

**Text: Ac 27.27-44**

With this message we'll complete Acts 27 and get Paul to Malta.

Shortly after we bought our building, we decided to redo the floor in the fellowship room. We bought some linoleum and hired a guy to do the job. His company was called "Malta Carpets." In talking with him, I found out he was from Malta. I was so interested I invited him out to lunch ... if I recall correctly, we went to the Pantry on Douglas St (no longer in existence). He's the only person I ever met from Malta.

Unfortunately, after that encounter, I never spoke with him again. I remember giving him the gospel. He was a very religious man, very proud that the apostle Paul came to his island, but he wasn't a Christian. My witness bore no fruit with him on that day.

We will talk more about Paul's work in Malta next Sunday, this Sunday we will occupy ourselves with getting Paul there.

Now you recall where we left Paul, in the middle of the Mediterranean in a large grain ship being driven by a violent wind out of the Northeast. The whole journey must have been terrifying. I know I wouldn't have enjoyed it in the least. My view is: "there's no *terra in firma*." You can travel by water all you want, I'd rather drive. (I fly grudgingly!)

You will also recall that last week we saw Paul give a prophecy that not only would he survive the voyage, but all the people on the ship would survive as well. That prophecy tells us at least two things:

1. It was God's will for them to survive
2. God never fails to accomplish his will, so they would survive

Now as we go through our account today, we are going to see several points where the actions of the sailors or soldiers might have derailed God's plans if they acted contrary to God's revealed will. (Yet we know that can't happen – God's plans always succeed.)

This brings up the subject of Providence and the part that man plays in God's providence.

Read Ac 27.27-44

I've given our message this title:

*Man Works God's Works*

What I mean by that is this: we see men very active in this story. They are making decisions, doing work, taking actions and so on. And in the end, they are all saved from the sea, *just as Paul said they would*. Not only that, *just as God said they would*. God's Providence / God's Will came to pass.

It turns out that the men made the right decisions in the end so that God's will would come to pass. I think that is instructive for us:

**Proposition:** The troubled Christian needs to take courage in the mysterious way God works his works through men's works.

## I. The first happenstance: the sailor's caught in fear (27-32)

### A. The peril continues

1. Caught by a northeaster while trying for Phoenix on the South of Crete
2. Driven past Cauda/Clauda with a brief rest to put on storm footing (boat, mainmast)
3. Driven before the wind, tacking towards the starboard (north) with a sea anchor to prevent southward drift
4. Our passage opens telling us they went on in this way 14 days

Note: the passage refers to the "Adriatic Sea" — in ancient times, the middle of the Mediterranean was called the Adriatic, not just the bit between Italy and Greece

### B. The direction and time of their drift calculated by James Smith

"The distance from Clauda to the point of Koura, where I suppose that this happened, is 476.6 miles, which, at the rate deduced ... would take exactly thirteen days, one hour, and twenty one minutes."<sup>1</sup>

"Hence according to these calculations, a ship starting late in the evening from Clauda would, by midnight on the 14th, be less than three miles from the entrance of St. Paul's Bay. I admit that a coincidence so very close as this, is to a certain extent accidental, but it is an accident which could not have happened

<sup>1</sup> Smith, *Voyage*, 126–27.

had there been any inaccuracy on the part of the author of the narrative with regard to the numerous incidents upon which the calculations are founded, or had the ship been wrecked anywhere but at Malta, for there is no other place agreeing, either in name or description, within the limits to which we are tied down by calculations founded upon the narrative.”<sup>2</sup>

Bruce comments: “If they missed Malta, there would have been nothing for it but to hold on for 200 miles until they struck the Tunisian coast, and no one could have expected the ship to survive that long.”<sup>3</sup>

### C. In the fourteenth night, the sailors sense they are nearing land

#### 1. They couldn't see the land

- a. It is nighttime
- b. The hills there are low

#### 2. The breakers on the beach are visible some way off

- a. The sound of breakers could reach them
- b. May have “smelled the land” – though this less likely

#### 3. Preparation for landing

##### a. Taking soundings

- 1) 20 fathoms (fathom = about 6 ft) = 120 ft
- 2) 15 fathoms = 90 ft

##### b. They don't want to wreck on the rocks in the night

- 1) Cast four anchors from the stern
- 2) “Wished” for daybreak — could be “prayed,” if so, to pagan gods
- 3) The four anchors astern was unusual, but this would keep vessel pointed toward the beach in the wind

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<sup>2</sup> Smith, 128.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 488.

#### D. The sailors try to escape

1. They make a pretense of setting anchors at the bow also
2. They are afraid and want to make a dash for it in a smaller boat
3. Whole crew may have been only 12 men, so could have been all of them
4. Paul spots them and reports: "Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved."
  - a. A bit of emphasis on "you yourselves"
  - b. Likely an observation that the rest of those on the ship needed the sailors to survive

"Why the sailors' presence aboard was necessary for the safety of all is not expressly said; but plainly it would have been disastrous had the ship been left as it was with no skilled hands to work it."<sup>4</sup>

#### E. Soldiers cut the lines and the boat drifts off

1. The boat would have been useful once they got safely in towards shore
2. But getting rid of the boat ensures no second attempt

This is the first happening: the sailors betrayed their cravenness, the Lord through Paul and the soldiers intervened.

God works his works through men's works

## II. The second happenstance: the apostle's words of encouragement (33-38)

#### A. As they are waiting for dawn, Paul encourages them to eat

1. They were now fourteen days "going without food"
2. A bit of hyperbole, probably ate some food, but no whole meals

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 491.

- B. They would need all their strength to get the ship into shore and them off the ship
1. There are 276 people on board
  2. Josephus speaks of his own experience in a wreck of a similar ship carrying 600
  3. Their provisions / galley may have suffered damage, but they still had lots of their cargo
    - a. They ate a full meal
    - b. They threw off the rest of the cargo to lighten the ship

Their meal gave them strength for the ordeal to come, though a small detail, an important one. (Also shows the respect Paul is gaining among them.)

God works his works through men's works

### III. The third happenstance: the centurion's desire to deliver Paul to the emperor (39-44)

- A. They do not recognize the land, but notice a bay with a beach
1. The main port of Malta is to the south, the current capital city: Valetta
  2. If the sailors were ever in Malta, they would have been in Valetta, not at this point (now called "St. Paul's Bay")
  3. There are two creeks entering this bay, one of them may have had a sandy beach in the first c. (Smith gives reasons for this)
- B. They cast off the anchors, and loosen the rudders
1. The anchors are no longer needed
  2. Ancient ships had two large steering paddles, during the storm these would be drawn in and lashed down
  3. They hoisted a foresail to give forward movement and some steerage (mainsail not useful, and main mast overboard at Cauda)
  4. They make for the land, heading for the beach

### C. They strike “where two seas meet”

#### 1. Here they struck a “reef”

“‘Reef’ implies coral reef in English, but the Greek word (*topon*), plus investigations at the site of St. Paul’s Bay, suggest that Luke probably described a sand or mud bar. The sailors did not see this obstruction and unintentionally ran the ship aground. Its prow stuck firmly and remained immovable.”<sup>5</sup>

#### 2. There is a small island protecting the bay, the sea is shallower between this island and Malta than the sailors expected

“A ship ... would strike a bottom of mud graduating into tenacious clay, into which the fore part would fix itself and be held fast, whilst the stern was exposed to the force of the waves.”<sup>6</sup>

### D. With the sea breaking up the weakened bow of the ship, there was nothing for it but to swim

#### 1. The soldiers propose executing the prisoners, lest they escape

a. This seems brutal to us!

b. But...

1) Most of them were condemned men, probably heading to Rome for the games

2) More important, the soldiers’ lives were forfeit if any prisoners escaped

#### 2. The centurion intervenes

a. He wanted “to bring Paul safely through”

b. He prevented the soldiers’ plan

c. He ordered all to swim, or to grab planks to float in on

And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land.

<sup>5</sup> Constable, *Expository Notes*, Ac 27.41.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, *Voyage*, 144.

Again, we see a threat to Paul's safety (and his prophecy). **First threat** was the loss of the sailors, the **second** their weakness from fasting, and now, **this threat** from the soldiers.

Here, the centurion acted, and God's will prevailed.

God works his works through men's works

### Conclusion:

**Proposition:** The troubled Christian needs to take courage in the mysterious way God works his works through men's works.

In this narrative, we have the benefit of hindsight. Here are the things we know that the participants (most of them at least) didn't know:

- The prophecy that Paul would make it to Rome and testify before Caesar would come to pass.
- The prophecy that all the passengers on this ship would survive would also come to pass.

We've seen three things in today's passage that would prevent the prophecy from fulfillment, but all of them "worked out" according to God's will.

Now, how do we apply this?

We don't have specific prophecies about our lives, but we know that, if we believe in the Lord Jesus, we will triumph in the end: Rapture or resurrection is our destiny.

What can men do to thwart God's will?

What can we do to help others become part of this destiny? (Can anyone prevent that from coming to pass if we are able to reach the lost and bring them to Christ?)

Our role is to work God's works while we have time to work.

God will bring his will to pass, just as he said he would.