

Leadership in the Storm

September 3 – Acts 27:1-44

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Day 246 – 119 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Luke, the author of *Acts*, detailed Paul's journey from Caesarea to the island of Malta. Paul had appealed his case to Caesar, so the Romans had to transport him safely to Rome to stand trial. He was placed under the care of a Roman centurion named Julius (v.1). Julius treated Paul and his teammates with consideration (v.3).

A map would be helpful to follow Paul's route to Malta (look in your Bible, online, on an app, or in the Study Guide). Luke provided so many names and directions, we can easily follow their journey. As for the timing of the voyage, we are told that "the fast was already over," referring to the Day of Atonement, a Jewish holiday in September or October (v.9). In other words, it was not an ideal time to be on the sea. If they experienced any delays along the way, they would have to dock for the winter.

Paul had been on ships enough to know that the timing was terrible for sailing. He even offered his opinion saying, "I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss" (v.10). Though Paul was right, the leaders on the ship were not persuaded. Instead, they proceeded headlong into danger (v.11-13).

Sure enough, a violent north wind blew the ship out into the open sea. The crew was caught in a storm for two weeks, fighting the wind and waves. They even threw their cargo and tackle overboard to lighten the ship (v.14-20). They were convinced that all was lost.

However, **at this point Paul began exerting a great deal of influence over the leaders, the crew, and the passengers** (276 total, v.37). At first, he simply encouraged them not to lose hope, guaranteeing them that no lives would be lost (v.21-26). But as things grew intense, and it was certain that the voyage was doomed, Paul warned Julius and his soldiers that people would die if they abandoned ship (v.27-32).

By the end of the journey, Paul was giving orders. For two weeks, no one had eaten anything of real substance, probably because they were simply fighting for their survival. Thus, Paul suggested that they all eat before the ship was destroyed (v.33-38). Besides, they would need their strength to swim to shore.

Daily Reflection

Paul was a leader. Because of his influence, encouragement, and guidance, "all were brought safely to land" after the ship crashed on the shores of Malta (v.39-44). Had things gone smoothly, Luke may not have even recorded much about the journey. But, because of the situation, Luke provided details. **The storm gave Paul an opportunity to influence everyone.**

Although you may not view yourself as a leader, you are. Why? **Leadership is influence.** You may not influence 276 people, but you can influence one. Therefore, everyone has leadership potential. How do we exert influence? Simply do what Paul did. Build relationships with people and meet their needs.

Obviously, Paul was praying on the voyage, as the Lord gave him a peace about the situation (v.23, 24). Then, he simply shared that peace with the men on board. Paul addressed their emotional needs (i.e., fear, uncertainty) with encouragement. He addressed their physical needs with food, and he addressed their dilemma with wisdom and courage. He will address their spiritual needs on the island.

Life storms are opportunities to influence people. How are you influencing others?

Treasure Island

September 4 – Acts 28:1-10

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 247 – 118 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul and the other 275 passengers made it safely to land on the island of Malta (v.1). Though their ship had been destroyed, their lives were spared. Now, they were dependent on the kindness of the natives (v.2).

A common response to shipwreck would be depression and hopelessness, but the men were just glad to be alive. For Paul, who had already proven to be a leader on the voyage, **being stranded on an island was just another opportunity to glorify God and share the gospel.**

It didn't take long for the opportunities to emerge. As soon as they made it to shore, the natives built a fire. Wanting to help, Paul gathered a bundle of sticks. When he laid them on the fire, a venomous snake attached itself to Paul's hand (v.3). Of course, the ordeal made an immediate impression on the natives (v.4-6). At first, they thought Paul was doomed, but after he shook off the snake and carried on as normal, they thought he was divine.

This is a remarkable scene. Of the 276 passengers aboard the ship and all the natives who had greeted them, the only person to be bitten by a snake was Paul. Why? Was it Satan trying to eliminate Paul because of his influence? Perhaps. If it was the enemy, the Lord allowed the snake bite to occur to mark Paul as distinct from the others. **The incident simply gave Paul another platform to glorify God and share the gospel (Mk. 16:18).**

When the natives saw what happened, they knew Paul was different. No doubt, they spread the story across the island quickly. Paul was instantly popular. It may have been because of this story that Paul and his friends were invited to the home of Publius, "the leading man of the island" (v.7). Once again, **rather than use the opportunity for self-promotion, Paul used it to encourage Publius and minister to his dying father (v.8).**

Of course, the healing of Publius' father compounded Paul's reputation. When natives heard what happened, they brought their ailing loved ones to him for help (v.9). Once again, **the Lord had given Paul the opportunity to maximize his influence, and we can be assured that Paul glorified the Lord and shared the gospel.** The result was that the people treated Paul and the others with respect, kindness, and generosity, "supplying them with all that they needed" for the voyage to Rome (v.10).

Daily Reflection

It doesn't take long to see why Paul taught and wrote, **"For we know that God causes all things to work together for good..." (Rom. 8:28).** He experienced God's providence in every stage of his life. But is God not performing the same miracles in our lives as well?

Is there evidence of God's providence in your circumstances? Absolutely. But do you see it? How would you view a shipwreck, getting stranded on an island for three months, or getting bitten by a poisonous snake? **Are these events a treasure or a tragedy?**

None of them are pleasant, for sure, yet God works all of them for your good and His glory. What does it take for you to recognize God's goodness amid your shipwrecks?

Practice now. How have you witnessed God's treasure amid your latest tragedy?

Unhindered

September 5 – Acts 28:11-31

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Day 247 – 118 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

After three months on the island of Malta, Paul made it safely to Rome (v.11-14). In Rome, Paul was greeted by fellow Christians from all over the area (v.15), a fulfillment of his desire expressed in the letter he had written years earlier. "I long to see you," he wrote, "so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established, and that I may be encouraged while among you, each of us by the other's faith..." (Rom. 1:11, 12).

While in Rome, waiting for his trial before Caesar, Paul was given a great deal of freedom. He was allowed to live by himself with a guard. No doubt, the guards that rotated watching Paul heard the gospel day and night (Acts 28:16).

But Paul's first priority was the Jews in Rome. He wanted to explain his arrest and imprisonment, as well as share the gospel with them (v.17-22). However, as expected, most of the Jews rejected Paul's message. The hard hearts that he had spoken about in his letter to the Romans proved to be true (Rom. 11). "They have eyes but do not see. They have ears but do not hear. The heart of this people has become dull..." (Acts 28:26, 27; Isa. 6:9, 10).

Thus, Paul turned to the Gentiles, in this case, the Romans. "Let it be known," he said, "that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen" (Acts 28:28). Therefore, over the next two years, Paul preached the gospel to anyone who would listen, "teaching with all openness..." (30, 31).

At that point, Luke's account of the acts of the early church ended. Paul was still awaiting trial, but what happened? From here, we must infer what happened from Paul's other letters. We know for certain that he wrote several letters while in Rome, for example to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and to Philemon.

We can also surmise that Paul experienced a second imprisonment in Rome (2 Tim. 2:9), during which he wrote his final letters to Titus and Timothy. Since he experienced two imprisonments, it is assumed that Paul was acquitted in his first trial before Caesar (Nero, 62 AD). However, historians and early church leaders reported that Paul was executed by Nero in 67 AD. Nero set fire to Rome and blamed the Christians. As a result, he unleashed a terrible persecution throughout the empire.

Daily Reflection

We have come to the end of Acts. Though it may leave us wanting more, in Luke's mind, he had written enough. Jesus' prophecy had been fulfilled, and the gospel had been spread throughout Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

I especially like Luke's last words, that **Paul was "preaching and teaching the kingdom of God with all openness, unhindered..." (28:31). Though Paul was hindered by chains, he was not hindered in sharing the gospel of Christ.**

Though the enemy may hinder the messengers of God, he cannot hinder the message of God. The gospel cannot be stopped! Jesus said, "Even the gates of Hades (death) will not overpower it" (Matt. 16:18). Paul wrote that "though he suffered imprisonment as a criminal, the Word of God is not imprisoned" (2 Tim. 2:9).

Let this be an encouragement to us. "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isa. 40:8). **People like Paul may come and go, but the gospel goes on unhindered! The Lord will triumph over all His enemies!** How, then, should you and I respond?

Every Spiritual Blessing

September 6 – Ephesians 1:1-14

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 248 – 117 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We transitioned from the book of *Acts* to Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Paul wrote this letter in Rome, while awaiting his trial before Caesar. It is a field manual for the people of the church, reminding us of what Christ has done for us (*Eph. 1-3*) and imploring us to live in a manner worthy of our redemption (*4-6*). Knowing that the church in Ephesus would experience tremendous difficulties, it is not surprising that Paul took time to encourage those believers in their faith.

After his salutation (*v.1, 2*), Paul immediately reminded the Ephesians of the manifold spiritual blessings that God had accomplished for them (*v.3-14*). In the original Greek, Paul listed eleven spiritual blessings in one long sentence. Let's take a minute to recount those blessings.

First, God chose us for salvation before He formed the world (*v.4*). Second, He made us holy and blameless in Christ (*v.4*). Third, God predestined us for adoption as His sons (*v.5*). Fourth, He blessed us with His glorious grace (*v.6*). Fifth, God has redeemed us and forgiven us through the blood of Christ (*v.7*).

Sixth, God lavished His grace on us (*v.7, 8*). Seventh, He has made known to us the mystery of His will (*v.9*). Eighth, He revealed His plan, "summing up all things in Christ" (*v.10*). Ninth, God gave us an inheritance (*v.11*), guaranteed by the Holy Spirit (*v.14*). Next, God made us the praise of His glory (*v.12, 15*). Finally, He sealed us with the Holy Spirit (*v.13*).

These blessings are a result of our position before God in Christ. We have not achieved them by our own doing. Rather they have been given because of our right standing before the Father, which was accomplished by the work of His Son. Paul made this very clear by repeating phrases such as, "in Christ" (*v.3, 10, 12*), "in Him" (*v.4, 7, 9, 10, 13*), "in the Beloved" (*v.6*), and "through Christ" (*v.5*).

Daily Reflection

Because of the rich doctrinal nature of this letter, *Ephesians* is often called a mini version of *Romans*. Just like *Romans*, *Ephesians* is divided into two parts. The first half of *Ephesians* speaks to our newfound position in Christ (*1-3*), while the second half speaks to our expected practices in Christ (*4-6*). Being found "in Christ" is a wonderful position, seeing how we have been "in Adam" since birth, condemned in our trespasses. **While our practices are not yet perfect, our position forever will be.**

While an entire devotion could be written about each of these spiritual blessings, it is good to see them listed together and to take them as a whole. **We can get a sense of how privileged we are to be a child of God.** It can even be overwhelming when we consider what all He has done on our behalf. We have been given much, which is why God expects much of us.

Which of these spiritual blessings is most encouraging to you? For which of them are you most thankful? Explain why.

As a child, I was taught this acronym for grace — God's Riches At Christ's Expense. When you begin to comprehend what God has done for you (which you can't fully), what is your first thought or response? Explain.

The Strength of His Might

September 7 – Ephesians 1:15-23

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Day 249 – 116 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Still in the opening thoughts of his letter to the Ephesians and having just finished a list of spiritual blessings which we have been given in Christ (v.3-14), Paul transitioned to sharing his prayer for believers there (v.15-23). Just as the previous passage was one long sentence in the original Greek language (v.3-14), so is Paul's prayer (v.15-23). What did he pray?

First, he prayed that God would give the Ephesians a "spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge" of the Lord Jesus (v.17). It should be our passion, as well as our prayer for others, to know more of God, more of His nature, His character, His love towards us, and what He's done for us through Christ. This knowledge and wisdom are revealed to us by the Spirit we received at conversion.

Second, Paul prayed that the "eyes of their hearts would be enlightened, so that they would know the hope of His calling, that they would understand the riches of the glory of His inheritance and the surpassing greatness of His power toward us" (v.18, 19). These lofty descriptions all connect to the list of spiritual blessings that Paul recorded earlier (v.3-14). His hope was that the Ephesians would grow in their understanding of these tremendous truths.

Although Paul's prayer requests ended there, his prayer continued. **He stated that these requests were "in accordance with the working of the strength of His might"** (v.19). Then, he explained that the Christ that they followed and worshiped has been magnified with great honor (v.20-23). He was raised from the dead, and He is seated at the right hand of God the Father. He is far above all other authorities, and all things have been put under His feet.

The power of God that resurrected Christ from the grave is the same power that has been given to us, to conform us into the image of Christ. Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit

comes upon us, we would receive power (*Acts 1:8; Col. 1:29*). The same Spirit by which Christ worked miracles has been given to all believers to teach them, to convict them of sin, to conform them to the image of Christ (sanctification), and to equip them for the work of ministry. **We do not lack anything that we need to be effective representatives for Christ.** "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness" (*2 Pet. 1:3*).

Daily Reflection

Spiritual power is not an object but a person, the Holy Spirit. Often Christians are misled to think that they need more power in their lives to accomplish God's will, but that's not true. **All the power that we need has already been given to us in the Holy Spirit; and, since power is a Person, not an object, we don't possess it, but rather He possesses us.** For God's power to be expressed in our lives, all we need to do is surrender to the Spirit and make ourselves more available for Him to work. When we yield every aspect of life to Him in obedience to God's Word, we can be an effective vessel in His hands, an empowered ambassador for His glory.

Paul's point in highlighting the authority that God has given Christ is that He is on our side. Or, better yet, we are on His side. **This truth should give us great confidence in the faith, for we are on the winning team. We know the conquering King, and all foes will be vanquished before us.**

Are you praying according to "the strength of His might" (v.19)? If you are, how would that affect your prayer life?

But God

September 8 – Ephesians 2:1-7

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 250 – 115 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

After a lengthy introduction to his letter, which described all of the spiritual blessings that we have been afforded through Christ (1:1-14), as well as the blessings that Paul himself had been praying for the people of Ephesus (1:15-23), Paul shifted gears to remind the Ephesians of two more blessings — how God had reconciled them to Himself (2:1-10) and how He had reconciled them, as Gentiles, to the Jews through the Church (2:11-22). Both acts are a mystery that requires close examination. Let's focus on the blessing of salvation first.

To describe the salvation experience, Paul started with our status before Christ — spiritually dead (v.1). In Eden, the Lord warned Adam that if he ate of the forbidden fruit, he would surely die. Adam did not die physically that day, but he died spiritually. Unfortunately, he cursed his posterity with the same disease — spiritual death. All human beings, therefore, are born dead, the penalty of imputed or inherited sin. Since we are born dead, we do not belong to the Lord of life but the lord of death (v.2). Satan is our master, and we are his slaves.

Thus, we live according to the likeness of God's enemy, acting as any "son of disobedience" would, according to the course of his fallen world, in rebellion and defiance to God. As such, we are naturally servants to our lusts and impulses and deserving the wrath of God (v.3). Because of our sinful nature, we are depraved, rotten, hopeless, helpless, and dead; and dead men cannot resuscitate themselves.

After Paul painted the picture of humanity's destitution and despair, he penned two of the sweetest words in the human language — "but God" (v.4). **We were dead once, but God gave us life. We were slaves once, but God set us free. We were depraved once, but God made us holy.** He intervened for us, when we could do nothing to change the situation. But why, why did God save us?

Daily Reflection

The reason God saved us from spiritual death is because of His love and mercy. Paul used another "but God" passage in his letter to the Romans. **"But God demonstrated His own love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"** (Rom. 5:8). God did for us what we could not do for ourselves, evidence of His love. He also withheld the punishment we deserved, evidence of His mercy. We owe our transition from death to life to God's mercy and love, not to our deeds. Thus, Paul added that it was "by grace that you have been saved" (Eph. 2:5). Salvation is entirely a work of God. It is because of His actions that we are rescued from our former status.

As a result of God's work on our behalf, we are "made alive together with Christ" (v.5). We are no longer spiritually dead, as we were at birth; rather we have been reborn and made spiritually alive within. "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old has gone, and, behold, all things are made new" (2 Cor. 5:17). Not only have we been made alive with Christ, but we also have "been raised up and seated with Him in the heavenly places" (Eph. 2:6). Positionally, God no longer views us as one of Satan's slaves or as a citizen of his fallen world, but rather as one of His children and a citizen of heaven. We have overcome this world and its "god" because of Christ.

This work of God through Christ on our behalf is a mystery. We did not deserve it. All we can do is praise Him for it and be grateful for being counted among His redeemed! We will marvel, "for ages to come at the surpassing riches of His grace and kindness towards us" (v.7).

We were dead once, but God gave us life. We were slaves once, but God set us free. We were depraved once, but God made us holy. What a transformation! It is a good thing that we have eternity to participate, for it will take an eternity to explore the depths of this great act!

A Work of God

September 9 – Ephesians 2:8-10

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Today in Your Reading

We covered three verses that are part of Paul's explanation of salvation (v.1-10). He stated that we were once spiritually dead in our sins and that God, in His great mercy and love, made us alive with Christ (v.1-5). We were once hopeless and helpless, but God intervened and changed our circumstances. We are now hope-filled with the promise of life everlasting.

Before Paul changed the subject to the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles (v.11-22), he made sure that the people of Ephesus understood the source of their salvation.

Salvation is entirely a work of God. In our original state, dead in our trespasses and sins, and living in rebellion and defiance to God, we would have never loved God or followed Him. **It was the Lord who had to initiate the change, for we would not and could not do it on our own.** Thus, Paul wrote, "It was by grace that we have been saved" (v.5, 8).

Grace is unmerited favor, receiving something that was not deserved. We did not deserve salvation, but God extended it to us anyway. That is grace or love (*Rom. 5:8*). It is God doing for us what we could not do on our own. If we could earn salvation, then there would be no need for Christ. His sacrifice on the cross would be for naught. Likewise, if salvation could be earned, we would have a reason to boast.

But no one can boast, "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (*Rom. 3:23*). No, it is grace that saved us. Paul used the word *saved*, meaning that we have been rescued or pardoned. From what have we been saved? We have been saved from the wrath and judgment that He reserves for His enemies (*Rom. 5:9*). That's why we sing of His amazing grace, because we have no merits of our own to earn God's favor or to be redeemed.

Paul also wrote that we are "saved through faith" (*Eph. 2:8*). Faith is a confident trust in

Christ Jesus, that He is who is says He is, the only means by which we can be rescued from our sinful, condemned state. **That kind of faith does not originate with us. It must be given to us by God** (v.9). Why would someone who lives in rebellion to God ever decide to put his faith in Him? Why would someone content in their sin ever put sin aside to live for Christ? Why would someone ever believe in a God that he has not seen, trust Him at His Word, and stake his future on the promises that He's made? He wouldn't. **No one would exhibit that kind of faith on his own. It must be given to him by God.**

Daily Reflection

Paul reinforced this truth by saying, "We are God's workmanship" (v.10), not a work of our own. The Greek word used here is *poeima* meaning a "masterpiece" or work of art. The apex of God's creation was human beings, but His finest work was the re-creation of man from death to life through Jesus Christ. We were once a formless lump, but the skillful Potter fashioned us into a useful vessel.

While Paul made it clear that we are not saved by good works, he emphasized that we were saved for good works. Though deeds are not the root of our salvation, they are the fruit of our salvation. We were saved for good works. What works? Works that "God prepared for us beforehand," from the beginning, when He predestined us to be one of His children (v.10).

God has work for us to do, works that incorporate our giftedness, interests, and experiences. The purpose of these works is not to make ourselves look good but to honor the Lord. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (*Matt. 5:16*). Each of us has a spiritual career, full of exciting works, but are we squandering our time and resources, not doing what we've been saved and called to do? **God has done His work for us. Now it's time for us to do our work for Him.**