

“Life’s forecast! Not looking good.” (43)

A Scotsman was an extremely hard worker and expected all the men under him to be the same. His men would tease him, "Scotty, don't you know that Rome wasn't built in a day?" "Yes," he would answer. "I know that. But I wasn't foreman on that job."

Now we know that Rome wasn't built in a day and because they didn't have aeroplanes like we have today, Paul's journey to Rome was going to take more than one day. And as we have seen over the past few weeks God has been protecting him for that very task, so, Festus, along with Agrippa and Bernice, delivered the apostle and some other prisoners into the hands of a centurion named Julius. God wanted Paul in Rome, Paul wanted to be in Rome, and Agrippa sent him on his way to Rome.

Acts 27:1+2 “When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us.”

Luke noted that Julius was of the Imperial Regiment who basically was a part of the Roman army who belonged to the emperor. And so the ship they boarded headed out to sea from Adramyttium, which is located in northwest Turkey. And this is where I want to make my first point about life's forecast; God never designed humans to be alone.

Genesis 2:18, “The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone.” It was never a part of God's plan for mankind to be alone, Paul was not alone, Luke went along on this journey to Italy with him and Aristarchus. You see loved ones as Christians we need to remember that it's absolutely impossible to be alone. Jesus Himself said in Matthew 28:20, “surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” In other words you may feel lonely at times but you are never alone, Jesus is there with you, just like He was with Paul. And you have brother and sisters in Christ who are on this life's journey with you and you need to remember that.

And so they are off on that long journey to Rome and Luke continues in Acts 27:3-5 and reports, “The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs. From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us. When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia.”

The ship's first stop was in Sidon, but because of the wind they changed direction and stopped again at Myra in Lycia. You see loved ones, none of us were born Christians, in life's forecast we also have to make many stops before we get where we need to go. And notice I said, ‘where we need to go’ not ‘where we want to go’.

God wants us to find truth, but many people settle for a truth which suits their own needs. Many people believe in God but don't believe what the Bible teaches. Many people believe that one church is as good as the next and one person's faith is as good as the next. But Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4:4-6 “There is one body and one Spirit- just as you were called to one hope when you were called- one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” Paul says there are not many churches, there are not many hopes, there are not many lord's or faiths, there are not many baptisms. He says there is one church, one hope, one Lord, one faith and one baptism.

I know most of us were never brought up in the Lord's church, we dabbled with other religious groups, but Jesus' promise is as true now as it was when He first said in John 8:31-32, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Sometimes we have to stop and think about where we need to go and not where we want to go.

And so Luke carries on with his report to Theophilus and says in Acts 27:6-9 “There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board. We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone. We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea. Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Fast.”

The ship Julius found was out of **Alexandria** and bound for **Italy** and so Julius, Paul and the rest of their company boarded that ship and it set sail against a late summer, north-westerly wind, for the port of **Cnidus**. But because the wind was so unfavourable the captain sailed along the southern shore of **Crete**. And when they finally reached the port of **Fair Havens**, near the city of **Lasea**, a decision had to be made as to the course to be pursued. All in all things are going well and according to plan even though the wind is not in their favour but as were about to read the apostle Paul could see something different on the horizon, the forecast was not good.

**Acts 27:10-12** "So Paul warned them, "Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also." But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. Since the harbour was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbour in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest."

Paul advised them not to attempt to go any further at such a dangerous time of year. Christians should also be aware that the forecast for **life will be dangerous at times**. Anyone who says become a Christian and life will be great has told you a lie. Jesus reminds us in **John 16:33** that "**In this world you will have trouble.**" And you can just count on that loved ones; sometimes the storms of life are so powerful we're left wondering **why is this happening?**

**Dr. Thomas Goodwin**, who was **President of Magdalen College**, lost half of his library, some five hundred pounds worth of his best books, in the terrible fire of **London in 1666**. His son remembers how his father lamented this, and said of it, that in taking away these precious possessions God had struck him in a very tender place. Later he said, "**I loved my books too well, and God corrected this by affliction.**"

Sometimes pain, suffering and troubled waters come into our lives because we love the world more than we love God. In other words we bring trouble upon ourselves when we spend too much time in the world and not enough time in Christ Jesus. And just when you get through one storm you can be sure that it won't be too long until the next one comes along. Luke told us that the wind didn't let up all night, in fact the violent seas continued the next day so the sailors began to throw the cargo overboard.

I don't think anyone will ever forget the date **December 26<sup>th</sup> 2004**. I remember it well because we were watching the television on that **Boxing Day** when all of a sudden the news was showing pictures of the **Tsunami** that struck **Thailand**. The devastation was on a gigantic scale and four years on people are still rebuilding their lives, in fact **Joel** is still heavily involved in helping people who are victims of this event.

Now why was this a bad time of year for the ship to making this journey? Well because Luke told us in **verse 9** that '**the Fast**', or '**Day of Atonement**', was now over, we can conclude it was around **October 1**. And if you were the captain of a ship you should know that the **Mediterranean Sea** was not a safe place to be especially for ancient vessels between **September 15<sup>th</sup>** until about **March 15<sup>th</sup>**.

Paul knew what time of the year it was and notice also that Paul's concern was not just for the cargo but also for the lives of those people on board the ship. But even with this insight from Paul, **Julius** was inclined to listen more closely to the words of the ship's pilot and the owner than to Paul. And so the majority of those on board the ship were hoping to reach **Phoenix** because its harbour was easier to access.

Now I mentioned the **Tsunami** that struck **Thailand** but how many of you remember **Hurricane Katrina** which formed on **August 23** during the **2005 Atlantic hurricane season** and caused devastation along much of the north-central **Gulf Coast**. It was the costliest and one of the five deadliest hurricanes in the history of the **United States**. It was the sixth-strongest **Atlantic hurricane** ever recorded and the third-strongest hurricane on record that made landfall in the **United States**. The pictures which most of us will remember were the devastation it caused in the city of **New Orleans**.

Now the reason I mentioned that is because naming hurricane winds is not new, in fact as were about to read there's one called the '**Northeaster**' on its way towards the ship which Paul is on board. **Acts 27:13-18** "**When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had obtained what they wanted; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the "northeaster," swept down from the island. The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the**

lifeboat secure. When the men had hoisted it aboard, they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Fearing that they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard.”

Now I'm guessing that most people have heard the phrase, 'plain sailing' which simply means an easy, uncomplicated course. But did you know that 'plain sailing' is a nautical phrase and originally it had the literal meaning of 'sailing that is easy and uncomplicated'. It refers to an easy-to-navigate sea, in the 'level, flat' sense because remember sailors for years believed the earth was flat.

But Luke has just told us that this ship's travels were far from 'plain sailing', in fact if they were anything they were troubled seas. And when a soft, south wind began to blow they assumed they could easily reach Phoenix within a day.

Now I'm not a sailor but I know people who are and they tell me that when you're out at sea the weather conditions can literally change in minutes. And that's what happened here; all of a sudden a hurricane force wind which they called the 'northeaster' blew stronger and stronger. And this wind basically ended all hope of reaching a safe harbour as they had to let the ship be driven by the will of the wind.

When the ship reached the shelter of an island called Clauda, the sailors, with the help of Luke and some other passengers, secured the lifeboat which would have been allowed to trail the ship because they planned to use it to go ashore at Phoenix. And as panic stations sets in, the sailors passed cables under the ship to strengthen it against the stormy sea and let the ship drift without the aid of sails for fear of being shipwrecked on the west of Cyrene, which was called Syrtis.

And the wind didn't let up all night, in fact the violent seas continued the next day so the sailors began to throw the cargo overboard. Acts 27:19-21 “On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved. After the men 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.”

Luke tells us on the third day they threw the tackle overboard as well. And remember since they could not see the sun or stars, navigation was impossible. Loved ones, when the forecast for life is not looking good and you feel like you've lost your way because of the dangers which lie ahead, don't give up hope. Don't go throwing the baby out with the bath water as the saying goes.

I understand that when times get tough you want to isolate yourself and give up on God and His people, but please don't do that. In 1 Peter 1 when he writes about our living hope and our future inheritance, he says in 1 Peter 1:6-8, “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith-of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

Don't give up and cut your self off from God and His people because in the eternal forecast of life, your suffering is only for a little while. And that hope of eternity with God is not a fairy dream, it's real and alive, that's why it's called a living hope.

If you mention the name Michael Fish to most people in the UK, the conversation will immediately focus on the Great Storm of 1987, where south east England saw the greatest damage, with the wind gusting to 70 knots for three to four hours. And most people will never forget that elderly woman who called in and asked him about the storm which she heard was coming and he reassured her and the nation that there was no stormy weather coming.

Luke tells Theophilus that Paul told them it was coming, but they didn't listen and so Paul reminds them of his earlier warning. And the reason he reminds them is not to say, 'I told you so', but to give more credibility to what he was going to say next.

Acts 27:22-26 “But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me 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.' So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."

Paul said listen I know life's forecast is tough right now and the ship is going to run aground on an island and be lost. But listen, God, through an angel, had promised to answer my prayers by saving every single life on board this ship. When life's forecast is for rough waters ahead we also need to remember that **God will answer our prayers.**

If God rescued us before **why do we think He won't rescue us again? Psalm 61:1-3** "Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe."

When the forecast for life is tough, this is where the mature Christians set themselves apart from the immature. In the **Book of James** when he's talking about asking God for wisdom, he writes in **James 1:6-8**, "But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does."

Immature Christians think that when the waves get high that God has left them and they stop praying because they want the suffering to be over on their terms. But the mature Christians continues to pray, not only because they understand that the waves will settle again but because they have absolute faith in God to hear their prayer and answer their prayer according to His will.

Life is tough but don't stop praying because there is always hope. The **Philippian jailor** in **Acts 16** saw no hope when Paul and Silas were freed from prison and he was about to kill himself but Paul gave him hope. Most people on board this ship saw no hope but Paul gave them hope.

And so Luke continues and tells us, **Acts 27:27-32** "On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land. They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet deep. Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved." So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it fall away."

On the fourteenth night, as they were tossed about in the **Adriatic Sea**, the sailors sensed they were coming close to land. And as all old ships did to find out how close to land they were, they took soundings. And when they realized they might hit some rocks, they cast four anchors off the stern and prayed for daylight. But the sailors in an effort to save themselves let down the lifeboat and pretended to put out more anchors. But this didn't go unnoticed; Paul saw what they were doing and warned **Julius** that he could not be saved without the sailors on board. And now finally they begin to believe Paul's words and the centurion commands his soldiers to cut away the ropes to the lifeboat and let it fall away.

**Do you know what one of the saddest parts of life's forecast is?** It's knowing that some will give up and **fall away**. Paul knew, even though the soldiers didn't, that they had to cut away the ropes to the lifeboat and let it fall away so save their own lives. We have witnessed people falling away from the Lord over the years and it's heartbreaking.

But we need to always ask ourselves, **have we done everything humanly and divinely possibly to prevent that from happening? Have we encouraged, talked, sent cards, have we prayed about them to God?** If the answers to those questions are **yes** then we can't say that we haven't tried.

But whilst we are doing all those things we need to be careful that we don't go with them. **Galatians 6:1** "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."

You see loved ones, people will fall, Jesus taught that in 'the parable of the sower', the Bible is full of examples of people who fall. And the sad news is, sometimes in order to keep ourselves from falling; we need to let them fall away. And so after meeting their spiritual needs by giving them hope, Paul turns his attention to their physical needs.

Acts 27:33-38 "Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. "For the last fourteen days," he said, "you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food-you haven't eaten anything. Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head." After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. Altogether there were 276 of us on board. When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea."

Paul urged everyone on board the ship to eat since they hadn't eaten for a while. And then reassures them again by telling them that not one hair on their heads would be harmed. And so while they all watched, Paul took some bread, prayed and began to eat. And when all 276 on board ate they were encouraged and cast the rest of the grain overboard. When life's forecast is not looking good, not only should we remember we're not alone on our journey, not only should we remember we will have many stops in life, not only should we be aware that life can be dangerous at times.

Not only do we need to remember that God will answer our prayers but we also need to remember that **God will look after our needs**. If you ever wanted to know someone who is more aware of your needs than anyone else, God is that person. Paul tells them that not one hair on their heads would be harmed. Jesus says in **Luke 12:6+7** "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."

God is so aware of you, never mind your needs that He knows exactly how many hairs you have of your head. No wonder Paul could write in **Philippians 4:19**, "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." You see loved ones, life is a journey, and sometimes the forecast is not good but it doesn't have to be that way forever.

For the unbeliever life sucks sometimes with no hope of a better tomorrow because they don't see the eternal forecast. But for the Christian, we know that life is difficult sometimes but because we have the living hope of eternal life, the forecast is looking good indeed.