

Intro. In *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, the magazine of the Naval Institute, Frank Koch illustrates the importance of obeying the Laws of the Lighthouse. Two battleships assigned to the training squadron had been at sea on maneuvers in heavy weather for several days. I was serving on the lead battleship and was on watch on the bridge as night fell. The visibility was poor with patchy fog, so the captain remained on the bridge keeping an eye on all activities. Shortly after dark, the lookout on the wing reported, “Light, bearing on the starboard bow.” “Is it steady or moving astern?” the captain called out. The lookout replied, “Steady, Captain,” which meant we were on a dangerous collision course with that ship. The captain then called to the signalman, “Signal that ship: ‘We are on a collision course, advise you change course twenty degrees.’” Back came the signal, “Advisable for you to change course twenty degrees.” The captain said, “Send: ‘I’m a captain, change course twenty degrees.’” “I’m a seaman second-class,” came the reply. “You had better change course twenty degrees.” By that time the captain was furious. He spat out, “Send: ‘I’m a battleship. Change course twenty degrees.’” Back came the flashing light, “I’m a lighthouse.” We changed course (Max Lucado, *In the Eye of the Storm*, 153). Warnings can prove effective, especially when heeded. Couple the warnings of Scripture with the promises of God & you see the need both to trust God’s promise & heed His warnings through perseverance. In “Missions 401: To the End of the Earth,” today we look at Acts 27-28 on “God’s Promise, Your Perseverance” (read 27:1-3, 9-11, 13-38, 41-44; 28:1-10)

Theme: God’s sovereignty & human responsibility

Background: After Paul finished his 3rd missionary journey, he was beaten & imprisoned in Jerusalem with plans to be killed. The Roman tribune protected him by sending him in the middle of the night to Caesarea Maritima, where he spent more than 2 years defending himself of his hope in the resurrection.

- Paul fully trusted in God’s promises & gave warnings to others to heed & persevere.
- You must fully trust in the Lord’s promises & heed the warnings of Scripture to persevere in the faith.

Overview of the Narrative:

- After more than 2 years of imprisonment in Caesarea Maritima, Paul was in danger of being sent back to Jerusalem (where a Jewish mob was waiting to murder him). Thus, Paul appealed to Caesar and he was sent to Rome to provide his defense. Chapters 27 & 28 trace Paul’s northwesterly journey toward Rome, traveling by ship during the difficult season. Because the storms picked up in the winter, they would stop for a few months before continuing their journey.
 - Because of the challenges the ship faced, many were wondering if they would die in route. God sent an angel to assure Paul that he would make it to Rome & so would all of those who traveled with him. Later, when many shipmen believed they would run aground, they were ready to hop on the boats & make it to safety, but Paul warned them that they would only be safe if they stayed with the ship. They listened to Paul & when the ship began to fall apart, everyone swam to safety or floated on the debris. Even when orders were given to kill the prisoners, for fear they would escape, those orders were rejected out of respect for Paul.
 - Everyone made it safely to shore (all 276 people). The locals offered hospitality & while Paul helped gather sticks for the fire, a viper bit him. The locals assumed he was a terrible criminal who was getting justice since he escaped death at sea. When nothing happened to Paul, they thought he was a god. Paul helped heal people while they were there.
 - It’s possible little is said about Paul preaching the gospel because they spoke different languages & didn’t have a translator. If they spoke the same language, Luke may not have mentioned the gospel, because the healing ministry would have implied it as an extension of the ministry of Jesus.
 - God’s promise about life for those who have faith in Jesus is a big part of the gospel, because God can promise things since He is in charge. Once we trust in the gospel, we must obey the gospel as a means of persevering in the faith.
- **Here are 4 principles to make it through life’s journeys** (adapted from *Acts*, Tyndale, 445):
- 1. Recognize the presence of the Lord (27:23-25)**
 - Paul was always cognizant of the Lord’s presence throughout all of his journeys—it started with his conversion as the once-sacrificed yet risen, living Lord Jesus appeared to Him

- You will not get the same appearances & visions as Paul received, because the Lord commissioned him for a special service as an apostle, but the Lord has promised to be present with you, if you are one of His people
- Illus: The most re-occurring command in Scripture is “do not fear” or “do not be afraid” & the reason is because “the Lord is with you”—as you go through the loss of a loved one or as you battle cancer or as you face job loss or whatever challenge you face in your journeys, recognize the presence of the Lord

2. Rely on the people of the Lord (27:1-3)

- No matter what circumstances Paul was in, the Lord provided other believers to encourage him that he could rely on—like Aristarchus of Thessalonica

Illus: One of the reasons it is so important to be part of a small group or SS class is because there is a much greater chance for you to make friends who can be there for you when you face difficult times in your journey of life

3. Rest in the promises of the Lord (27:21-26, 34, 43-44; 28:3-6; cf. 23:11)

a. **His sovereign promise about life (27:21-26, 34, 44)**—once God saves you by His grace, He always keeps you by His grace

- Paul gave them God’s promise about being saved physically—the Lord gives you a promise about being saved spiritually by His grace, if you receive His gift by faith & you won’t lose it

Illus: In essence Paul told them exactly the opposite of what their senses were telling them: you think you can find life by ignoring what God has said. Not true. You think you will experience death if you heed what God has said. Not true. No matter how desperate your situation seems, ultimate safety is found in remaining in God’s will. This is a great lesson for us: it is better to be with God in the midst of danger than to be without God in a place of apparent safety” (*Acts*, 442)

b. **His sovereign promise about His plan (23:11; 27:24, 43; 28:3-6)**—God promised Paul he would testify in Rome before Caesar, so his life was spared by the centurion & a viper

- The Lord’s plan is to save people from every nation, from all tribes, peoples & languages (cf. Revelation 7:9). He will use His people to accomplish His plan. He can use you & this church or you can be silent about the gospel & fail to reach unbelievers & He will use other believers & other churches, but His plan will come to fruition

4. Respond with perseverance in the Lord (27:9-10, 21, 30-32; 28:8-9)

- Paul gave them the Lord’s promise, but they had to heed the warnings to stay with the ship (& not kill the prisoners as they swam & floated to the shore) in order to persevere & be saved
- The same is true for you & me—yes, the Lord has promised to save us, but a means by which He saves us is through a faith which perseveres & doesn’t fall away

Illus: Jesus said the faith which falls away wasn’t a real faith to begin with (cf. Matthew 13:20-21). John said people who leave the community of faith weren’t really part of the faith after all (cf. 1 John 2:19). Jess Moody, former pastor of 1st Baptist, West Palm Beach, said, “A faith which fizzles before the finish was faulty from the first!”

Conc. On Halloween 1991, a fishing crew found themselves in the middle of a collision of tempestuous winds. They had left a small fishing village in New England a few days earlier, hoping to land one more big catch before they would break for the winter season. They landed their catch, but a major storm system lay between them & their path back home. Rather than wait it out a couple of days & watch the fish rot (for a lack of ice), they determined to push through & return home. The movie & the book it was based upon dubbed it *The Perfect Storm*—a tempest that may happen only once in a century — a nor’easter created by so rare a combination of factors that it could not possibly have been worse. Creating waves ten stories high and winds of 120 miles an hour (193 kph), the storm whipped the sea to inconceivable levels few people on Earth have ever witnessed. Few, except the six-man crew of the *Andrea Gail*, a commercial fishing boat headed towards its hellish center. Those men should have heeded the warning about going out & once they failed to do that, they should have heeded the warning & stayed put. But because they failed to heed the warning, they perished. Will you heed the warnings of God? Will you turn from your sin & trust in Jesus? If you have, will you persevere in the faith even when you want to give up & call it quits? The Lord promises life to all who trust Him & persevere.