

Weathering the Storms of Life Takes Faith in Jesus

It was late in the fall; the year was AD 59; and the Apostle Paul was imprisoned on a boat. Paul was used to travelling by boat, not as a prisoner but as a missionary of the Gospel. Over the last ten years, Paul had gone on three missionary journeys throughout the Mediterranean world and spent a lot of time on a boat. But after his third mission trip, Paul got in trouble with the law – not because he broke the law but because the Jewish leaders wanted to put a stop to their once advocate now adversary. So they had him arrested, and Paul spent two full years in jail for sharing Jesus. Eventually, during his trial before the Roman governor, Paul appealed to Caesar in Rome (who was sort of like our Supreme Court). And, of course, the best way to get from Israel to Italy is by boat. So, here we find Paul, travelling to Rome, imprisoned on a boat, about halfway to his destination when **vs. 13-14**.

Sometimes when we're sailing through life, hurricane-force winds sweep down on us, as well – quickly and without warning. Not literal wind and waves – we call them the storms of life. And they just pop up, at unexpected times. And we all have to weather these storms. They can be external storms, that everyone can see, like a boat battered by the splashing sea. Or they can be internal storms of fear, anger, doubt, exasperation – storms of the heart or mind that only you can see. Storms like a car accident; a medical emergency; a terminal diagnosis; a death in the family; chronic, debilitating pain; cruel, hurtful words spoken to or about you; being made fun of; a broken relationship; the betrayal of a friend; a sick child; a dying spouse; a failing parent; an unexpected layoff; an unexpected expense; nagging debt; mental issues; a broken heart; a mind not at peace.

These are what we call the storms of life. They sweep down on us suddenly and with hurricane force, and they catch us off guard, just Paul and his shipmates were caught off guard. **Vs. 15**. Sometimes there's nothing you can do about the storms of life; they just drive you along, to places you don't want to go, to do things you don't want to do – like take your loved one to the emergency room; or meet with the funeral director to plan a funeral; or meet with an attorney to finalize your divorce; or make the daunting search for a new job; or try to figure out how in the world you're going to pay all these bills; or try to cope with the anxiety bubbling up in your heart and the frustration fogging up your mind. The storms of life sometimes just drive us along and force us to go places we don't want to go and do things we don't want to do.

So what do we do? We fight back! **Vs. 18-19**. We take matters into our own hands during a storm. We improvise; we strategize; we galvanize our efforts; and we fight back. We come up with plans for survival, solutions to navigate these rough waters. We want to be in control of our lives; so during a storm, our natural reaction is to fight back.

But so does the storm. It's unrelenting. And it's painfully obvious that the storm is more powerful than we are, and it's out of our control. And so eventually we give up all hope. **Vs. 20**. Have you? Have you given up all hope? Has your storm – whatever it may be, whatever catastrophe has been crashing down on you in your life – has your storm caused you to throw your hands up in abject despair and simply give up on God? Have you been brought to your breaking point and lost your faith in the promises of the Savior you've prayed to, turned to, and relied upon, because he doesn't seem to be saving you? Have you come to the conclusion that God must have forgotten about you, or that he certainly doesn't care about you anymore? Have the storms of life pushed you over the edge, so that now you too have **"finally [given] up all hope of being saved"**?

Well, if you have, or if feel like you're about to, you are not alone. Paul and the crew felt that way. I have felt that way. And I bet every one of us here today, at some point in life, has felt that way, as well. Jesus' own disciples once felt that way, too. **"A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, don't you care if we drown?'"** (Mk 4:37-38). And we can relate! Jesus, don't you see what's happening in my life?! Don't you care?! Don't you have the power to stop it? Don't you want to stop it?! What are you doing? Why aren't you helping? I thought you loved me, Jesus! Don't you care?!

Vs. 21a, 22-25. What has God told you? What has God promised you – not from an angel standing by your side; but what has God told you in his Word? What has he spoken to you in Scripture to encourage you and strengthen you and lift you up as you go through these storms of life? What has he said? Let me remind you.

Dt 31:6 – Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified..., for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

Ps 9:9-10 – The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble... You, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.

Ps 23:4 – Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.

Ps 55:22 – Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken.

Jer 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.”

Rom 8:28 – We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.

Rom 8:38-39 – I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jn 14:1 – Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.

Jn 16:33 – In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

Mt 28:20 – Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Whenever you go through difficult times in life; whenever life stinks and your heart hurts and the storms of life bear down on you and you wonder whether God even cares, listen to what the Lord says – in these passages and in a thousand more! He is not silent. He speaks a consistent message of comfort that he wants you to take to heart. The Lord does love you; he does care about you; he is always with you; and he will never leave you. That’s his promise! No storm is too powerful, no problem is too great, no situation is too desperate for the God whom **“even the wind and the waves obey” (Mk 4:41)**. When the storm of guilt and divine justice was howling around us, the storm that would have swept us away into hell forever because of our sins, God’s Son Jesus Christ stepped in and took our place. On the cross Jesus endured the terrible tempest of God’s wrath against sin so that we would never have to. He willingly laid down his life, then came back to life, to forgive our sins and quell the storm and reassure us that he stands behind every promise he makes.

So, **vs. 25**. What God tells us in his Word is powerful and comforting. His Word stops storms and strengthens faith. To the storm on the sea of Galilee he said, **“Quiet! Be still!” (Mk 4:39)**. And it was! To the storms that devastated Job he said, **“This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt” (Job 38:11)**. And they did! And when the storms of life bear down upon you, at the right time, God will say the same thing. “Quiet. Be still. Here is where you stop.” The Lord is in control, even when it seems like he’s not. The Lord walks with us, especially when life is hard. He has not left us, and he will not forget about us. Jesus is risen; Jesus reigns; and Jesus knows best.

But the challenges we go through in life do take their toll on us. Paul said **vs. 26**. And that’s exactly what happened. They landed on the island of Malta, battered but not broken. I don’t know what island God will run you aground on, how things in your life will shake out after your storm subsides. But I do know that you won’t be there alone. Jesus will be there. He is with you now, and always will be, and always has been. Maybe your life right now is smooth sailing and you’re not really dealing with any major troubles. Or maybe you are! Certainly you have, and certainly you will again. Whatever storms you face, and whenever you face them, always trust in Jesus, look to Jesus, remember Jesus. Remember what Jesus did for you to save you because he loves you, and remember his promise that he will always be with you.

Weathering the storms of life takes faith in Jesus. Don’t let any storm you face shipwreck your faith. Put your trust in Jesus, because he’s bigger than your storm.

Acts 27:13-26

¹³ When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. ¹⁴ Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the Northeaster, swept down from the island. ¹⁵ The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. ¹⁶ As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure, ¹⁷ so the men hoisted it aboard. Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Because they were afraid they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. ¹⁸ We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. ¹⁹ On the third day, they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands. ²⁰ When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

²¹ After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: “Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. ²² But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. ²³ Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me ²⁴ and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’ ²⁵ So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. ²⁶ Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island.”