

the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. ³¹ Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved.” ³² So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it drift away.

³³ Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. “For the last fourteen days,” he said, “you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food—you haven’t eaten anything.” ³⁴ Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.” ³⁵ After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. ³⁶ They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. ³⁷ Altogether there were 276 of us on board. ³⁸ When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.

³⁹ When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. ⁴⁰ Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. ⁴¹ But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.

⁴² The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. ⁴³ But the centurion wanted to spare Paul’s life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. ⁴⁴ The rest were to get there on planks or on other pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land safely.

1. In spite of the promise that Paul has received from the Lord, we find him taking practical steps to insure the safety of the passengers. What are some of the practical steps that Paul urges the men to take?
2. What does this passage teach us about the intersection between divine sovereignty (God had guaranteed their deliverance) and human responsibility (Paul actually says “unless these men stay with the ship you cannot be saved”)?
3. What happens when we emphasize divine sovereignty but ignore our responsibility? What happen when we emphasize our responsibility but ignore divine sovereignty?
4. How do we strike a meaningful balance between the two?
5. How might God have used this treacherous journey to strengthen the faith of the believers on board?
6. How might have God used the same events to reveal his heart and character to the non-believers on board?
7. What does this passage teach us about how God is working in and through the difficulties we may face?



THE STORY CONTINUES

THE JOURNEY TO ROME | ACTS 27

Does following Christ make our lives easier or more difficult?

Our initial response will always be, “It is far easier to follow Christ than take on life’s challenges on our own.” Christ offers a sense of peace and well being that can only be found in him. Jesus’ invitation in Matthew’s gospel is compelling.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:29-30).”

On the other hand, even the most casual reading of Scripture seems to indicate that following Christ invites difficulty we would not otherwise experience. Christ not only invites us to find rest in him, he also challenges us to “deny [ourselves] and take up [our] cross daily (Luke 9:24 Cf. Matt. 16:24; Mark 8:34).” That doesn’t sound easy. John challenges his readers to “not love the world or anything in the world.” He quickly adds, “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in them (1 John 2:15).” It’s so easy to love the things of this world. It’s not so easy to maintain a heart of pure devotion to Jesus. Paul warns Timothy, “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” That’s not what we signed up for.

If you are convinced that following Christ makes life easy, you probably won’t want to say that out loud in Paul’s presence. His life would have been so much easier if he had stayed at home, poured over his parchments and enjoyed long quiet strolls in the evening.

From the outset, Christ warned Paul that he would suffer. My guess is that Paul had no idea just how much he would suffer. Christ also promised him that he would arrive safely in Rome. I am certain Paul had no idea how treacherous safe passage to Rome would be. He’s been rescued from an angry mob, there have been two plots against his life, he has been a political prisoner for the better part of two years, and his final voyage to Rome will be one of the most harrowing journeys by sea in ancient literature.

Paul's journey to Rome is not a story of how easy it is to follow Christ, it is a story of how Christ sustains us in the face of overwhelming difficulty.

PAUL SAILS FOR ROME (vv. 1-12)

¹ When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. ² We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us.

³ The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs. ⁴ From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us. ⁵ When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. ⁶ There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board. ⁷ We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone.

⁸ We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea.

⁹ Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Day of Atonement. [†] So Paul warned them, ¹⁰ "Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also." ¹¹ But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. ¹² Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbor in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest.

1. What are some of the early indications that continuing the journey to Rome might not be the best idea?
2. How did Paul feel about the journey ahead?
3. Read 2 CORINTHIANS 11:23-29. What are some of the factors that might have influenced Paul's thoughts?
4. Who else weighed in on the decision?
5. What do you think motivated their thinking?
6. What are some situations where our motives might keep us from making wise decisions?

THE STORM (vv. 13-26)

¹³ When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. ¹⁴ Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the Northeaster, swept down from the island. ¹⁵ The

ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. ¹⁶ As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure, ¹⁷ so the men hoisted it aboard. Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Because they were afraid they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. ¹⁸ We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. ¹⁹ On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. ²⁰ When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

²¹ After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. ²² But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. ²³ Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me ²⁴ and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' ²⁵ So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. ²⁶ Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."

1. What might have initially encouraged the captain, crew and passengers to continue the journey?
2. What are some of the things Luke does to highlight the severity of the conditions they soon encountered?
3. How does the Lord encourage Paul?
4. In addition to safe passage to Rome, what else does God grant Paul?
5. What are some of the adverse consequences that would result from their rash decision?
6. What does Scripture teach us about the consequences of rash (not so wise, or impulsive) decisions?
7. How does God sustain us in spite of rash (not so wise, or impulsive) decisions?
8. Why is it far better to make wise decisions than simply trust God to bail us out of our not so wise or impulsive decisions?

THE SHIPWRECK (vv.27-44)

²⁷ On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land. ²⁸ They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet deep. ²⁹ Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. ³⁰ In an attempt to escape from