*DEVOTIONAL*

May 14 - 19

*Paul and the Storm*

**Monday, May 14 Acts 27:1-12**

*“We set sail for Italy”*

Luke returns to the first person plural, having last used it in Acts 21:18, indicating that he is on this journey with Paul as they travel to Rome. Others in the traveling party include the centurion, Julius, his soldiers, other prisoners, and Aristarchus. The latter had been traveling with Paul for some time; he is described by Paul as his “fellow prisoner” (Colossians 4:10) and “fellow worker” (Philemon 24).

With difficulty the ship arrived in Fair Havens, which, despite its name, was not a suitable place to face the rigors of winter. The group had already been delayed, for it was “after the Fast” (i.e., the Day of Atonement), which fell around October 5. Paul felt it was not safe to venture out to find a better place for the winter. Paul was a seasoned traveler, who had already been shipwrecked three times and had spent a night and a day in the open sea (note tomorrow’s devotion from 2 Corinthians 11:24-27). But he was overruled by the majority who decided to go a short distance further west to the better harbor at Phoenix.

*Thank you, Lord, for those you give us to help us on our journey. Amen.*

**Tuesday, May 15 2 Corinthians 11:24-27**

*“I have faced danger”*

Paul’s various arrests, imprisonments, and punishments referred to in these verses were suffered as an apostle for the gospel. His more severe beatings refer both to the Jewish punishment of thirty-nine lashes and to the Gentile punishment of being beaten with rods. Five times Paul received synagogue punishment, which, among other things, was inflicted for false teaching, blasphemy, and seriously breaking the law. Paul’s receiving such punishment five times attests that the synagogue continued to be a strategic focus of his ministry. He went to the Jews first, even though they often accused and convicted him of false teaching and/or breaking the law for his witness to Jesus as the Messiah and for his ministry among the Gentiles.

That Paul submitted himself to these punishments rather than separate himself from the Jewish community is an indication both of his self-understanding as an apostle and of his amazing love for his people. He suffered for his mission to the Gentiles while never abandoning his commitment to his own people.

*Paul’s was a heroic choice, Lord. May I be willing to suffer for you. Amen.*

**Wednesday, May 16 Acts 27:13-20**

*“All hope was gone”*

“A gentle south wind” seemed ideal for the journey to Phoenix, so the crew weighed anchor. Unfortunately Paul’s ship had to confront a northeaster with all its force. They eventually decided that they could not fight it, so they gave in and let it carry them along in the opposite direction, away from the island. Battered by the storm, they tied ropes around the hull to strengthen it. As they were being driven along, a new fear confronted them – the dreaded shallows and quicksands off the shore of Cyrene in North Africa called Syrtis. So they lowered a sea anchor to slow the ship.

As with the storm in the story of Jonah, the next step the sailors took was to throw their cargo overboard and then the ship’s spare gear. By doing this they hoped to decrease the danger of the ship foundering. The sun or stars did not appear for many days, which meant that they could not determine which direction they should go. They finally came to the stage of giving up all hope of being saved.

*We try to save ourselves Lord, but our hope is in you alone. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONAL*

May 14 - 19

*Paul and the Storm*

**Thursday, May 17 Acts 27:21-26**

*“Take courage! For I believe in God”*

To find in Acts an entire chapter dedicated to a journey causes us to wonder why Luke devoted so much space to its description. What did he want his readers to take away from this chapter? The first thing we can says it that it shows us that Luke was clearly there. The narrative is so vivid that we can almost feel what was happening, and it provides evidence that this passage, like the rest of the book, is historically reliable.

A second reason for Luke’s extensive description is that here we see vividly illustrated the mysterious providence of God as he works out his purposes amidst apparent misfortune. This is a major subtheme in Acts. Earlier in the book we saw God work out his purposes despite human sinfulness. Here he works despite the unpredictability of nature and despite human errors in judgment (i.e., the decision to try to sail to Phoenix). God spoke to Paul at a crucial time so that he could maintain his courage and trust in God’s sovereignty; buoyed by that belief, Paul acted with calm at a time when others were panicking.

*I believe you are working out your purposes in my life, Lord. Amen.*

**Friday, May 18 Acts 27:27-38**

*“Paul urged everyone to eat”*

That Paul should take a leadership role in this situation while being a prisoner is so amazing that some biblical commentators doubt that it really happened. But this is typical of the way Paul acted elsewhere in this book. It is important for Christian witness, and for the general welfare of people, for Christians to be actively involved in the affairs of society. If they are gifted in leadership, they can take a lead and have a wide influence for good. But even those not called to be leaders can learn from Paul’s actions here.

Since Paul believed so strongly in the sovereignty of God, he could look beyond the bleak situation and anticipate good to come out of it. Twice in this chapter Paul asked the people to take courage. He then buttressed these words by encouraging them to eat some food. Our words and actions can cause us to be agents of hope in a world that often seems hopeless. One of the most powerful messages we can give to the world is that God is sovereign and that there is therefore hope amidst the gloom that may temporarily engulf us.

*May I be an agent of your hope, Lord, in this hopeless world. Amen.*

**Saturday, May 19 Acts 27:39-44**

*“The commanding officer wanted to spare Paul”*

Dawn brought sight of land for Paul and his shipmates. A beach on the land looked like a safe place to ground the ship. What they didn’t know was that beneath the waters was a treacherous reef. They cut the four anchors, loosed the rudder ropes, and hoisted the mainsail. Then it happened. The prow of the ship stuck fast in the shoal and the stern was battered to pieces by the surging wavers. There was nothing to do but abandon ship and grasp anything afloat to aid in swimming ashore.

Paul and the other prisoners barely escaped execution. The soldiers wanted to kill them, fearing they would swim away and, once on land, would slip out of their grasp. Julius, the centurion, stepped in. Luke tells us that he wanted to save Paul. Was this allegiance to his duty to deliver the Apostle to Rome, or in gratitude for what Paul had done to save their lives? I think the latter. He knew that they would not have made it if it had not been for Paul’s leadership, prayers, and the blessing of his Lord. The Apostle had made a friend.

*When we seek the welfare of others, Lord, we shine your light in the world. Amen.*