



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 27:1–44

“Learning Doctrine Amid Crisis at Sea”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We have a lengthy chapter to read this morning, and I toyed with the idea of taking out certain sections and reading them. But, I think, all in all, that we probably will get as much from the reading of the chapter thoughtfully as we will from the preaching, and so we, in my opinion, should not dispense with the reading, although it will take a few minutes longer than usual. So turn with me to Acts chapter 27. Our subject this morning is “Learning Doctrine Amid Disaster at Sea.” This is a remarkable chapter in many ways. I’ll read through it with just a few comments for the sake of time.

Now, remember, Paul is in Roman custody in Caesarea and the chapter begins after his defense of himself before Agrippa, with the first verse of chapter 27.

“And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus’ band. And entering into a ship of Adramytium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us. And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself. And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.”

Incidentally, if you’re beginning to get a little seasick, you can take your Dramamine now. And if you’re wondering where we are, it’s permissible to turn to one of the maps in the back of your Bible to follow Paul on this journey to the city of Rome. I wanted to make mention of one thing; that you will notice that the apostle as he goes, generally is following land. That was one of the principles of ancient navigation, and so that is set forth here. And then one other thing to notice is that the first person plural has appeared again in chapter 27, an indication of the fact that Luke has rejoined the apostle. Now, he has not been mentioned in the book of Acts since chapter 21, in about verse 18. We assume that Luke was in the area of Caesarea in the land, and, no doubt, was doing some of the research that he speaks about as he begins the Gospel of Luke; research that led him to write the Gospel of Luke and this history of the early Church. So now, we begin with verse 5.

“And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy, and he put us therein. And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone. And hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called the fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea. Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past.” In other words, it was in October. “Paul admonished them, and said unto them; ‘Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.’ Nevertheless, the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things, which were spoken by Paul. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter, which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the southwest and northwest.”

The fact that they followed the opinion of the majority is one of the arguments that one might draw for not following the opinion of the majority, in the light of what happens. Verse 13 begins:

“And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete. But not long after, there arose against it a tempestuous wind called Euroclydon. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive. And running under a certain island which is called Clauda,” today called Gavdhos or Gozzo, “we had much work to come by the boat. Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship, and fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship. And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.”

Now, those of you who have sailed, I did a little in my youth in Charleston, South Carolina, may wonder why they were not able to tack better against the wind, but ancient ships were constructed in such a way that tacking was relatively difficult, and so that accounts for some of the difficulty that they were having.

Verse 20: “And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.”

And remember also, that they reckoned, they navigated, by the stars and by the sun, so when neither one of these appeared for days, that was disastrous for accurate navigation.

Verse 21: “But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them and said, ‘Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and

loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer, for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve saying ‘fear not, Paul. Thou must be brought before Caesar, and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.’ Wherefore sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe God, that it should be even as it was told me.”

Now, this is true biblical prophecy given by God to the apostle who proclaimed it to the men.

“Howbeit, we must be cast upon a certain island. But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria.”

The Adriatic Sea today we think of, as between the Balkan Peninsula and Italy, but in ancient times, it was regarded as being much wider, inclusive of a good part of the Mediterranean, and so the reference here to “Adria” is a reference to that.

“About midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country, and sounded, and found it twenty fathoms. And when they had gone a little further they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms. Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day. And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under color as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, ‘Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.’ Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off. And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat saying, ‘This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. Wherefore I pray you to take some meat, for this is for your health, for there shall not a hair fall from the head of any of you.’ And when he had thus

spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all, and when he had broken it, he began to eat. Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat. And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea. And when it was day, they knew not the land, but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship. And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.”

This of course, was the island of Malta, as will appear later on.

“And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground, and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves. And the soldiers’ counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out and escape. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose, and commanded that they which could swim should themselves first into the sea, and get to the land. And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.”

One of the things that has often been said about this chapter by modern scholarship, is that what Luke did, was to come across an ancient story of a storm and a shipwreck, and using that as a background, inserted the name of Paul, and the so-called experiences of Paul at certain places in the story. Now, if you will take out the references to Paul and read it, you will see that you have to have the experiences of Paul and Aristarcus and Luke in it, to make real good sense out of what is left. Furthermore, the extent to which modern scholarship often goes in an attempt to say that the New Testament is not authentic is illustrated by verse 28, where when they realized that they might be near some land, they sounded. They found it twenty fathoms. When they’d gone a little further, they sounded again. They found it fifteen fathoms, and we now know that they were near Malta, and

navigators have shown that this is precisely the depth of the land around that island, and that it looks very authentic.

Hans Conzelmann, a well-known German New Testament scholar, has, in his attempt to show that this is an inauthentic or unauthentic chapter has said, “No, that’s added afterwards, because would Luke be standing by when they were casting the lead in order to find the depth?” Now, that is the extent to which modern scholarship often goes in its efforts to disprove the historicity of the Word of God. Why as a matter of fact, I can imagine that hardly anything on the boat would be more important than finding out where the bottom was and how they were proceeding. So it seems to me, that’s probably where Luke would have been. But, of course, he wouldn’t have to be there in order to accurately set forth what those men did find. Well, may the Lord bless the reading of his Word.

Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the privilege that is ours, and we thank Thee for Luke, the historian of the early church, who has with research and hard work given us such a marvelous account of the history of the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the work of the Lord as it has continued through the Spirit in the early life of the apostles. We thank Thee for Peter and James and the others who have dominated the earlier chapter, and we thank Thee for Paul, whose experiences have dominated the latter part of this book. But most of all, we thank Thee for the one who obviously is in sovereign control of what is happening, the Lord Jesus Christ, now ascended to the right hand of the Father, having completed his work of redemption, and seeing to it that all of the things that the triune God has intended, should come to pass, are secured for us and for all.

We thank Thee and we praise Thee for the grace of God that has reached down to us, and we pray O God, that as the Word of God is preached today in this auditorium, the grace of God may reach out to any who may be here without the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. May they, by Thy grace, recognize that salvation is not of human works, but of divine activity through the merits of the

cross of Calvary. We ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon the members of the chapel, and the friends, and their friends whose names are in our Calendar of Concern. We pray for them. We pray O God, that Thou wilt give healing, both spiritual and physical as the needs may exist. Give us, Lord, opportunity to glorify Thee in the grace and goodness and mercy that Thou hast shown to us. We pray Thy blessing upon the whole church, upon our country, upon the Chapel, its elders, and deacons, and members. May O God, Thy name be exalted and lifted up in our gatherings. We ask also Thy blessing upon the Lord’s Supper to be observed this evening.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] The ancients generally had no love for the sea. The vessels were uncomfortable. It was not easy to travel in them. There were long delays, as is evidenced by the experience of the apostle and Luke and Aristarchus and others in Acts 27. They were very perilous. They had no sextants. They had no compasses. They had to navigate by the stars, by the sun, by the land. That’s why they kept so close to the land, as I mentioned in the Scripture reading. Their knowledge of the sea was relatively limited, so the result was that no one really looked forward to going on a sea-going cruise. Furthermore, in much of the ancient literature of the Near East, the world was regarded as beginning in a kind of primeval chaos, probably a reflection of what is found in the book of Genesis; in Genesis chapter 1 in verse 1 and verse 2, where, “the Spirit of God hovered over the waters where the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep,” and the result was, that the sea was thought to be a very perilous part of the universe that God had created.

And when we remember too, the fact that the children of Israel were agricultural people or farming people for the most part, you can see that they too did not have any great love for the sea. And even the small lake of the Sea of Galilee could cast some fear in them because remember when the Lord Jesus was on the lake in the storm, and they were with him in the boat or when he was not with them, but they were in the boat, and he came to them to be with them in the boat, they looked off, and when they saw him walking on the water, the first thing that they thought about was, “It’s a

ghost, and the ghost has come to send us to the bottom of the lake.” So they were very fearful of that, and in fact, some have even said, that in the description of the new heavens and the new earth, the intent of “there is no more sea,” the statement made in Revelation chapter 21, is designed to be comforting for those who read that particular account. Well, you can understand then, I think, some of the things that transpired here, and something of the atmosphere that must have governed the thinking of those who took part in the incident.

Acts 27, is a small classic in its own way; as graphic a piece of descriptive writing as anything found in the Bible. And the more you read it and the more you ponder it, I think, the more you recognize that is true, and then of course, it’s one of the most instructive documents for the knowledge of ancient seamanship. Luke narrates, however, not for purposes of instructing us concerning seamanship, but to throw into the strongest relief, the Apostle Paul, and the contribution that he made to the life of Julius, the captain, the owner, the sailors, and others who were with him on that boat. In a sense, he was another Jonah sent to the Gentiles, and wherever the apostle is, he comes to the fore. When he’s before Felix, Paul becomes the dominant figure. When he’s before Festus, he again becomes the dominant figure. Standing before Agrippa, he’s the dominant figure again. He was the dominant figure in the jail in Philippi, when he and Silas, and the others who were there with them, whoever they were, had a little sacred concert without an organ, and “brought down the house,” if I may use a figure to describe the earthquake that took place while they were singing praises to the Lord. So Luke’s desire in this account is to set before us Paul and his ministry in the particular situation.

Now, obviously, if we tried to expound Acts 27, with its forty-four verses in thirty minutes, that’s an impossible task. To do it well, well, if I were a great expositor, we wouldn’t be through until Tuesday, but since I’m not, I’m going to try to be through at twelve o’clock or thereabouts. And so, therefore, what I would like to do is, since I’ve made some comments as we’ve read through it, we’ve read through the whole account, I’ll just note the three major sections of it, and then close with a few

moments to discuss some biblical truths that I think come to the fore here in Acts 27, in the midst of this description of an ancient shipwreck.

Now, if you want to follow things, it's good to have a map of Paul's journey as he left Caesarea and made his way to Rome. We'll break all the homiletical rules this morning for one time, relating the story, and just stressing a few of the points. By the way, while it occurs to me, Professor William Ramsey of the University of Aberdeen, perhaps the greatest of the biblical archeologists of a generation or so ago, made the comment that, “Aristarchus and Luke were following with the Apostle Paul and acting as his slaves.” Now of course, they were not his slaves, but they were acting as his attendants. And acting as his attendants, they gave a sense of importance to Paul, and that may account for the fact, that Julius the centurion comes to regard Paul obviously rather highly and takes him into the councils concerning the things that are going to happen with reference to that boat. It may have been simply because Paul was a kind of commanding figure, and I'm sure you didn't have to be around him long to realize that he was a commanding figure. But at any rate, Aristarchus and Luke may have been his attendants.

The first movement of the story is the description of the journey from Caesarea to Fair Havens; that's the start, and it's found in verses 1 through 8. It's relatively simple. We read it through. I don't think there's any need to say much about it. But from Fair Havens to Malta, and the storm, well, more can be said about that.

An ancient writer, Vegesius by name, said that, “Up to September the fourteenth sailing was safe in the Mediterranean. Then from September the fourteenth to November the eleventh, it was dangerous.” Now, that's the word that is used by Luke in the ninth verse, “and when sailing was now dangerous.” Vegesius went on to say that, “After November the eleventh, then sailing was impossible,” and so that is why, when they got to Fair Havens, the thought came to them, “We must make up our mind where we're going to spend winter,” because from November until March, there was no sailing on the Mediterranean, particularly, if you wanted to arrive at your destination. So they did have some debate about where they should be. Fair Havens, unfortunately, did not have a very

enclosed harbor. It was open to the sea, and damage could occur, and so they hoped that they might be able to go to Phenice, which was up the coast, modern Phoenicia, and there they sought to go, as you know. They had a discussion. The apostle told them, that in his opinion, it was a mistake that, “There would be much hurt, and much danger, not only of the lading and the ship, but also of our lives.” Now, nothing is said about the results of the apostle’s council here. I can only assume that perhaps in the journey from Fair Havens up, they had lost some lives earlier. It was easy for people to be swept overboard, and for various other things to happen in those days, but that’s a questionable thing. In fact, some have even questioned that this was a kind of prophecy by the apostle at all, but was just simple council that, “We are liable to encounter some very difficult times.”

At any rate, after the council of the men we read that, “The centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul.” Now, I have a friend who has made a great deal over this, and he has said, “That illustrates the danger of believing men, rather than the divine revelation.” Well, if the apostle had given what may be called “divine revelation,” it may illustrate that point. They refused the amateur advice of a person who was a land lover, but after all, Paul had had a lot of experience on the sea. He traveled a great deal. He even says in 2 Corinthians that, “he was a day and a night in the deep,” so he had suffered shipwreck before. He knew what it was. He’d had that experience. I imagine they did listen to him, but, finally, made the decision that they didn’t want to stay at Fair Havens, and that they should move on, hoping to make the further port of Phenice, and there to winter.

Well, when the south wind blew softly, I can just imagine someone saying, “You see, the Lord is with us.” Now, that illustrates the fact, that circumstances are not reliable guides for Christians. People often go by circumstances, and sometimes circumstances do confirm the guidance that we seem to have from the Lord, but circumstances often are just as much opposed to divine guidance as in favor of it. “When the south wind blew softly,” might have suggested God’s in this, but as it turned out, it was a very, very difficult thing. In fact, the storm became so bad, they finally had to let the ship just drift. By the way, James Smith, who wrote *The Voyage and Shipwreck of the*

Apostle Paul over a hundred years ago with extensive research, showed that a ship from the island of Crete left to drift for two weeks, which is about the time here, would have drifted just about exactly where this ship came, somewhere in the vicinity of Malta. And even modern navigation has confirmed that fact, so in that sense, this is true to the experience that a person might have on the Mediterranean Sea.

Well, when they arrived at the end of this fourteen days Luke says, “The sun or the stars in many days had not appeared, and all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.” The “we” may suggest that even Paul was feeling a little despairing at this point, if Luke intends to include Paul. We do know that idleness feeds despair, and despair nourishes idleness. Food was scarce. The cooking was impossible. Appetite. Who has much appetite in the midst of a violent storm on a ship? So they had every reason to be upset, and they were. And they really thought that things were lost. “After long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them and said, “Sirs, you should have hearkened unto me.” This is Paul’s way of saying, “I told you so.” But he did accompany it with some words of encouragement. He said, “I exhort you,” this is verse 22, “to be of good cheer, for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship.” And then Paul goes on to talk about the vision that he had. “The angel of God, whose I am and whom I serve, he appeared and said, ‘Fear not Paul. Thou must be brought before Caesar, and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.’ Wherefore sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.”

Now, those are Paul’s remarkable words of encouragement, and so the third movement of the story, from Malta to land, the shipwreck in verse 27 through verse 44, we’ll dispense with the exposition of it because it’s obviously very plainly and clearly written. Paul is pictured as very sagacious, as well as spiritual. He spotted the plot of the sailors to leave the ship and leave the others, even before the centurion did. You know, there’s one thing you could say about Paul. You couldn’t say about him, the thing that you can say about many of us in the Christian church. He was so heavenly minded that he was no earthly good. Paul had combined this heavenly mindedness with a

very practical good sense. I never have found myself, that these things should be opposed to one another. The heavenly mindedness, however, is the thing that should guide and direct us.

Well, after they have come near the land, Paul encourages them to take meat; an evidence of his faith that they would live, and at the close, Julius says that he wanted to save Paul and the others, and they all managed to reach land, even though there had been a shipwreck. Some of them reached land on broken pieces of the ship. Others were able to swim. A great deal has been made of that by people who like to over-typologize the Scriptures. Some have said that those that swam to the land were the brethren who have good understanding of biblical principles, and those who have to escape on pieces of the ship, well, they are the weaker brethren. But, I doubt, that, that was Luke’s purpose in writing the account.

What I’d like to do now, is to draw from this account three important things. I think they’re very important. They’re outstanding statements of spiritual truth. First of all, we have, and I won’t spend as much time on this as you might think I would, we have a clue here to the understanding of the nature of divine foreordination and human responsibility. Now, the Bible teaches the doctrine of divine foreordination of all things; the divine election of the people of God. Let me just remind you of a couple of Scriptures. In Ephesians chapter 1, the Apostle Paul says, “God works all things according to the council of his own will.” Divine foreordination. In that same chapter Paul says, “According as he has chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world.” Divine election. Now, many people when they believe in divine election, and divine fore-ordination, not enough believe in that, think that, therefore, there is no human responsibility. How can we be responsible if God is the ultimate determiner of the destiny of men? Well actually, there are many arguments that one might propose in support of the biblical doctrines. We don’t have time to do that. This is not the place to argue those points. But let me assure you, that those two doctrines of human responsibility and divine foreordination are taught in the Word of God.

Now, we have an illustration that, I think, answers some of the questions that people have. Sometimes they will answer like this; they will say, “Well, if God has fore-ordained all things, then

why pray?” Or “If God has fore-ordained all things, then why witness; give testimony?” Or “If God has fore-ordained all things, why are we warned in Scripture that certain things may transpire in our experience?” Well, when the Bible talks about divine foreordination and divine election, particularly, we are to understand that God accomplishes his purpose through his determined means. He determines not only the end but the means to the end.

Now, I want you to notice verse 24 of chapter 27. In fact, I guess we should read verse 22 also. “And now I exhort you to be of good cheer, for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship.” And then Paul says the angel appeared to him and said, “Fear not, Paul,” verse 24, “Thou must be brought before Caesar, and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.” In other words, it was foreordained that not one of those men on that boat should lose his life. But now, notice how Paul responds to that in verse 31. When the time comes for him to give his warning, “Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers,” who were thinking of leaving the ship, “Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.” In other words, why did the apostle say that if he already knew by divine revelation, no one was going to be lost? There would be no need for any warning at all. He would simply think, “Well, they’re all going to be saved. Some are going to be saved by sticking with the ship. Some are going to be saved by getting in the water. Leave it up to the divine foreordination of God, and do nothing about it. Well, that is the attitude that a lot of people have who think about the doctrine of divine foreordination, but you can see that these things were not contradictory to the apostle. To affirm that all should be saved, they were going to be saved in the ship. So the warning was given as the means to the accomplishment of the divine foreordained goal and end that the angel had told Paul previously. So there is no contradiction between divine election and human responsibility. They are taught in Scripture. So many people get so upset because election is a blow to human pride. Election is a blow to human pride, because it reminds us of the fact that salvation is of the Lord.

A few years back, in fact, it was in 1971, I was preaching the gospel in Calgary in Alberta in Canada, and it was a weekend meeting, as I remember it. And there was a man who came up to me

by the name of Eric Hanson. He was a man about, at that time, as I remember, about sixty years of age. He was a very friendly, open, outgoing person with a big smile on his face. I had mentioned the term “election” in the message somewhere, and he came up and he said, “I heard you mention the doctrine of divine election. I’d like to you to know, that I believe those great doctrines of the sovereignty of God’s grace.” We began to talk and he explained his experiences to me. It turned out he was a former Pentecostal charismatic preacher who had come to an understanding of the doctrines of sovereign grace, and he lived in Three Hills, Alberta, where the Prairie Bible Institute was; a very fine school, used of God in missionary activity, whose president, Mr. Maxwell, was a well-known theological Arminian; very Arminian.

And in the course of one of the classes, he had mentioned Mr. Hanson, and he had mentioned that Mr. Hanson believed, and these were the precise words that he used, that “Mr. Hanson believed that horrible doctrine of predestination.” Now, he made a mistake. He shouldn’t have mentioned Mr. Hanson’s name, because if he had just said to the students, “that horrible doctrine of pre-destination,” those students who were trying to search out the truth, might not have had a clue about where they might go to get an explanation, but they mentioned Mr. Hanson. And Mr. Hanson was well known. If he would be in any community, it wouldn’t be long before he would be known. He just had a marvelous outgoing personality. So they came to his house; a few of the students with their Bibles under their arms, and they told Mr. Hanson what Mr. Maxwell had said; I’m sure like students hoping to get a response from him. Mr. Hanson said, “Well, Hanson’s opinions are not worth a thing.” Well they replied, “Yes, we know. We know it began with Calvin.” And Hanson said, “Well, let’s turn to the Bible.” He said, “I respect Hanson, but actually it goes beyond him.” He turned to Ephesians chapter 1. He expounded, “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.” Then he turned over to Romans 8, where Paul mentions foreordination, and foreknowledge, and the other great doctrines of the Word there, and then as he concluded, the students said, “Well, I see or we see it began with Paul.” And Mr. Hanson said, “Well, now let’s turn to the Old Testament,” and so he turned to the book of

Malachai where Malachai says, “Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated.” And he expounded the significance of that particular passage, and they said, “Well, then it was in existence before Paul.” And Mr. Hanson said, “Then I asked them to turn to Genesis chapter 25 in verse 23,” where we have the account of the birth of Jacob and Esau, where the angel of the Lord made the statement that “the elder shall serve the younger.” And then the students said, “Well, we see it now. It was God who started it all.” Well, that’s the truth. It was God who started it all, but there is nothing contradictory between the speaking about the fact, that none of them are going to be lost, and at the same time warning them that they must stay on the boat.

Now, the second truth is, I think, of great significance as well. In Paul’s statements here, particularly, in verse 25, we have a clue to the true nature of faith. Notice the statement in verse 25. “Wherefore sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me.” Now, you can see here, that what the apostle is saying is that faith exists in the belief of the words of God. “I believe God that it shall be even as it has been told me.” That’s the way we come to the Word of God. We believe that the Word of God is the Word of God and, therefore, it can be relied upon. It can be trusted. True faith is simply the acceptance of the teaching of the Word of God.

When I was going through theological seminary, Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer used to refer to the experiences of Abraham and, particularly, the experience in chapter 15 of the book of Genesis, where God called Abraham out, and asked him to look at the skies, and number the stars if he could. And as Abram looked up, then we read, and God added, “and so shall thy seed be.” And Moses adding this, “Abram believed in the Lord, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness.” In other words, he took God at his word. “So shall thy seed be as multitudinous as the stars in the heavens.” Well, Dr. Chafer was not a student of the original languages, and he often made some mistakes, but he’d been around Bible teachers so much that he had a lot of understanding of things, which he had learned from teachers who did know something about the original languages. The Hebrew word “to believe” is the word *amen*. It’s the word that is related to the New Testament adverb *aman*. “Verily,

verily I say unto you.” *aman, aman* in the Greek text. That’s really a kind of Greek transliteration of the Hebrew. Now, that’s the word that is used when we read, “And Abram believed in the Lord,” “amine” comes from “amen.” He believed in the Lord, and it was imputed to him for righteousness. And Dr. Chafer used to like to say, “You see what Abraham did, was to “amen” the Lord.” So when God said, “So shall thy seed be,” and Abram believed in the Lord, he “amen-ed” the Lord. That’s what faith essentially is. It is to act what you say, when you say, “So be it.” So Paul says, “I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.”

Faith and feeling and facts are related in a particular order. Fact always comes first. Those are the facts set forth in Scripture that describe the redemptive experiences. Fact. Faith looks to facts. Fact goes first. Faith looks to facts, and rests upon them. Feeling may or may not come immediately. It usually will come thereafter. We have difficulty when we reverse orders, and think we must have feeling before we can believe some facts or feeling before we know certain facts, feeling before we believe facts. When we reverse the order of fact, faith, and feeling, then we have difficulty. So many people do that in the Christian church, and so emotions properly part of man, emotions assume wrong places. We live in a society that has a great deal of adjustment necessary in this very fact in their daily life. In spiritual things, we have the same problems. So the apostle says, “I believe God, that it shall be even as it has been told me.”

Mr. Spurgeon used to say, “This is the genuine breed of faith; to believe God as it has been told him.” That great principle will stand us in good stead through life, and it will also stand the local church in good stead. So many people, when you say, “This is the way the New Testament presents the working of a local church” will say, “It won’t work,” or “It hasn’t worked,” or various other types of objections based upon human reasoning. But the answer, is the answer of the Word of God, “I believe God as it has been told me.” And if we believe God, we will, ultimately, see the hand of divine blessing.

The third principle found in this passage is found in verse 23. “For there stood by me this night an angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve.” Now, here we have a clue to the true nature

of life in Christ. “Whose I am.” That looks at Paul’s inward life. He belonged to the Lord. “Whose I am.” And he recognized that, and notice he doesn’t say, “Whose I was,” but “Whose I am.” He regards the Lord as the owner of himself, but then he says, “And whom I serve.” That’s his outward life. That’s his priestly service, for the word is a term that is often used of priestly service, “whom I serve.” So Paul regarded his whole being as belonging to the Lord, and everything that he did as part of his priestly service. I say to you my Christian friend, that you will most enjoy your Christian life when you recognize you belong to the Lord, and secondly, that all of your activities are part of your priestly service. Now, I’m sure that most of us, if we were to use that standard, “Whose I am, and whom I serve,” there would be some modifications in the way in which we live. This is so important. Both of these verbs are in the present tense. “Whose I am, and whom I am serving.”

So Paul, amid the howling winds, the pounding waves, the tempest, the blackened sky, the real skipper of Paul was not Julius, or the captain, or even the owner. The real skipper of the apostle was the Lord God himself. As the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, “He endured as seeing him who is invisible.”

I love that story about some individuals who were in a great storm. They were very much disturbed; very afraid as the ship was tossed about like a matchstick on the sea, and finally, one of the members of the party down below got enough courage to go up the steps, and take a look out. And he went up, took a look out, and came back and said, “Well, I think everything’s all right, because I’ve seen the captain’s face.” And in life, to have the sense of the fact that it is the Lord who is the ultimate skipper of our lives, is of great comfort in whatever experience we might have.

No apostle, no New Testament writer ever remembered the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, let me qualify that. Of course, they remembered him, but as they remembered him, their memory became a present experience. They didn’t think of him as someone in the past who had lived and died. They thought of someone who had died and lives now and that was the guiding star of their lives.

May God help us as we think of our own lives, to recognize that we belong to the Lord, and that we serve him. If you’re here and you’ve never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, you

don't belong to him; you do not have this guiding star of life. But you may have him if you recognize that the Lord Jesus has died for sinners, that you're a sinner; that the atonement has been made, the price has been paid, and if upon your recognition of yourself as in need of deliverance from sin and guilt and condemnation, you in your heart flee to our Lord and rest upon him and what he has done, you pass from death into light, life; from darkness into his marvelous light and into a relationship that is eternal. May God help you to come. Don't leave this auditorium without that personal faith in the Lord Jesus that enables you to say, “Whose I am, and whom I serve.” We invite you to come, as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus. Come to Christ. Trust him by his grace.

Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these marvelous accounts, so true to life, so true to our lives. Give us something of the spirit of the apostle and of Luke and Aristarchus, and others who by their grace have come to know divine election, divine sovereignty, the presence of the Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of sins; all of those blessings that belong to the saints of God [End of Tape]