

Be Comforted  
Acts 27:1-26

His song became a hit in 1976 when he sang about her unfortunate and untimely demise. To this day no one really knows the reason why or how it happened, there is merely speculation and theories. Her career began in June of 1958 after what some deemed superstitious circumstances. At its launch it took three attempts to break the champagne bottle in her christening and then proceeded to collide with a pier when entering the water. Yet her stellar record of ore transportation was unmatched. Its storied history on the Great Lakes is well documented yet the reason for its demise remains shrouded in mystery.

The event that occurred on November 10, 1975 remains the most celebrated shipwreck on the Great Lakes. On that particular day on the lake we call Superior an early winter storm had blown in. Reports of the day indicate that severe winter weather with winds near hurricane force created 35 foot waves. She had been in contact with another nearby vessel, but had given no indication of any distress when suddenly at approximately 7:10p.m. she sank to a depth of 530 feet. The *Edmund Fitzgerald* may have fallen victim to the high waves of the storm, suffered structural failure, been swamped with water entering through her cargo hatches on deck, experienced topside damage or shoaled in a shallow part of Lake Superior. On that day 29 lives were lost along with the cargo as the Mighty *Edmund Fitzgerald* settled down in the cold waters of its liquid grave in Lake Superior. All veterans of the sea, she is immortalized in the song written by Gordon Lightfoot, *The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald*.

Shipwrecks and sailing disasters have always been part of the history of the seas. It was nothing new to the Apostle Paul who notes on one occasion that he had been in three of them. He has been in prison in Caesarea for two years, had the opportunity to

stand before governors and kings and share with them the gospel just as the Lord had said he would at his conversion. Through legal recourse he appealed to Caesar. According to Acts 23:11, “the Lord stood near Paul and said, ‘Take courage! As you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.’”

The promise of God to Paul was being fulfilled, not necessarily in the way Paul thought or perhaps wanted, but because God was the one leading Paul could trust his Lord that this was the best plan. So when things don’t go the way we think they should we need to be comforted that God is in control of those difficult life events.

Turn with me in your Bibles to Acts 27:1-26.

Let’s notice together in verses 1-12 that smooth sailing is a misnomer.

I. SMOOTH SAILING IS A MISNOMER –  
v. 1-12

A misnomer is a contradiction or an inaccuracy, something that is misleading. You’re led to believe one thing and your experience is something different. We’re told that the surgery we are going to have is a piece of cake and then find out afterward that there were complications. Nothing is never guaranteed in life is it? I was surfing the web a little in preparation for the message and came across a website titled “Smooth Sailing Celebrations”. It promises the perfect ambiance to accommodate a wide range of events and milestone celebrations. The website poses these probing questions. Are you lost on a sea of uncertainty? Too many options and don’t know what to choose? Too little options and nothing fits your needs? Coordinating an entire evening can be overwhelming. At Smooth Sailing Celebrations, we take care of it...and send you off to smooth sailing! Your guests can enjoy a cruise event on the Hudson River with a spectacular ever-changing view of the city skyline. They will take care of your

every need so that your celebration will truly be one to remember.

Another website offered assistance for government employees to sail smoothly through the transition into retirement.

To me and maybe to you too, smooth sailing is just pie in the sky wishful thinking. Something always seems to come up to make life, well, more challenging. It never turns out the way we thought. That life can be smooth sailing is misleading. I don't buy it for a minute. If someone says something is too good to be true, then it is too good to be true.

Follow with me in this section beginning at verse 1. I want you to remember this and remember it well. God was the one who had decided they would be going to Italy. Remember, He told Paul he would testify in Rome and because Paul knew God did not lie, he believed God, trusted God would do it. Proverbs 16:9 "The mind of man plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps."

Psalms 27:3 "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delights in His way."

Jeremiah 29:11 "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" It was God's plan all along for Paul to get there. He was directing Paul's steps.

Notice as well Paul's traveling companions. First we see that there were other prisoners. Luke doesn't tell us how many or what kind of prisoners, they were just prisoners. We don't know if, like Paul, they were on their way to stand trial before Caesar or if they had already been found guilty and were going to Rome to be executed. If convicted, many prisoners were sent to the coliseum to become gladiators or the victims of gladiators. Gladiators were considered the lowest class of citizen in Rome.

They may have won acclaim in the arena for physical prowess but they were still considered the lowest slave.

Now here is Paul, as godly a man as there ever was among this group of hardened criminals. Truly he was wheat among the tares. Was it by chance or did God have a plan even in this? Though not stated how many of you would believe that Paul used this opportunity with a captive audience to share Christ? Maybe some hearts were changed on that voyage. Maybe there were some who went from Rome's prisoners to heaven's freedmen. They were still in chains as criminals of the Empire, but their hearts were freed as they stood uncondemned before the throne and by the grace of God. Romans 8:1 "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Also include in this group is a centurion named Julius. He would have 100 soldiers with him. It was a special regiment given assignments fit for an elite soldier.

That Luke writes in the first person means that he is present with Paul. Paul may have needed a physician with him because we don't know what kind of physical shape he was in after two years in prison. Finally we note that a personal friend named Aristarchus was also along.

This group boarded ship, weighed anchor and set sail. Verse 2 notes that they traveled from port to port. It was a cargo ship hauling goods along the coastline. During these stops they would also take on daily supplies for the passengers.

Traveling as far as Sidon, the centurion gave Paul some unusual liberties that allowed him to leave the ship and visit with friends, believers who lived in that seaport town. It's possible that Paul was afforded this luxury because Julius may have considered Paul to be a gentleman prisoner due in

part because he was traveling with both his personal physician and a personal attendant.

So the ships log consisted of Paul, Luke, Aristarchus, Julius the centurion and a 100 soldiers, an unknown number of prisoners and crew.

Keep this thought in your back pocket for just the right time you might need it. Notice that Paul wasn't alone. He had close friends along the journey with him. It's important for us to remember when traveling along the sea of life that we need to have those around us who can help out when the seas become rough. We may think there is nothing but smooth sailing, but when an unexpected storm comes up we need to have friends at our side. They can help us manage the storms.

These travelers set out to sea again, but I want you to notice something that comes up repeatedly in this section. Do you see the difficulty they were having in making any headway to their destination? Life is never as easy as we think it might be. It will never be smooth sailing. It may start out as smooth sailing, but rougher seas are ahead.

The class we needed wasn't as easy as we were led to believe.

We weren't told all the details about the job we took.

Parenting has more challenges than expected.

Retirement isn't a walk in the park.

Illness is prolonged, with complications.

The list can go on and on as we think about all the things that we thought would be easier in life and yet the storm seems to overwhelm us and want to capsize us. It was with great difficulty that they made their way along the coast and found another ship headed to Italy. They thought this would be an easier go of it as they sailed to Rome. Sometimes we can think that changing what we're doing will make the sailing smooth again, that it will get easier or we'll get to our destination faster. A move or a

different pace or a change of scenery has to be the answer to help get back to calmer seas. But we find out as it states in verse 7 that "the wind did not allow us to hold our course."

What winds are you facing today that are trying to blow you off course as you journey to the destination that God wants for you? What storms are brewing in the journey we call life, the storms that are unexpected?

That destination is twofold.

- 1) There is the destination of godliness in which the Lord wants to develop His character in you.
- 2) There is the destination of heaven in which the Lord has prepared a place for those who have trusted Him as Savior.

Getting to either destination is not smooth sailing. Godliness takes effort. It's hard work. Standing up to temptation as we yield daily to the Holy Spirit can be exhausting. Can we do battle one more day? Wanting to reach the shores of heaven takes patience on our part as we endure through the struggles of life that accompany this journey until the Lord calls us home.

That Luke notes the time was after the Fast, referring to the fast that occurred before the Day of Atonement, meant that they were traveling sometime late September, early October. Traveling in November was dangerous on the Mediterranean. Winter storms were often violent. Sure we can get late fall days with bright, blue skies and warm, gentle breezes. If there was smooth sailing then, it didn't last long just by nature of the time of year. Paul's traveling experience and his having been shipwrecked three previous times gave him a unique perspective regarding their current situation. It wasn't a prophetic word he received from the Lord that damage to the ship would result if they continued, it was just common sense. But who was Paul? He was a prisoner. He was a scholar not a sailor. What did he know about such things? Why should they listen to him? What he said didn't

make sense considering the current weather conditions. It should be safe enough. The vote was three to one in favor of going.

Sometimes the advice that is given by others doesn't seem to make sense. It goes against logic and reason. It goes against the majority thought. Are we willing to consider such advice or are we more inclined to listen to what makes sense? Are we all too willing to go with the majority? Are we unwilling to listen to someone because they may not have the expertise or the experience?

Proverbs 3:5-6 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths." From the wisdom of Solomon even when it doesn't make sense, trust the Lord. That's what Paul was doing, even in the storm.

The centurion, who by rank was in charge because the ship was carrying both prisoners and grain bound for Italy, listened to the owner and pilot of the vessel instead of Paul. Press on to a safer harbor. We can make it another 50 miles or so.

Smooth sailing is a misnomer. Be prepared for rough times. Make sure friends are nearby. Moving on to verses 13-20 we find that severe storms are menacing.

## II. SEVERE STORMS ARE MENACING – v. 13-20

The winds were favorable. It looked like smooth sailing. It must be the right time. It must be the right way. It must be the right thing to do. All too often we try to navigate the seas of life in our own ability, by our wisdom because the way looks favorable, but then the winter storm hits. We attempt to steer through the storm in our own power, by our own experience or expertise or instinct.

Notice beginning in verse 13 the effort that man takes to try to make his journey smooth again. They hadn't gotten very far and a severe storm whipped the sea up into a frenzy. This was a hurricane like force that came down from the northeast and it blew them off course. In such a storm sailors would point the ship into the wind so that the bow could cut through the waves to keep it from rolling, but the wind was so severe and the seas so violent all they could do was give into the storm and let it drive them. They had lost all control of the vessel. So they did what they could to survive.

Take a look at their efforts. They didn't look up, they looked out.

1) They gave in to the wind. Sometimes when the storms of life hit us and hit us hard we just throw our hands up and say what's the point, what's the use in trying and we let the storm of life dictate the outcome, all the while forgetting that God is the one who brought us to the storm and that He is near.

2) They hauled in the lifeboat to secure what they thought was their only hope of survival. The lifeboat was usually towed behind the vessel, but in this case they felt they needed to bring it on board. By this time it was probably swamped with water which made it not only difficult to pull through the stormy seas, but also very heavy to lift up until all the water was drained. Luke notes that it was very difficult to secure.

3) To ensure that the pounding waves wouldn't beat the vessel so violently that it would break apart, they took ropes underneath the ship and tied them to the sides of the boat to hold it together.

4) Fearing that they would end up off the shores of northern Africa in Syrtis, which was known for quicksand and the demise of many ships, they let down an anchor to act as a drag or brake.

5) They threw the cargo overboard.

6) They threw unessential tackle and gear overboard.

7) They gave up all hope of survival.

This storm raged for days. Verse 27 states it had been 14 days since they had seen land or sun. They relied on the sun by day and the moon and stars by night from which to navigate and they had neither. They had no clue where they were and the pounding of the storm was relentless. The severity of the storm had unnerved even these seasoned sailors who had given up all hope.

You may be going through such a storm right now in your life. There seems to be no hope. There seems to be no point from which to navigate through it with no end in sight. There seems to be only despair. And all along as the storm intensifies you begin to do things, human things to try and quell the storm, to try and navigate through it and yet there is only darkness and hopelessness in your own vain attempts to get through it, to get out of it.

If you are in such a storm, what manmade efforts are you attempting to make it through? We cannot save ourselves in our own power. *Desperate men despair, faithful men fear not.* When severe storms are menacing, secure standing is monumental.

### III. SECURE STANDING IS MONUMENTAL – v. 21-26

Here's where we begin to see how essential comfort is when we are confronted by the storms in life. We have a choice in life when facing storms. We can take all kinds of desperate measures on our own to get through the storm and all the while despair and lose hope, or we can by faith pass through them knowing that the Lord is with us. As Paul relates to them about the vision of the angel, he was telling them that he believed God. His position was secure. In that knowledge, we have nothing to fear.

In our storms have we come to a point of emphatically stating I BELIEVE GOD?

Isaiah 41:10 “Fear not for I am with you, be not dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yea, I will help you, yea I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness.”

Isaiah 40:25-31

Oh, dear friends, if we could just learn what it is to rest in God's strength, to go to Him when we are weary and tired, when the assault of the storm seems so unbearable and we're about to give up hope. In such times desperate men panic, faithful men pray.

Philippians 4:6-7 “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” In such dire straits we are not only to pray but we are to praise, we are to give God thanks and in so doing he blankets us with His peace in the storm. “In everything give thanks for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”  
(I Thessalonians 5:18)

God controls the storm - will we fear or have faith? Paul knew that God had appointed him to testify in Rome and no storm, no matter how severe, would keep him from that divine appointment. He believed God that it would happen just as He said. One day Jesus and His disciples were out on the Sea of Galilee. As is prone to happen there, a severe storm blew in. The disciples became panic stricken and feared for their lives. Some frantically rowed with all their might to make shore. Others tried to trim the sail. Others were bailing water out of the boat. Jesus was down inside the boat sleeping. He had nothing to fear. It was not His time to leave this earth and no storm was going to cut that time short. Someone probably hollered to one of the other disciples that they should go and get Jesus so he could lend a back to their efforts for survival.

They had gone to right person for help expecting Him to do the same things they were doing to survive, but the kind of help they wanted wasn't the kind of help He gave them. We want the Lord to get us through the storm in our way, by our method. We often fail to understand that the Lord is capable of so much more, something different in getting us through the storm. And so when the Lord came up on deck to help, He merely spoke to the wind and the seas and told them to be still. Isn't that what the Psalmist told us? "Be still and know that I AM God." With the Red Sea in front of them and the Egyptian army behind them Moses told Israel to stand still and watch the salvation of the Lord.

Another kind of storm hit a man in Jesus' day. During one of those occasions when Jesus was pressed by the crowds a father stepped forward and begged Jesus to help his son who was overcome by demons that would at times cast him into the fire or into the water to destroy him. It was his storm. Jesus told the father that all things are possible for the one who believes. The father answered that he believed but needed help for his unbelief.

A woman was gathering sticks to make one last meal for she and her son. It was her storm. Elijah came along and asked for some food and to trust God to provide. Would she fear or have faith?

Stephen was facing a hostile mob. In their anger they picked up stones and began to pelt him to death. It was his storm. Would he fear or have faith?

When the storm comes will you panic or pray, will you fear or have faith?

Isaiah 43:1-3 "But now, this is what the Lord says – He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: 'fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not

sweep over you...For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;"

Psalm 23:4-5 "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for You are with me. Your rod and your staff comfort me."

When we go through the storms as Paul did there is nothing to fear because God is with us. In His presence there is peace. In His presence there is comfort. In His presence there is renewed strength.

You may be going through a storm today. You may have just come out of a storm. You may yet have a storm to go through. Remember to pray. Remember to praise. Remember the promise that God will be with you through it. Bear in mind a couple of things about that storm. They help us grow stronger in our faith. How many of us would say that the flood was Noah's storm? How many of us would agree that Mt. Moriah was Abraham's storm? How many of us would agree that Egypt was Joseph's storm? How many of us would agree that Goliath was David's storm? Storms grow our faith in the Lord. They make us stronger.

When a tree's life is threatened, stressed by elements of fire, drought or other calamity, it twists beneath its bark to reinforce and make itself stronger. On the surface, this new inner strength may not be visible, for the bark often continues to give the same vertical appearance. Only when the bark is stripped away or when the tree has fallen are its inner struggles revealed that have helped it to become stronger against more severe storms.

Storms develop inner strength that isn't seen on the outside, yet great strength in the Lord has been developed. "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." (Psalm 46:1)

Another benefit from the storm is that after we have gone through them, we are then able to bring

support and comfort and encouragement to those who are going through similar storms.

II Corinthians 1:3-4 “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”

Paul’s standing was secure because he had total confidence in the Lord to do what he promised. There wasn’t any second guessing God. Secure standing is huge, it’s monumental.

Over the past number of weeks we have learned to:

Be courageous.

Be confident.

Be consistent.

Be clear.

Be concerned.

Be comforted.

Hymn #693 – *A Shelter in the Time of Storm*

As we sing this hymn if you’re experiencing a storm and you’ve been trying to manage it in your own power and you know it’s been a futile attempt, will you come? Will you come and give it to the Lord right now and pray that your faith will overturn your fear?

If you have been through a storm, you’ve been there, you know what it’s like, your faith has been strengthened will you come and bring comfort to these whose storms seem overwhelming?

Maybe it’s just to come and give thanks to the Lord for helping you through a recent storm.

Please don’t leave today trying to navigate the storm in your own power. God is there to give you the strength to get through it.