

9-22-24

The Storm 2

Acts 27: 13 – 26

Have you ever had a day that seemed to sum up your entire existence – or experienced an event that felt like a microcosm of your life, at least up to a point?

What I'm asking is, have you ever experienced something, say, over a brief period of time that felt like it mirrored the overall trajectory of your life?

And when it passed, and you finally had time to reflect you said to yourself, "I'm not surprised this happened to me. I could almost see it coming."

Maybe it's the **job** you find yourself in right now – and you're thinking to yourself, "I didn't plan on doing this for a career, but I'm not surprised I'm up to my ears in it now."

Perhaps it's your **current relationship** status. You weren't planning on being single at this stage of your life, but as you rewind the tape, you begin to see how one event led to another.

Maybe it's a **health issue** you're battling, and you're saying to yourself, if I didn't have this condition, I'd be doing A, B, and C, but because of this challenge, God's presence and provision has become so much more real to me.

Maybe it's where you find yourself on your **spiritual journey** today.

You fondly remember earlier days when you felt close to God, but now, not so much – the ground you're treading on seems a bit unlevel and not as solid as it once did or vice versa.

Maybe you look back on your history and say to yourself, "Wow Lord, you've done a mighty work in my life. I'm extremely grateful."

I probably have thoughts like these every week as I prepare Sunday messages.

Sometimes I think to myself that in some way the message I prepare is sort of like a microcosm of my life. I'm thinking, "Wow God, now I know why you put me through this or that - so I can better relate to and convey your word to your people.

When this happens, I feel privileged that God would want to use me for His kingdom in this way.

I hope you understand that God has put you through unique experiences so that you too can minister to a unique set of people who need a Ray of Hope.

The Apostle Paul had a unique experience while heading to Rome on a ship. His experience at sea over that timeframe of a few months probably felt like years to him.

And as I studied his journey, I began to realize that his sea-faring adventure mirrored his life in interesting ways.

It actually seemed to take on characteristics of his life in general – sort of what I was alluding to at the beginning of my message:

Things happen in our lives that seem almost unavoidable – that actually were meant to happen to us so that God could use us and our experiences to minister to others in very specific ways.

In truth, I believe we can say with absolute certainty, and without any hesitation, that the events that take place in our lives are divinely ordained by God in order that we too should play an important part in God's perfect plan for reconciling mankind to Himself.

Listen to what Paul says in Ephesians 1: 4 – 5 concerning this idea: *“For he chose us in him* (This is referring to the Father rescuing us by his one and only son, Jesus)

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”

Can you see God's plan unfolding here before us and for us from the very beginning?

A few verses later Paul continues, *“In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.”*

This is amazing stuff, because it tells us beyond a shadow of doubt, that our lives are no accident, but have purpose, meaning, and an ultimate goal that is directed and overseen by God himself!

This should instill in us confidence, hopefulness, and thankfulness – to know that we, as God's children, even amidst the chaos and unpredictability of life, that our future is safe and secure in the hands of the Almighty!

Now before I move on, I cannot help but ask, Why do you think God would want people to be holy and blameless? I can think of a couple of reasons just off the top of my head:

1 He wants us to be holy and blameless so that we can abide with him in perfect unity for all eternity! God wants us to be in a perfect and personal loving relationship with him for all eternity.

This is can only happen if we become holy and righteous as he is. And the only way we can be righteous is by receiving and claiming God's righteousness as our own.

We do this by believing and trusting in the person and work of Jesus Christ – believing that he is who he says he is, God in incarnate, God in the flesh, come to earth from the Father's side, to offer himself as the perfect sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins.

But what makes Jesus qualified to rescue us?

He can rescue us because in offering himself on the cross, he offered the perfect sacrifice. Jesus is fully God and fully man. He is the most unique person that ever lived, because he, in fact, has no beginning and no end.

Jesus was with the Father from the very beginning, and when he died for our sins – and sin is the root of our loneliness, worries, struggles, and brokenness – his death was only temporary, because perfection can never be contained. Jesus is holy and perfect so death can have no power over him. This is the reason he can rescue us.

When Jesus Christ rose again from the grave, he proved to us that his promise to save us is real and tangible. If he can have victory over death, then we who believe in him shall experience this same victory, if we place our faith in him.

So first, God wants us to be holy and blameless so we are able to abide with him where darkness and evil cannot exist.

And second, he wants us to be holy and blameless so that we can reflect his nature to others and in doing so, bring glory to his name.

Matthew 5:16, *"Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*

This is God's plan for us from the very beginning and when we finally realize this, how can we not help but be exceedingly grateful?

But let's return for a moment to Paul's story at sea, and how it mirrored the Apostle's life in general.

First, Paul did not board the ship voluntarily. He was a prisoner of the Roman government. He boarded this ship along with other prisoners because he claimed his Roman citizenship and appealed to a highest court in the land to have his case heard which would have been in Rome before Caesar himself.

Up to this point, Paul has been a prisoner of the Roman government for over two years! The incident that led to his arrest happened way back in Acts 21 when he was arrested soon after he arrived in Jerusalem.

You see, wherever Paul went, there were always jealous Jewish leaders following him, not to learn from him, but to spread lies and rumors that would stir up trouble and create riots in the streets.

Their strategy was an especially shrewd one, since these religious leaders knew that Roman officials would do anything to maintain peace, including arresting an innocent man, but in the end, their plan actually back-fired!

So Paul was not the least bit surprised that he was arrested. He already had a sense of what was to come. In his farewell speech to the Ephesian church he said, *“And now, **compelled by the Spirit**, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city **the Holy Spirit warns me that prisons and hardships are facing me.**”*

When we take a moment to think about this, we cannot help but begin to realize what an extraordinary man Paul was – that despite the constant warning of the trouble that lay ahead, he was never deterred from his mission.

Even when the prophet Agabus took Paul’s belt and tied his own hands and feet with it to demonstrate what would happen if Paul went on to Jerusalem, Paul did not waiver. Paul responded to this prophecy by saying, *“I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”*

But you ask, how does Paul’s boarding of the ship as a prisoner relate at all to the overarching theme of Paul’s life?

I’m glad you asked.

In this way: Just as Paul was divinely appointed by God to board the ship against his will, likewise it was divinely appointed by God that Paul should meet the Risen Savior on his way to Damascus, and become a servant / slave of God.

Remember Paul's conversion?

Was Paul looking to meet the living resurrected God on his way to Damascus?

Was Paul on his way to share a potluck dinner with followers of the Way?

Hardly! He held papers in hand, signed by the high priest himself that gave him the authority to arrest and imprison Christians!

His mission was to destroy the newborn church - to snuff it out before it gained any momentum that would threaten to displace the already entrenched religious culture of their day.

Paul's plan was to crush this embryonic faith movement that centers around a person that allegedly conquered death.

But God's plan for Paul and the church was diametrically opposed to Paul's plan for the church. And God's plan always wins.

Listen to what God says to Ananias concerning Paul: ***"This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."***

"To carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings!"

Wow! Talk about prophecy that one could reach out and touch!

Here is Paul, in Jerusalem, held for two years under guard and in chains waiting for his trial and having audiences with anyone who would listen including all the important heads of state like Governor Felix, his successor Festus, and King Agrippa, being able, time and again, to share

his amazing testimony of how he met the risen Lord on his way to Damascus!

How else would Paul have had this opportunity had it not been for the jealous religious leaders who were constantly out to get him!

In fact, we should really give credit to the religious establishment for raising such a stink because they inadvertently kept Paul alive longer than even he anticipated since his arrest kept him away from those who sought his death!

So when Paul, bound in chains, boarded the ship for Rome, do you think that Paul doubted for even a second that his mission to stand before the most powerful man in the world and proclaim Christ would ever happen?

Read in Acts 23:11, and you'll know the answer. While Paul was in prison, "The Lord stood near Paul and said, *'Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.'*"

Yes, Paul was in chains as he marched up that board walk to enter the ship, but amazingly, I don't believe Paul saw this as a burden at all or even a hindrance.

In fact, I am certain he viewed his situation as a privilege ordained by God to advance His kingdom.

On different occasions, Paul referred to himself as a prisoner or slave of the Lord. Paul was always ready to cast his lot with Christ, even if it meant physical hardship and ill-treatment. In Ephesians 6:19 - 20 Paul writes, "*Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains.*"

And Colossians 4:3, *“And pray for us too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we might proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.”*

So in a very real sense Paul saw God directing his path even as he washed ashore on the island of Malta.

For Paul the whole shipwreck event was but another way God was transforming him into his faithful servant. Philippians 3:10: *“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain the resurrection from the dead.”*

So, whatever you’re going through today, health issues, relationship struggles, a loss of a loved one, the lack of a job or financial insecurity, depression, confusion, or something else ...

the Bible’s advice seems to be that we should view it through the lens of the grand scheme of things that are held lovingly and safely in the hands of our Savior even as the tempest blow and the seas rage around us.

So as Paul proclaimed to the soldiers and sailors on board, I say to you ... keep courage, have faith in God that our salvation will happen just as has told us in the scriptures.

And yes, though we may run aground for a time, God has graciously given us the lives of all who sail with us if we continue to put our hope and trust in Him. Amen.

