesarea, crossing the Mediterranean Sea, and eventually landing in Rome. His voyage was quite an adventure and was filled with surprises.

From the voyage's beginning to Paul's arrival in Italy, these surprises tested the character of Paul and those Christians around him. They revealed what character qualities were required of first century believers for the Gospel to have so impacted their world in such a short period of time. The writer of **Acts**, Dr. Luke, uses his journal to show us how one man's faith can make a big difference for him and others amidst the storms of life. I trust that in the weeks to come, you will find our study of Paul's journey realistic, encouraging, and challenging to your own faith and Christ's call upon your life.

An observation from the outset of **Acts 27** and **28** is that Luke uses the first person plural pronoun "**we**" throughout, to indicate that he accompanied Paul from Caesarea to Rome. He mentions names of places (and some are rather obscure) that scholars have identified as being accurate; he describes climatic conditions that could have been understood only if the one describing the scene was an eyewitness. This is quite different than the earlier portions of **Acts**, where Luke had to rely

upon the testimony of other eye witnesses in order to record how the early church was birthed. But now he is there, giving us the vivid details of their travel itinerary, the storm they experienced, and the subsequent shipwreck.

I will attempt to take you back to the late summer breezes blowing off the Mediterranean Sea and the palace that sat next to Herod the Great's harbor that he constructed and named Caesarea after Caesar. I want you to try to imagine with me what the previous weeks must have been like for Paul as he waited for his appeal to Caesar to be put in play, so that he could finally be on his way to Rome and receive an acquittal. How would you have handled living under house arrest for more than two years when you were totally innocent of all charges made against you? I'm convinced that Paul was successful in life and ministry because, as he sought after Jesus Christ, Jesus transformed Paul into a man of such character that he became a force to be reckoned with as it concerned the gospel.

In our passage for this morning, Festus had finally made arrangements for Paul to be shipped off to Rome. Since Paul lived in the governor's palace on the harbor of Caesarea, it's quite natural to presume that his trip to Rome began there. We pick up Paul's latest adventure at **Acts 27:1**, where we read:

**<sup>1</sup>When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, they proceeded to deliver Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan cohort named Julius. <sup>2</sup>And embarking in an Adramyttian ship, which was about to sail to the regions along the coast of Asia, we put out to sea accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica.**

Even though Festus gave the order to have Paul transported to Rome, the fulfillment of his order couldn't take place immediately. It depended on a number of factors and people. For instance, the governor would not send to Rome just one prisoner accompanied by a centurion and a band of soldiers. That would be a waste of manpower and resources. He would wait until he had a group of prisoners from various parts of Palestine so that they could fill the empty spaces of a freighter headed to Italy.

Eventually, they found a ship to accommodate a sizeable company. (Note in **verse 37** that the second ship that carried them and was wrecked carried 276 people.)

Large freighters would periodically show up at Caesarea and then sail along the coast to deliver and receive freight from various ports, providing passage for voyagers along the way.

Luke specifically states that they “**sailed for Italy**,” not for Rome. Travelers to Rome often journeyed by ship to the southern part of Italy and then walked to the Imperial City. Sometimes, depending upon the weather, they would sail to the southernmost tip of Asia and then make their way up and over to Macedonia and then take a short boat trip to eastern Italy and on to Rome. Although that was the cheaper way to go, over land, it wasn’t very fast. But sometimes it was the only safe route to travel from September through March.

There were several key figures that traveled with Paul. The first mentioned was the centurion in charge of the Augustan cohort. His name was Julius. The Augustan cohort was composed of office-couriers who went to and from Rome and the army. They were employed for numerous purposes that demanded communication between the emperor and his armies and provinces.

According to the historian, John Pollock, Julius commanded a detail of about a dozen soldiers. Of all his prisoners, Paul was the only one of rank. Since Paul was a Roman citizen who had appealed to Caesar, he would have enjoyed greater privileges and would have been shown more respect than the regular prisoners. We will see the respect shown to Paul throughout the story. Julius demonstrated fairness, consideration, and mercy to Paul. He was even permitted to bring on board two attendants who were listed as his personal slaves. (John Pollock, *The Apostle*, p. 274)

Those two “slaves” would have been Luke and Aristarchus. Seeing as Paul had been a prisoner for more than two years and had to depend on friends and relatives for food, clothing, and other necessities while in prison, I presume that he was not able to pay his friends’ way to accompany him. Hence, these beloved, trusted friends and proven travel companions must have paid their own way to serve as Paul’s slaves. Why would they do such a thing? It was all for the sake of the one who had presented Jesus to them, and for the sake of others hearing the gospel through Paul’s ministry.

Most of us know Luke, a physician by trade and follower of Christ, discipled by Paul. But who was Aristarchus? Aristarchus first appears in **Acts** when he was seized by the angry rioters at Ephesus. **(19:29)** He accompanied the apostle on the final leg of Paul’s third missionary journey back home to Jerusalem with the

offering from the Gentile churches to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (20:4). Paul later writes in one of his prison epistles that Aristarchus was his fellow volunteer prisoner, who took care of him while he was in prison in Rome. (Colossians 4:10) Hence, we may conclude that Aristarchus had been a long time traveling companion, disciple, and dear trusted friend of Paul's.

Along with Julius, Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus, there were other soldiers and prisoners aboard a freighter that stopped at various places until it reached its home port of Adramyttium. This harbor city was located along the northwest coast of Asia Minor.

**“<sup>3</sup>The next day [in other words, after just one day of sailing] we put in at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul with consideration and allowed him to go to his friends and receive care.”** Sidon stood about seventy miles north of Caesarea near Tyre, where Paul and his party had some years before stopped for a week on their way to Jerusalem (21:3-6). Because the work of loading and unloading the freighter was time-consuming, Julius gave Paul permission to go ashore to visit friends in the city. Paul's “**friends**” were probably members of the church there (11:19). Julius apparently knew that Paul was a Roman citizen and not a criminal, and for this reason he was kindly disposed toward him. But I doubt he would have done so without a soldier to accompany Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus everywhere they went.

These saints that made up the church at Sidon were special. They probably had no idea that the three men were coming until they heard the knock on the door. The stated purpose of meeting with their friends was for fellowship and “**receiving care**.” What “**care**” they received specifically, I don't know. It could have meant being given the opportunity to have a good meal, a shower, and a clean bed for the night before they headed on this long voyage. Whatever it was, the men showed up unannounced, and their friends more than welcomed them and their guard and provided for their needs so that Paul could get on with his mission for Jesus' sake.

**<sup>4</sup>From there we put out to sea and sailed under the shelter of Cyprus because the winds were contrary. <sup>5</sup>When we had sailed through the sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia.**

**<sup>6</sup>There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy, and he put us aboard it.**

By staying close to the shoreline, the captain and his crew would take advantage of the protective shelter of land areas that prevented their ship from being hammered by heavy northerly winds. But the time came when they ran out of protective shelter and they had to face the northwesterly breezes.<sup>1</sup>

Because of the westerly headwinds, this sailing trip from Caesarea to Myra took three to four weeks. Myra was a major harbor, where passengers booked voyages on ships going to various parts of the Mediterranean basin. Julius and his men could have stayed aboard the freighter to Adramyttium, crossed the Aegean Sea, and traveled overland to the west coast of Macedonia. But Julius chose to take the quicker route and go directly to Italy.

In the first century, Rome depended on Egypt for its grain supply; in consequence, the Roman government developed a relationship with certain freight companies to transport large quantities of grain from Alexandria to Puteoli in southern Italy. Using his military authority, Julius arranged passage for the prisoners, his soldiers, and himself on an Alexandrian ship that was bound for Italy.<sup>2</sup> By the standards of the day, the grain freighters were immense, measuring 180 feet long, 45 feet wide, and 43 feet deep. Some of the passengers on these vessels were given small cabins, but most of them had to stay on the open deck, where they made their own shelters. According to the Roman/Jewish historian Josephus, conditions on board were excessively crowded.<sup>3</sup>

Check out what happened on the next leg of their voyage, in verse 7.

**<sup>7</sup>When we had sailed slowly for a good many days, and with difficulty had arrived off Cnidus, since the wind did not permit us to go farther, we sailed under the shelter of Crete, off Salmone; <sup>8</sup>and with difficulty sailing past it we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.**

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<sup>1</sup> Kistemaker, S. J., & Hendriksen, W. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (Vol. 17, p. 918). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

<sup>2</sup> Kistemaker, S. J., & Hendriksen, W. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (Vol. 17, p. 919). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

<sup>3</sup> Kistemaker, S. J., & Hendriksen, W. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (Vol. 17, p. 919). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Because of the strong winds from the west and northwest, after many days and little progress, the craft finally arrived at Cnidus, a city located on the tip of a long peninsula that juts from the coast in a westerly direction. When the vessel came to Cnidus, it no longer received wind protection from the mainland. As a result, the ship was forced to go nearly straight south toward Crete. With the northwesterly wind blowing in its sails, the vessel moved to the Cape Salmone side of Crete. The name itself may suggest that Salmone was **“a refuge from exposure to the wind.”**<sup>4</sup>

At Fair Havens, vessels were relatively safe from the northwest winds. But Fair Havens faced the open sea to the south, and the suitability of wintering there for five months proved questionable. If they tried to winter in Fair Havens, the ship, if not severely damaged or sunk at anchor, would need some serious repairs from storm damage. So they considered another alternative. We read about this alternative next.

**<sup>9</sup>When considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast was already over, Paul began to admonish them, <sup>10</sup>and said to them, “Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.**

Luke mentions the **“fast,”** which is the Jewish Day of Atonement. The date for the Fast fell on October 5 in AD 59. This is extremely important under the circumstances. According to one source I read, “In ancient times, sailing the high seas after September 15 was not advisable. By then, cloudy weather set in; the cloud cover made it impossible for seafarers to observe the stars, by which they navigated. And from November 11 to March 10, all seafaring ships stayed in port.”<sup>4</sup> They were already almost three weeks past the “not advisable” best practices date, and five weeks before the absolutely “no go” date--smack in the middle of a very hard decision. Stay in an unprotected harbor and have the ship damaged if not ruined, or sail forty miles to a secure port, such as Phoenix? Risk going and you might get there, but you might die trying should the weather suddenly turn against you. What do you do?

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<sup>4</sup> Kistemaker, S. J., & Hendriksen, W. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (Vol. 17, p. 921). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Well, Paul was an experienced traveler who, according to his own testimony which he wrote in **2 Corinthians 11:25**, had suffered shipwreck three times. He knew that a decision had to be made, and he had his own ideas. And he unabashedly shared them with others. Interestingly, the verb tense of “**to warn**” indicates that Paul repeatedly advised others not to leave the harbor. But notice that Paul’s warning was not a divine prophecy-based warning. In other words, God had not told Paul that the ship must stay there. It was a human warning based on obvious circumstances. The reason we know that this was a human warning is that Paul said lives would be lost if they sailed on, and none were. For Paul’s words to have been a prophecy from God, they would have all had to die.

But to whom was Paul speaking when he warned them not to leave Fair Havens? When we read further, we see there were three other men who were conferring about what they should do: Julius, the pilot of the ship, and the captain/owner. Because the captain’s vessel was part of the imperial grain fleet, the centurion Julius functioned as the Roman official with greater authority than even the ship owner. Hence, Julius had the final word.

Julius at least listened to Paul, probably because he had learned of Paul’s experience as a veteran traveler and survivor of several shipwrecks. But could Paul’s wariness to sail be because he was gun shy after three close encounters with death? Julius decided to get a second and third opinion. He spoke with the pilot and the captain of the ship.

**<sup>11</sup>But the centurion was more persuaded by the pilot and the captain of the ship than by what was being said by Paul. <sup>12</sup>Because the harbor was not suitable for wintering, the majority reached a decision to put out to sea from there, if somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.**

Julius recognized that the pilot and the captain were not unfamiliar with the coast of Crete. Two factors governed Julius’ decision: Fair Havens was not a safe place to settle down for the five stormy months of winter. It was just too exposed. Secondly, the security of Phoenix’s sheltered harbor, where they could safely moor and wait out the winter, appeared to be close enough to risk the trip. In the end, Julius trusted in the “expert advice” of the pilot and the captain of the ship. So as

soon as possible, the captain gave the order to weigh anchor and set sail for the safe harbor of Phoenix.

As I looked over these verses, I noticed that there is no mention of the gospel, no mention of Jesus or God or the Holy Spirit, and no key theological terms. I knew we were to cover these verses, but at first I wasn't sure why the Holy Spirit would have us here in this passage. So, I asked Him for direction.

As I waited for several days, placing myself as best I could in the midst of this human drama, I became more aware of the key people involved. Suddenly, I was struck with these thoughts: the individuals in this passage were some of the key figures who were responsible for impacting the world so powerfully with the gospel. As I considered them, I identified six characteristics of men and women who were committed to Christ and who were serious about the gospel being preached to others. Why were they so serious? Because Jesus had transformed their lives. Hence, they would do anything for others to hear the gospel. They were as compelled for Paul to preach the gospel as Paul was.

As I saw these characteristics, I began to ask myself, "How does my life rate in these areas?" Quite frankly, I find room for improvement! It has been a good reminder to me as to what I and you need to be, if we are going to impact our friends and neighbors for Christ. Let's look at them, beginning first with two characteristics of Paul that made him so impactful for the spreading of the Gospel.

Consider that of Paul's previous sixteen years, the first thirteen he spent preaching the gospel and planting churches throughout Asia Minor and Greece. During those days, he lived with both plenty and want. He had many days living in freedom but some in prison. And for more than two years, he had been confined to house arrest after being wrongly accused for crimes he did not commit. Yet we never hear of one complaint from him. Instead, Paul remained patient, and most importantly, content to stay there as long as Jesus wanted him to. It reminds me of Paul's own words, written a few years later to the church at Philippi which he had planted. He wrote to them in **Philippians 4:11-13**:

**Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I**

**have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.**

How would you describe your level of contentment with your day to day life? Better yet, how would others view your level of contentment? There are several ways to measure this. How often do you whine, complain, or get irritated, and for how long, when things don't go as you had planned. The more you are in love with Christ and His purposes and are focused upon living for Him, the more you will be content in this world, regardless of your circumstances. However, the more you cling to and worship this temporal world and your own purposes and rights, the more you will lack contentment. People who have learned to be content whatever their circumstances make the best ambassadors for Christ and the biggest impactors for the gospel.

A second characteristic of Paul that made him so effective for Christ and the spreading of the gospel was his ability to wait upon the Lord. He waited more than two years under house arrest before being sent to Rome, and he eventually waited another two years before he was released from prison in Rome and could get back to his preaching ministry. Paul learned to wait for God's perfect timing, God's provision, and for God to bring about His perfect justice.

How does a man do that? I believe that the key to this kind of waiting upon the Lord has to do with knowing and focusing on God's Word and his promises. For instance, being a scholar of the Old Testament with much of it memorized, Paul probably thought often of well-known verses such as these: **Psalm 25:4-5**, "**Make me know Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; for You I wait all the day.**" Another verse is **Psalm 37:4-5**, "**Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust also in Him, and He will do it.**"

I like to meditate on verses like these when I become impatient or restless when things don't happen when or the way I think they should. If you want to be more impactful for Christ, begin a scripture memory program. If you want some help, Victor, Dan, and I have loads of scripture memory verses and systems of verses we can direct you to for starters. I couldn't live well through challenging times if I hadn't memorized verses I can draw upon when I must wait upon the Lord.

Paul is such a hero that many think, “I could never be like Paul. He is a ‘super saint.’” I don’t agree with that, but just in case you do, consider the next three characteristics of two more common folk like us, Luke and Aristarchus.

Luke and Aristarchus took to heart Jesus’ teaching in **Mark 10:42-45**.

**Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”**

Luke and Aristarchus so loved Jesus and so loved Paul that for Jesus’ sake and for the sake of the gospel, they became Paul’s servants.

This leads to the fourth characteristic of people who become impactors for Jesus. When Paul, years later, wrote these words to Timothy at the church in Ephesus where Luke and Aristarchus ministered with Paul, I wonder if Paul’s memory of their service to himself and the church was in his mind. He gave Timothy these words in **1 Timothy 6:18** to teach the believers in Ephesus, **“Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share.”** These two men offered all they had to Paul, their time and resources, to care for him and further his impacting ministry for the Gospel. They were impactors for the gospel because they were generous. Are you generous with your time and resources? If you are, for whom are you generous—your name’s sake or the Lord’s?

On Paul’s last missionary journey, he met with the elders at Ephesus to give them final instructions before he left. Both Luke and Aristarchus were there with him. Paul said to these leaders in **Acts 20:18-21**:

**You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Taking heed to Paul's words and personal example, Luke and Aristarchus portrayed humility in their caring for Paul for the sake of the gospel.

Finally, a characteristic of not just one or two individuals, but an entire church, is that hospitality shown by the church at Sidon. In **Romans 12:10-13**, Paul exhorted the believers:

**Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor, not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.**

That passage is full of other characteristics of impactful saints, but the one I want to highlight here, and that for which the church at Sidon was a perfect example, is hospitality. Once more, it wasn't hospitality because it was a cultural thing to do, like "southern hospitality," nor was it something that was expected. This hospitality was for Jesus' sake and for the furtherance of the gospel through the proclamation of it by brother Paul.

These six characteristics are supernatural characteristics. They require that individuals draw near to God and delight in Him and His Gospel in order for these characteristics to burst forth. They can become part of you as you respond to Jesus' affection and devote your life to inviting others to know and experience

Christ's love and power.