

Acts Video – Well there you have it – the book of Acts in 3 min. After 12 weeks in the book of Acts, I hope you've begun to discover and appreciate that the Christian life will always and only be a life in alignment/in sync w/ the H.S. Contrary to cultural/religious opinion, the Christian life isn't based on the ingenuity, ability, and effort of our capable flesh, but is a life lived under the influence/directed by the H.S. It isn't what we can do in our humanity that pleases God, but what God can do in/thru us when we live submitted to him that puts a smile on God's face.

As we close our series today, we're going to discover from Paul what it looks like when believers walk in the Spirit. Lest we forget, Acts is a record of the unleashing of the H.S. upon the world, the church, and in the lives of every believer. Throughout this account, we've seen God at work in a powerful way to explode the Gospel into the world. Yet it's vital to remember that Jesus didn't become a man to die on the cross to atone for sin so we could just see it – He came so we might experience it. Neither did He enter into our lives in the person of the H.S. to make us feel good about ourselves and our eternity; He came to fill/indwell us to empower us to live each day on mission for Him.

In **Acts 27**, Paul showed us H.S. living in action thru the most challenging of circumstances. Truth is one of the best ways to validate one's faith to prove it is authentic is through trials/storms. The book of James tells us to – *Consider it joy when you encounter trials of many kinds b/c you the testing of your faith produces endurance.* **That is, the testing of your faith authenticates that your life is in proper alignment under the influence of the H.S.**

In **Acts 27**, after a series of arrests and trials in Jerusalem and Caesarea by the Sea, Paul is being transported to Rome to be granted an audience w/ Caesar.

This passage reminds us that when bad things happen to God's people they're happening for earthly/eternal reasons – and not b/c of karma/bad luck. They remind us that we live by faith instead of fate – and that nothing happens outside of His will/purview or independent of the H.S.

In case you don't know the story, Paul boards a ship in chains under the command of the Roman Guard to stand trial before Caesar in Rome. As the ship sets sail, they encounter a series of challenges affording them the opportunity to ditch the first ship to board a larger ship. As the voyage continues the ship encounters a storm w/ hurricane winds and the ship was lost. Everyone swims to safety to Malta where Paul is bitten by a viper and lives – and then performs a healing.

While there are many lessons in this story about leadership, faith, God's sovereignty, and more, I believe the great lesson to be learned is about how believers are to live life. *We distinctly see the difference b/w walking by faith and living by fate.* In the crew, we see men who trusted in what they could/couldn't do – in what they could manage, handle, and chart and what they couldn't. We see men who trusted in their abilities/ingenuity living life thru the lens of their present circumstances/personal preferences. And in the end there was despair, defeat, and desperation.

In Paul we see a different pursuit/outlook on life. We see a man who lived beyond his circumstance for a purpose of Divine origin greater than himself. Instead of seeing his life through the lens of personal ambition, he saw his life as the Divinely directed/orchestrated will of God. He saw his life as a series of God provided opportunities for ministry instead of as a series of random events of fate.

When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity; 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, so the men hoisted it aboard.

Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. B/c they were afraid 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. On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard w/ 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 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. But now I urge you to keep up your courage, b/c not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong 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 w/ 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." Acts 27:13-26

Whereas the sailors in the storm defaulted to trusting in their own abilities to save their ship and lives, it ultimately proved ineffective against the storm. But Paul was a man who reveals to us how to walk anchored in the H.S. even in the midst of a storm!

I The Anchor of God's PRESENCE

Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me...

Paul lived in tune and under the leading of God's voice – Thus, even in the midst of a raging storm, Paul found he wasn't alone – God was present to minister peace to his heart. And the same God who was present w/ Paul is present w/ us. Even when it seems He's distant, He isn't. He is there – watching, leading, protecting, and being God.

When Tony Campolo was a boy his mother paid a teenage girl a nickel a day to walk Tony home from school. In 2nd grade, he rebelled telling his mom if she gave him a nickel a week, he'd walk home from school by himself. After a period of begging, she relented and let him have his way, and for 2 yrs he walked himself the 8 blocks to and from school. Years later at a family party, he was bragging about his independence and reminded his family of how he had taken care of himself as a boy. His mother laughed and shared the rest of the story. "Did you really think you were alone? Every AM when you left for school, I left w/ you. I walked behind you all the way. When you got out of school, I was there again. I always kept myself hidden, but I was there and I followed you all the way home. I was there just in case you needed me."

II The Anchor of God's PROMISE

Did you know there are 8,810 promises in the Bible? Nearly 25% of the all Bible verses contain a promise from God. Here in Acts 27, God makes Paul a promise.

'Do not be afraid, Paul; You must stand trial before Caesar

As Paul was weathering the storm, God sent an angel to remind him that he was going to stand before Caesar and that everyone on the ship was going to be spared. This promise helped Paul to see it through w/out fear.

The promise of God is a powerful aspect of faith and a key element of living out God's will. Knowing He has a plan for us and that He will be present can give us great confidence in our earthly circumstances. This is how we must pursue the Christian life – according to God's Word.

God made a promise and God kept His Word! He spared every life and proved Himself to be as good as His Word!

When Jesus takes your hand, He keeps you tight. When Jesus keeps you tight, He leads you thru your whole life. When Jesus leads you thru your life, He brings you safely home.

Corrie Ten Boom

III The Anchor of God's PROVIDENCE

28:1 – *Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all b/c it was raining and cold. Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, “This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, the goddess Justice has not allowed him to live.” But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead; but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god. There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days. His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. They honored us in many ways; and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us w/ the supplies we needed. Acts 28:1-10*

Now this might be hard to fathom, but not only was God present, but God was at work both in/thru Paul.

In that moment, the storm/snake was the safest place in the world for Paul to be b/c he was resting in the center of God's will! He was right where God wanted him to be. The storm/snake were part of God's plan He was working out His plan in Paul's life. He authored the circumstances to give Paul the helm for the sake of the Gospel.

God is always (even when we have a hard time seeing it) at work in us, thru us, and beyond us for His glory/will.

Back in June, as I was selling my house in Newnan and looking for a new house near PTC, God began to put teaching thru the book of Acts on my heart. He knew at that time what I didn't know – that we'd be in a brewing storm regarding the new house. He also knew then that we'd be studying Acts 27 and Paul's response to His storm just as our storm is beginning to rage. Here's the point – this week, as one wave began crashing after another and the winds began to howl, God pulled me to the side and spoke ever so gently – are you going to handle this man's way or My way? You do know I am present? You know I promise to walk w/ you? You know I'll watch over and protect you? And you do realize I am providentially at work in/thru you in these stormy conditions. So TRUST Me!