

Monday - Acts 27:1-26

It will happen just as God told me

Insight

Verse 9 *“Sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Fast.”* The Fast, also known as the Jewish Day of Atonement, occurred in late September or in October. Mediterranean sailing after mid-September was always risky.

Points to Ponder/Discussion

1. How did the centurion show special kindness to Paul on his trip to Rome?
2. Why did the majority dismiss Paul’s advice to stay put in the port of Fair Havens?
3. What events led those sailing the ship to give up all hope of being saved?

Apply

4. An angel appeared to Paul, assuring him that he would live. As a bonus, the Lord graciously gave to Paul the lives of his shipmates. What similarities does this act of God have to the events of Genesis 39:2-6? What do such events reveal about the character of our God? What purpose does God have whenever he shows the unbelieving world kindness? (Acts 14:15-17)
5. As a storm raged and it appeared all on the boat would die, Paul may have recalled God’s promise in Acts 23:11. Read that promise and discuss how such words would have given Paul a very different perspective as his boat was tossed and nearly broken by the waves. Read Romans 8:38,39 and Psalm 46:10, and explain how these words give us a very different perspective as we face difficulties in life.

Summary - Paul began his trip to Rome. The Lord gave Paul many opportunities to testify.

Answers

- 1) In Sidon the centurion permitted Paul to visit friends who cared for him. (Note: You may wish to have a map handy and trace Paul’s route since there are so many place names.)
- 2) Both the pilot and the owner of the ship opposed Paul’s suggestion. In addition, most felt the harbor of Fair Havens was unsuitable for wintering. They would try to sail about 50 miles more to Phoenix, a much better harbor.
- 3) A horrible storm with winds of hurricane force threw the boat like a toy. The boat itself threatened to break apart. To reduce weight and hopefully minimize damage, sailors dumped cargo and threw overboard their ship’s equipment. When even these extreme measures did nothing to reduce the problem, they concluded all was lost.
- 4) In both cases the Lord blessed the lives of unbelievers through one of his children. In both cases, God blessed one of his children by blessing the unbelievers around them. Whenever God shows kindness to unbelievers, he gives testimony to his existence and love, wanting them to be saved. How many on board the ship would come to faith in the next couple of weeks? We aren’t told, but no doubt God had his elect among the passengers and crew.
- 5) God had promised that Paul would testify in Rome. While he didn’t know how God would make that happen, he knew God would. As Paul felt timbers shiver and was drenched with sea spray, he had nothing to fear. He knew God would keep his promise. God has promised us that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ, not even death. In the greatest of troubles and in the most discouraging of life’s storms, we can be still, completely relaxed knowing that God will not break his word. We have nothing to fear.

Tuesday - Acts 27:27-44

God protects Paul and all the people on board

Insight

Verse 27 *“On the fourteenth night”*—A storm of hurricane force had raged for 14 days and blew the ship off course. It was driven out of control across the waters. (The pronoun *we* notes that Luke, the author of Acts, was with Paul on the journey.)

Points to Ponder/Discussion

1. Reading this account is adventure at its best. But it is more than adventure involving the forces of nature or human cunning. The account is the story of God calmly in control of the raging sea and his ability to sail a ship against all human odds. Find the island of Malta on a map. Then compare how far it is from Crete and how much water surrounds it. What were the “odds” that the ship would have been driven for 14 days and come across this island?
2. This adventure story is also the story of calm in the heart of God’s representative, Paul, who was trusting in God’s promises. How did God use a Roman prisoner to steer the passengers and crew to follow his will?

Apply

3. This short account gives us a view of how God has dealt with the world and will continue to deal with the world until the end of time. Can you see how this account does that?
4. Paul took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of a boatload of unbelievers. How can we give witness to our Savior in how we handle the regular activities of daily life?

Summary - Paul repeated God’s promise to rescue everyone on the ship. God used Paul to guide the actions of the people on the ship, and all arrived safely on shore.

Answers

- 1) Malta is a little speck way out in the Mediterranean Sea. It is clearly God’s hand that led the ship to find this island.
- 2) When the sailors tried to escape, Paul told the centurion to stop them. Paul urged the people to eat to find strength for the ordeal ahead. No doubt this saved the lives of many. In so doing, he gave a witness to his faith, giving thanks to God for the food in the midst of terror. He encouraged the people. The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners, but for the sake of Paul, the centurion ordered them not to. In this way the whole crew and all the passengers arrived safely on shore—all because of God’s grace and the work of God’s representative, Paul.
- 3) God certainly gives good gifts to all people. Yet God’s people, and the elect who are yet to come to faith, are at the center of all God does. God guides and shapes the events of the world on a large and small scale for the sake of his plan of salvation. For example, the power structures of the world were put in motion during the famine in Egypt so there would be enough food, not just for the world, but especially for the fledgling nation of Israel. This same pattern can be traced in how God prepared the world for the birth of Christ and for how God used the world’s power to foster the Reformation in Luther’s day.
- 4) Paul communicated his absolute confidence that the true God was in charge. We can pray before meals. Like Boaz in the book of Ruth, we can allow the Lord’s name to be a part of our greetings and good-byes (perhaps “The Lord’s blessings on your day”). We can be on constant watch for opportunities to acknowledge and honor our God in the presence of unbelievers during their difficult times but, most important, during our difficult times.

Wednesday - Acts 28:1-16

Strangers and brothers welcome God's servant

Insight

Verse 1 *"Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta."* This small island south of Sicily lay about 500 miles from the island of Crete, where Paul and his traveling companions had first been blown off course and set adrift by the autumn storm.

Verse 13 *"The south wind"*—The violent hurricane winds of God's providence may force us in this or that direction so his will is done, but Christians can always take heart. God can also use the gentle south winds to put us where he wants us.

Points to Ponder/Discussion

1. How did the Lord immediately give Paul a chance to explain who he was and give a witness to his faith?
2. How did the Lord continue to give Paul a chance to witness to his faith?
3. How did a hurricane wind play into revealing God's love for people of all nations and advance his plan of salvation?
4. Describe Paul's living conditions once he arrived in Rome.

Apply

5. As Paul approached Rome, fellow Christians heard of his coming and went out to meet him. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and literally *received courage* (verse 15). Read Hebrews 10:23-25, and explain why regular contact with fellow Christians is a great blessing.

Summary - The people of Malta received the castaways and showed them hospitality. Paul had many opportunities to witness in Malta. When spring came, they completed their trip to Rome.

Answers

- 1) The Lord saved Paul from the snake. At first the people thought Paul was a god. Luke does not record Paul's sermon, but there can be no doubt that Paul used this mistaken identity to tell the islanders who the true God was and about the salvation he had sent them.
- 2) Paul healed the father of the official in charge of the island. He also healed others on the island who came to him.
- 3) The wind drove the ship exactly to where God wanted it. Because the ship had been driven off course, the Lord fulfilled his plan of salvation for the people on Malta.
- 4) Paul was held under a sort of house arrest, living by himself with a single soldier guarding him. Perhaps the centurion on the ship, who had experienced everything the Lord had done through Paul, made it clear that Paul was not a flight risk.
- 5) Fellow believers direct us to the hope we have, reminding us that God always keeps his promises. They encourage us to keep working hard for the Lord, reminding us that our labor in the Lord is not in vain. They focus us on the shortness of our lives and the imminent second coming of our Lord. Satan tempts all Christians to doubt. Fellow Christians who remind us of God's truths use words filled with divine power, words that encourage us as they encouraged Paul. You might read Romans 1:11,12, written to the very people who came out to meet Paul.

Thursday - Acts 28:17-31

For two years, Paul spread the gospel in Rome

Insight

Verse 26 *“You will be ever hearing but never understanding.”* Isaiah (6:9), Jesus (Matthew 13:14), and Paul all spoke these harsh words of judgment. God was saying, “You will never understand.” Following the original Hebrew, we hear God telling Isaiah, “Make their ears dull.” In other words, preach so much that they become hardened in their rejection. Then I myself will harden their hearts so they cannot believe.

Verses 30,31 *“For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house. . . . He preached the kingdom of God.”* God used Paul’s unjust imprisonment to spread the saving news of Jesus. While in Rome, Paul wrote Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and probably Ephesians. After two years, Paul was freed. He continued preaching but was arrested again. During this second imprisonment, he wrote his second letter to Timothy. He told Timothy that he had finished his race. He expected to be executed. He anticipated God’s eternal prize.

Points to Ponder/Discussion

1. Why did Paul call together leaders of the Jews in Rome?
2. How did the Jews respond to Paul at this first meeting?
3. The Jewish people came to hear Paul explain his teaching. What did Paul attempt to do? What was the result?
4. After Paul had rebuked the Jews for their unbelief, he announced God’s plan for the mission work in Rome. What would Paul do in the years he was there?

Apply

5. How can we follow in Paul’s footsteps?

Summary - Paul shared Jesus with the Roman Jews. He condemned their unbelief and turned to the Gentiles.

Answers

- 1) He wanted nothing to hinder the gospel. He knew he would first be preaching the gospel to the Jews, and he did not want any rumors about him to interfere. Paul needed to find out what the Jews had heard about him. He wanted to share the real reason for his imprisonment. He wanted to make sure they understood that he was in chains because of the “hope of Israel.”
- 2) Paul had no reason to fear possible negative rumors. The Jews explained that they had heard nothing bad about him, no specific accusations against him, but they knew that many opposed his teaching. They wanted to hear his views, so they set up an appointment.
- 3) Paul used the Old Testament, Moses and the Prophets, to try to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah. Some believed; some did not. But Paul had fulfilled his obligation to the Jewish community in Rome.
- 4) He would preach to the Gentiles, and they would listen. So he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 5) We can center our ministry on the kingdom of God, which people join by faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. In God’s kingdom there is forgiveness of sins and strength to serve the Lord. We extend God’s kingdom by preaching Jesus Christ and his work for all people.

Friday – 1 Peter 1:1-9

Peter praises God for our living hope

Insight

Verse 1 *“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ”*—Peter identifies himself as the author of this letter. We do not know if he ever personally served the people he is addressing. He addresses people in Asia Minor, in locations where Paul established churches on his first journey. Some suggest that Peter wrote from Rome while Paul was on his mission trip to Spain, caring for Paul’s congregation when he was gone.

Points to Ponder/Discussion

1. What does Peter mean by “elect” and why does he call his readers “strangers in the world”?
2. What roles have the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit played in our lives? (verse 2)
3. Peter will encourage his readers to hold firm to the faith in the midst of persecution. But before he does, he overwhelms us with the great blessings God has given us. Meditate on these blessings in preparation for Peter’s encouragement to go through persecution:
 - “great mercy” *Everything we have is a gift of God’s mercy.*
 - “new birth” *Our old birth led to death. Our new birth makes us children of God.*
 - “living hope” *Our hope will never be put to death. It will continue on forever.*
 - “an inheritance that can never . . . fade” *Our inheritance in heaven is everlasting.*
 - “shielded by God’s power” *Through faith in Christ, God keeps us safe from Satan.*
 - “salvation that is ready to be revealed” *Our eternal salvation is at hand.*
4. What does Peter tell us about the length of our troubles?
5. We live by faith. What do our troubles do in relation to our faith?

Apply

6. As one of God’s people, what is the source of your joy?

Summary - Peter reminds us of the great blessings God has given us and encourages us in the midst of the suffering we go through as God’s people.

Answers

- 1) They, like us, have been chosen to belong to God and to be a new nation belonging to him. That makes them and us strangers in the world. We are people the world does not recognize or acknowledge as part of it.
- 2) The Father chose us to come to faith; the Spirit called us to faith and made us holy, leading us to obey (believe in) Jesus and be cleansed from our sins by his blood.
- 3) See above
- 4) Our troubles will last a little while. It is helpful to see the end of our time of difficulty.
- 5) Often we focus on what our troubles do for us. But here Peter focuses on what our troubles do for God. A willingness to go through troubles proves that our faith is genuine. And on the Last Day, when we stand before the Lord, all creation will praise him for bringing us to faith and for keeping us in faith.
- 6) The heart of our joy as Christians is the salvation of our souls. It is easy to get bogged down with earthly problems and forget the great joy we have as heirs of eternal life.

Saturday - 1 Peter 1:10-16

Live as heirs of the salvation foretold by the prophets

Insight

Verse 12 *“Even angels long to look into these things.”* These words are rather mysterious. They tell us, however, that angels are not privy to everything that God does as he works out his plan of salvation.

Verse 13 *“Prepare your minds for action.”* The word used in the original Greek pictures a person tightening his tunic so that he can engage in strenuous activity.

Points to Ponder/Discussion

1. Sometimes we think of the Old Testament as filled merely with laws and dreary prophecies. What does Peter see when he looks at the Old Testament?
2. In Peter’s day, the Jewish leaders often tried to squelch Christian congregations and influence the people to come back to the old Jewish religion. This may explain why Peter spoke about the Old Testament prophets immediately after he spoke about persecution. How would his words about the prophets help his readers overcome pressure to return to Judaism?
3. Where do we fix our eyes as we resist temptation and live as God’s people? (verse 13)
4. Peter quotes the Old Testament where God says, “Be holy, because I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44). Sometimes that verse is used to preach the law and remind us we can never be as holy as God. But does it really do that here? Why does Peter quote this verse?

Apply

5. What is the “ignorance” Peter speaks about in verse 14? What does ignorance lead us to do?

Summary - The Old Testament prophets were sent to serve Christians, foretelling the grace God would give us in Christ. In view of this, let us live lives in service to God.

Answers

- 1) He sees prophecies of “salvation” and of “grace,” which centered on something that had not yet happened in their day. He sees the Spirit of Christ speaking through these men, predicting the “sufferings of Christ” and the “glories that would follow.” Their service was not to the Old Testament people but to us. They preached the same gospel that New Testament people speak. All this helps us see the importance of the Old Testament.
- 2) The Old Testament prophets, on whom the Jews relied as their source of truth, were actually sent to serve Christians. They foretold Christ and the salvation that would come through him. They were not sent to serve themselves or Jewish people who mistakenly thought the Old Testament religion and the Jewish nation was the final step in God’s plan. They could only search their own writings for hints about what Peter’s readers knew in full detail.
- 3) On the grace to be given us when Jesus returns.
- 4) Because we already are “obedient children” of God. Peter encourages us to live lives patterned after our heavenly Father, whose children we are.
- 5) Peter is speaking about the ignorance of unbelief. It is not knowing our Savior, not being joined with his death and resurrection in Baptism, not being freed from the law, and not having the hope of eternal life. Having this hope, however, gives us the reason and the strength to resist these temptations. Through our knowledge of Christ, we become new people and want to serve our Lord. Yet we still have the power to forget what we know. This is what the writer warns us against.

Sunday - 1 Peter 1:17-21

We are redeemed through the precious blood of Christ

Points to Ponder/Discussion

1. We are to live our lives in view of God's judgment. Sometimes we hesitate to speak like that, for we know we have been cleansed by Christ's blood; we have nothing to fear in the judgment for we will be judged on the basis of his works, not ours. Yet the Bible writers often speak of God judging us in view of our works. How do you understand Peter's encouragement to us to serve the Lord because he will judge our works? (verse 17)
2. How do verses 18-21 make it clear that we are not saved by our works?
3. Recall that many Christians in Peter's day were being pressured by the Jews around them to convert back to Judaism. Interpret Peter's words in verses 18 and 19 in view of this.
4. How great is Jesus?

Apply

5. The law and the gospel are woven together in Scripture. When you read this section, what does the law say to you? What does the gospel say to you?

Summary - God has given us the perfect sacrifice. Let us now live as strangers in this sinful world.

Answers

- 1) In Christ we have become new creations. As such we do serve our Lord, and on the Last Day he will look at what we have done in Christ and will usher us into eternal life. The key is to understand that all we do is "in Christ." If we reject him and live as we did when we were in ignorance, we will be condemned. But if we continue to serve our Father, if we know we are "strangers" here on earth and live as people who are citizens of heaven, we will receive eternal life. Think of how Jesus spoke in Matthew 25:31-46, when he spoke about the sheep and the goats. Both were judged in view of what they had done in their lives.
- 2) Peter immediately reminds us of what we have received in Christ. We have been redeemed by his blood. We are his own.
- 3) Jesus redeemed us from the empty way of life of the Old Testament. God wanted his people to follow the Old Testament regulations, but in and of themselves—apart from leading the people to yearn for Christ—they were empty. The Old Testament offerings were perishable. The blood of Christ is "precious." Even the most perfect examples of animals that people sacrificed to God were imperfect. Only Jesus offered a perfect sacrifice.
- 4) God chose him long before he established Old Testament laws. God raised Jesus from the dead and glorified him, something he never did for any sacrifice or high priest under the Old Covenant. By believing in Jesus, you are putting your hope in God. In other words, there is no other way to God than through Jesus, on whom God put his stamp of approval.
- 5) The law says that God judges all people impartially. If we remain citizens only of this world, we will die. This has a sobering effect as we look forward to the judgment. The Old Testament laws (whose authority transcends all earthly religions) are still only empty customs that can do nothing to save. All earthly offerings to God are perishable. There is nothing we can give God to effect our salvation.

The gospel says we are children of our heavenly Father, who has made us citizens of heaven. We have been redeemed by Jesus' perfect sacrifice. Jesus is the sacrifice God chose before this world was even made. God raised up his sacrifice from death and glorified him. Through Jesus we have access to God. God has given us everything we need for life and salvation.