Life Written Small – Acts 27-28:10

Acts 27. The Apostle Paul has just finished his 5th and final trial, and is now being shipped off to Rome because of his appeal to Caesar. Unfortunately, it’s anything but smooth sailing. A storm nearly kills them. But once again, as we’ve found over and over in the book of Acts, God protects and God provides. It’s life written small. This journey, this storm, is a microcosm of our lives. What happened to Paul on the ship, happens to us in life. And the lessons, are invaluable.

So let’s get at it and see if we can find them. Act 27:1-12.

➢ [1] And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy [we, being Luke, Paul, and Aristarchus as we’ll see; when it was decided . . . , they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius. [A cohort consisted of about 600-1000 men, and a centurion was an officer over a hundred of them.]

And this particular cohort was highly revered, because it was named after the late Caesar Augustus; who ruled when Jesus was born.

So the centurion was no schmuck. And I think Luke names him to give credit where credit’s due, later on.

[2] And embarking (Map, ESV Study Bible, 2141) in a ship of Adramyttium [notAdamantium, the metal in Wolverine’s body, but Adramyttium; a ship from that city, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia [Asia Minor, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica. [3] The next day we put in at Sidon [just up the coast]. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for.

[4] And putting out to sea from there we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. [The lee is the side of the island sheltered from the wind. So it was coming out of the west.] [5] And when we had sailed across the open sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia.

[6] There the centurion found a ship of Alexandria [in Egypt] sailing for Italy and put us on board. [7] We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, and as the wind did not allow us to go farther, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salamine. [8] Coasting along it with difficulty [that’s not a contradiction of terms but a sailing reference; they were hugging the coast; where the wind-driven waves against them would have been a little smaller, but still difficult to navigate], we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.

[9] Since much time had passed [because of the slow-going], and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over [the fast associated with the Day of Atonement; which places this journey in the Fall, when sailing the Mediterranean became so dangerous it ceased; because of that . . . ], Paul advised them, [10] saying, “Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.” [He wasn’t speaking on behalf of the Lord, just from personal experience. Having been shipwrecked 3 times before; 2 Cor 11:25. He knew what he was talking about.] [11] But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said.

[12] And because the harbor [there in Lasea] was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

From slow starts to slow going, this is life written small. And the first lesson we ought to glean is this:

When the going gets tough, humble yourself and be wise (v1-12)

Difficulty in life usually has one of 3 effects on people. It strengthens them, or it hardens them, or it defeats them.

And the difference, is usually humility. Whether someone humbles themselves.

When the going gets tough, the tough don’t get going, they get low; they get smart. They humble themselves and seek wisdom. And this little section gives us 5 ways to do that. 5 ways to be wise, when the going gets tough in life.

1. Look ahead. Paul says in v10 – I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss. He perceived. He looked ahead. And we should too.

2. Count the cost. “I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.” He counted the cost.

Not that all of it happened, but that it could have.

When the going gets tough, count the cost.

3. Listen to others. Especially those who are objective. Something the centurion didn’t do. V11.

The centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. More attention to those with an agenda, than those without.

They wanted to deliver their cargo and get paid. They had an agenda. And it clouded their judgment. Don’t go there.

When the going gets tough in your life, listen most to those who are objective; those who think biblically; those who speak the truth.

4. Heed the warnings. The warnings of tough times. Which none of them did; pilot, owner, or centurion. They saw the weather. They felt the wind. They knew the sea.

5. Hold loosely. Loosely to your goals. The pilot, owner, and sailors had it in their mind to get to Phoenix, if it killed them (12). And it nearly did as we’ll see. (Summary)

When the going gets tough, humble yourself and be wise. Get low, and get smart.

➢ V13. Now when the south wind blew gently (Map), supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor [set sail from Lasea] and sailed along Crete, close to the shore. [14] But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land. [It came out of the northeast; with a fury.] [15] And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along.

[16] Running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the ship’s boat [a dinghy, that was normally towed behind]. [17] After hoisting it up, they used supports to undergird the ship [ropes that were designed to wrap around the hull, and hold it together; it was that bad]. Then, fearing that they would run aground on the Syrtis [an area of shallow sands off the coast of Africa], they lowered the gear, and
Thus they were driven along. [The gear, most likely referring to a floating anchor that was dragged behind the ship, so that every time they crested a wave and plunged down the other side, it offered some resistance and saved them from sinking.]

[18] Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. [19] And on the third day they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands [the sailing gear; and probably the main beam that supported the sail; they were so desperate they tossed it themselves]. [20] When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days [imagine that], and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned. [They were hopeless. Life written small.]

[21] Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. I don’t think it was out of pride he said that, but an effort to get them to listen to this time.” [22] Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.

[23] For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, [24] and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar just like the Lord himself told him back in Jerusalem: chapter 23. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ [They too will live.] [25] So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. [26] But we must run aground on some island.” [It was good news, bad news.]

And the point is this:

**When things seem hopeless, lean on God’s promises (v13-26)**

That’s what Paul did. Having received some promises, he leaned on them.

“You’re going to live, and you’re going to Rome. Count on it. Lean on it.”

You say, “Okay, but how’s that work for me?” You can’t remember the last time an angel spoke to me. Let alone made some promises.” Fair enough.

But you don’t need an angel. You have the Word; the word of God himself. With all the promises you’ll ever need. So when things seem hopeless, go there.

**Keep your head.** go to the Word, and make a list.

Instead of succumbing to the hopelessness, and wallowing in it, keep your head. Keep your eyes on the Lord. On things above.

Not that it’s easy. I have a terrible time with this. But it’s crucial when things seem hopeless.

Keep your head and **go to the Word.** Looking for the promises God has already made.

The assurance he’s already given when things seem hopeless.

And when you find them, **make a list.** Literally. Write them down.

*I will never leave you or forsake you,* Heb 13:5. *All things work together for good,* Rom 8:28. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, Rom 8:39.

God is good and does good, Ps 119:68. *The LORD GOD is an everlasting rock,* Is 26:4. Make a list and write them down. And keep it in your pocket until the storm passes; the hopelessness fades.

That’s how you lean.

➢ Now, there are 2 don’ts associated w/ this point, that also helps us. The first, in v27-38.

[27] When the fourteenth night had come [two weeks] in the middle of the storm. Can you imagine? I got seasick for two hours one time, on Lake Michigan, and I was done. Game over. “Just take me now, Jesus.” I can’t even imagine 24 hours, 14 times over.

[27] When the fourteenth night had come, as we being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. [28] So they took a sounding [they dropped a rope with marks on it] and found twenty fathoms [120 feet]. A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms [90 feet]. [29] And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern [the rear] and prayed for day to come.

[30] And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship’s boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, [31] Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.” [32] Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship’s boat and let it go. [They listened this time.]

[33] As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken hope and strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you.” [It may seem hopeless and useless to eat, because you think you’re going to die, but it’s not.]

[35] And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the middle of the storm, he tore and ate some food himself. [37] (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.) [38] And having reassured himself, he said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.” [32] Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship’s boat and let it go. [They listened this time.]

[37] (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.) [38] And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea. [Most likely the rest of their cargo.]

Here’s the first “don’t” when things seem hopeless:

- **Don’t let despair keep you from doing what’s best** (v27-38)

Like keeping your antenna up for danger. Similar to the sailors who suspected that they were nearing land (27); and took a sounding to assess the risk (28).

Or how about doing what’s practical? Like reducing their payload to increase the ship’s clearance. And taking care of themselves by eating.

And best of all, they prayed. They prayed for day to come (29). Not that it would literally come, but that they would make it until then.

You can’t just stop when things seem hopeless. Sit on the couch and expect someone else to take care of you. It’s not right, and it’s not best. You have to keep going.

Throwing in the towel is not an option. Especially with Jesus at your side.

Paul didn’t let despair keep them from doing what’s best, and neither should we.

➢ Second, the 2nd “don’t” when things seem hopeless, is . . .

- **Don’t let fear cause you to do what’s foolish** (v39-44)

[39] Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach (Map of Malta), on which they planned if possible to run the ship ashore (a bay on
And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery [severe diarrhea]. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him, healed him. [9] And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. [10] They also honored us greatly, and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed.

But God's grace isn’t. It remains and never wanes. It saves and always keeps.

The will of God will never take you, where the grace of God cannot keep you.

Never doubt his grace to keep you in perfect peace. It’s real. (Is 26:3)
Never doubt his grace to deliver you safely Home. Capitol H. (Jn 14:3)
Never doubt his grace to keep you from greater harm; like he did Paul with the snake.
Never doubt his grace to use you. To glorify him and bless others. No matter how bad it gets. Like using Paul to heal the islanders.

When all seems lost, never doubt God’s grace.

Especially his grace to sustain you for the journey that remains. When we were about to sail [v10], they put on board whatever we needed. Isn’t that just like God? Whether it’s the provision of strength, or perseverance in the absence of strength, or tangible needs, emotional, spiritual, whatever – his grace is sufficient. (2 Cor 12:9)

➢ That’s why Horatio Spafford could write the words of his now famous hymn, It Is Well With My Soul.

A Chicago lawyer in the late 1800’s, his son died at age two; enough to wreck any of us. Then, he was financially ruined by the Chicago fire of 1871...

And saw his legal business suffer all the more in the economic downturn of 1873. But it was later that year that all was lost. When all 4 of his daughters died in a shipwreck on the Atlantic.

And yet, on the way to connect with his wife, Anna, he penned these words over the very spot of the sinking.

When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot [whether the peace of smooth sailing, or the sorrow of storms], Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

It’s based on 3 John 2, where the Apostle John says:
Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.

When all seemed lost, when much was lost, Paul never doubted God’s grace.

He leaned on God’s promises, and did what was best. Then and only then, is it well with our soul. (Stand and sing)

Close
In the words of the Apostle John, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. (3 John 2)
And when it doesn’t, I pray that you’ll lean on God’s promises and never doubt his grace.

And then last, is 28:1-10
[1] After we were brought safely through (Map), we then learned that the island was called Malta [476 miles from Crete]. [2] The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold.

[3] When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. [4] When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, “No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice [a name for one of their gods] has not allowed him to live.” [5] He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. [6] They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

[7] Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days. [8] It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery [severe diarrhea]. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him, healed him. [9] And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. [10] They also honored us greatly, and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed.

When all seems lost, never doubt God’s grace (28:1-10)
And it happens. Sometimes all is lost. Like when your ship sinks. Or a tornado strikes. A hurricane hits. You lose your job. A loved one dies.

Sickness overwhelms. Criticism mounts. Sometimes, all does seem lost.

And it is so.

Oh, Paul, Paul, do you wonder why I cry? Do you wonder why I spill my tears.

It's been a long time coming.

To be able to fix it.

And it is so.

Oh, Paul, Paul, do you wonder why I cry? Do you wonder why I spill my tears.

It's been a long time coming.