

## “Shipwrecks, Snakebites and Salvations”

*Acts 27-28*

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We are coming to the end of our *FORWARD* series today. Nearly thirty sermons that we have preached out of this book, *The Acts of the Apostles*. I hope you have enjoyed the study as much as I have.

I’ve found myself thinking and praying throughout this series, “God do in my heart...do in our church, what you did in the early church. Make us as committed to you as these early followers of Christ were.”

- There was such a devotion in the early church...
- There was such a desperation for God to use them...
- There was a dedication to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth...

And this sets up perfect where we are headed with the message today. I’m calling this sermon: **Shipwrecks, Snakebites and Salvations.**

I’m calling it this because this is what we see here in the final two chapters of Acts, and this will serve as kind of the outline for us as we unpack these two chapters. And so, what we’re going to do is:

- In the first half of the message, we’ll look at these two chapters (Acts 27-28) and preach and explain the text.

While I look forward to finishing this series out this today, I have to warn you, it’s kind of anticlimactic.

- The second half of the message, we will review the entire *FORWARD* series and give some of the bigger lessons we have learned as we’ve made our way through this book.

We’ve covered SO much, I don’t want us to walk away from spending all this time in Acts, without really emphasizing and highlighting ONE more time some of the big picture take-aways that we have learned and need to take to hear.

So, let’s get after it, and we’ll begin by setting context to set up where we are in today’s passage.

Last week, if you missed, you really missed out as we covered the five defenses of Paul in Acts 22-26, and I preached the message with a kidney stone!

Feeling a lot better btw – thanks for all the prayers and checking in on me. I'll be honest, I don't remember much about last week's message except that it was a lot to cover and I was just praying the whole time the kidney stone wouldn't move while I was preaching!

Paul after being held in confinement for over two years...and remember, he didn't do anything wrong! The Jewish leaders of the Temple wanted him dead. He was a problem to them because of the message he preached – that Jesus was Israel's Messiah. He was a threat to them...probably even more than that, simply a nuisance to them.

They tried to have him killed...but being a Roman citizen, Paul was protected. He was put in protective custody and ultimately appealed to Caesar and in the words of Festus the Roman, governor over Judea at the time:

**Acts 25:12b – “...To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go.”**

And Paul finally gets what he had been wanting for a long time, and that is a chance to get to Rome. Now, he didn't think he'd be going in chains...as a prisoner!

Originally, he thought he'd be going there and using Rome as a new “home base” if you will, for reaching the rest of the known world with the gospel. Either way though, he is happy to be on his way.

They put him on a ship with some other prisoners, and evidently Paul is allowed to have some friends travel with him. We're told in:

**Acts 27:1-3 – “And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius. <sup>2</sup> And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica.”**

They get in this ship, and as you can see from this map (**SHOW MAP**) they make their way along the coastline, and if you read the account they have some difficulty due to the weather as they get here to Crete.

Now, they should have stayed put because the particular time they are traveling (late Fall) was known for tricky weather patterns. But the harbor here in Fair Havens wasn't up to par, so they put out to try to make it the Phoenix harbor and stay there for the winter.

Now, Paul told them not to do this. **Acts 27:9b-10 – “Paul advised them, <sup>10</sup> 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.”**

Paul isn't a sailor or nautical expert by any means. Maybe this was the Holy Spirit that was speaking to him, giving him this insight or maybe if you recall:

**2 Cor. 11:25 – “Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea...”**

Maybe Paul had been on the sea enough to know when to travel and when not to! The reality is we don't know what caused him to speak up here, but they didn't listen. They put out to sea and the Bible says:

**Acts 27:14-15 – “But soon a tempestuous wind, called a northeaster, struck down from the land. And when their ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along.”**

**Illus. Disney Cruise** – Now, I've been on a couple of cruises...we went on a Disney Cruise – I didn't think I was going to like it - “Disney Jarrett”. I ended up loving it! One day those waves were rocking and people were throwing up! I was never scared for my life though!

These are seasoned sailors with according to scripture 276 people on board, and they are fighting for their life!

**Acts 27:18-20 – “Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. <sup>19</sup> And on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. <sup>20</sup> When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.”**

This is a BAD day! And it's going to go on for two weeks! Yet in the midst of it, God uses Paul. He sends him an angel (“ministering servants”) to let him know that everything is going to be okay, and he tells the people on the ship this.

**Acts 27:21-26 – “Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me (Christian version of “I told you so!”) and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. <sup>22</sup> Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. <sup>23</sup> For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, <sup>24</sup> and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.’<sup>25</sup> So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. <sup>26</sup> But we must run aground on some island.”**

Just a preaching point here. I've noticed in my own life that my courage grows in me when I've heard from the Lord. I can stand up for him...speak boldly for him...I can do some healthy confrontation if it's needed. I have GREAT confidence when I've heard from him.

Now, Paul heard from an angel...chances are highly likely you and me will NEVER hear from an angel. However, we have a more sure word than an angel when we read his word, here!

And if we will give our lives to this, I promise you as we grow in understanding and discerning his voice through his word, courage and confidence and boldness will grow in our lives as well.

Hearing from the Lord has gave Paul a boldness and a courage to say, “I told you, you should have listened to me...but everything is going to be okay...take heart! All of us here are going to be okay.”

And they all end up being okay. The ship isn't! It hits a reef and is destroyed, but all 276 people end up alive and for three months they are shipwrecked on an island called “Malta” (**SHOW MAP**).

Now, when they get here...as you can imagine wet and cold from the water...they have hardly eaten anything in two weeks in the middle of the storm, they get to land and the Bible says that the natives from Malta were kind to them.

**Acts 28:1-2 – “After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. <sup>2</sup>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.”**

Now, you have to remember that at this time of belief in all kinds of gods, the sea was considered a dangerous place...it was the epitome of evil. With unruly waves and sea monsters in the deep, you didn't want to offend the gods of the sea.

To these natives, this group of people that just landed on their island...obviously, they had offended the gods of the sea and barely escaped with their lives.

So, when Paul gathers some sticks and a viper comes out and bites him. Look at:

**Acts 28:3-6 – “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. (Now, let me just say, if this was me, I would have died right on the spot! I hate snakes...and if the sea was considered dangerous, evil and deadly, even more so snakes would be! This is the point where I might have just looked up and said, “really?”) <sup>4</sup>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 has not allowed him to live.” (this is a bad guy to have seas and snakes after him! But of course, God is going to use this!) <sup>5</sup>He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. <sup>6</sup>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.”**

Now, Luke doesn't tell us that Paul rejected this claim, but from his past history, we know he would have. And as a result of what happens he has a great ministry in Malta.

If you keep reading for the three months they are there, Paul healed diseases of people and from what we know of Paul, we KNOW I'm he shared the gospel.

**Illus. Malta** – It's interesting. Operation World is a ministry that gives prayer needs for nations. Did you know that Malta according to Operation World remains the most religious nation in

Europe? 97% identify as Christian. There is a strong Catholic presence there, and each year they have a celebration/festival honoring Paul's arrival on the island via the shipwreck.

They finally leave Malta and as they are on the final part of the journey to Rome, some Christians come to welcome him, and essentially usher him into Rome – and this had to make him feel good.

He had written the book of Romans about three years earlier. To know that he was not going to be alone here...to know that the Church there knew about him and would care for him.

He's finally in the city he's been longing to get to, and remember, while he is in custody, there is no proof of wrongdoing - so he's not in a prison for a crime, but instead allowed to live in rented quarters under house arrest.

He can't go anywhere, but he could have visitors. And it doesn't take him long to call for and receive some visitors.

**Acts 28:16-17a – “And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him. After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews...”**

Paul does under house arrest what he did in nearly every city he traveled to throughout his ministry. He first communicates to the Jewish people, to try to explain to them the gospel. We've seen this throughout our study in Acts.

He starts with them because of their familiarity with the Law and the prophets. As the scripture says, the gospel came to the Jew first, and then to the Greek. BUT – the scripture ALSO says, “he came to his own and his own received him not.

And hasn't this been the story as we have made our way through Acts? For the most part, the Jews reject Paul and his message of the hope of Israel being Jesus, the son of God. And then Paul as a response, wipes the dust from sandals and takes the gospel message to the Gentiles - That's EXACTLY what happens here!

**Acts 28:24-28 – “And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. <sup>25</sup> And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: <sup>26</sup> “Go to this people, and say, “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” <sup>27</sup> For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’**

**<sup>28</sup> Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.”**

**Illus. Bible** – I have (v. 26-27) marked in my daily reading Bible. The date is 5/26/21 – nearly a year ago was reading through this and that's when God birthed in my heart to do this series.

Here's what I have written outside these two verses: "A prayer for Champion Forest. Lord, that we would never hear and NOT understand or see and NOT perceive. Don't ever let our hearts grow dull."

I pray for us as a church, what I pray for my kids nearly every single day – soft hearts. Eyes to see...ears to hear...a heart that is soft toward God and understands his ways.

Acts end rather abruptly. Were told in **Acts 28:30-31** – **“He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him,<sup>31</sup> proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.”**

I LOVE how Acts bookends. It starts in Acts 1:8 with this promise that these disciples would be witnesses to the ends of the earth, and it ends with that promise fulfilled - Paul being a witness from Rome to the ends of the earth.

BTW – it was during these two years that Paul wrote the books in our New Testament we know of as Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon.

He got A LOT of work done “in chains”. It's a great lesson isn't it? That God can use even unfavorable circumstances we are in for his glory.

- Nothing can thwart the purposes of God or stop the advance of the gospel...NOTHING!
- Not even shipwrecks and snakebites or prison apartments!

Now, we don't know what happened to Paul after this. Luke doesn't record it. From church history, we're fairly certain that Paul was released from house arrest...probably didn't get to appeal directly to Caesar, but instead to someone under him.

Some believe Paul actually made it to Spain and preached the gospel. And using Rome as “home base”, he would eventually return, but then be arrested again and ultimately beheaded by Emperor Nero.

The story of the early church is an amazing story. It's growth...it's expansion...it's meeting challenges head on...it's leaders. It's incredible.

And what I want to do as we close out our time together in this book, is to simply look back over this series and give some big picture lessons we learned. And that's what I've done.

I looked back at EVERY message we preached and I culled it down to seven major lessons or take away. Here they are. Ready?

- 1. God uses ordinary people filled with the Holy Spirit to accomplish his purposes.**

How amazing is this? I mean, just think about it! The fact that God chooses to use you and me to help carry out and accomplish his divine purposes. You look at any name we studied in Acts – from Peter to Stephen to Paul – all of them ordinary people that were filled with the extraordinary Holy Spirit of God.

And this is the key: We have to be FULL of the Holy Spirit. This is how we make a difference.

**Illus. Charleston** – Never think you are great! You are not great. The gift God has given you is great. It's very true. Never get over the fact that God chooses to use you!

**Illus. Glove** – God in the glove (week one)

## **2. Persecution, suffering and trying times is a normal part of the Christian journey.**

Look at nearly every page of the book of Acts and you can write one of these three words across the pages: persecution, suffering, trying times. It's the norm for the believer.

This is one of the major truths I love about reading Acts. We can read it and get so excited about the advance of the Church...about the progression of the mission – but you can't read it without seeing that it comes with a cost!

Jesus said in **John 16:33** – **“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”**

And the book of Acts plays this out for us. We don't need to be surprised, when persecution, suffering or trying times come into our life. God uses these situations...

- He uses these times to stretch our faith and create dependance on him...
- He uses these times to advance the gospel...
- He uses these times to teach us and conform us to Christ...
- And he uses these times to grow our prayer life and encourage others who are following us and looking to us.

Peter spoke at Pentecost, but he also praised the Lord in prison. Paul planted an untold number of churches, but he was also beaten and nearly killed on numerous occasions.

We've learned in Acts that persecution and suffering and trying times are the norm of the Christian life! Don't be surprised when they come your way – instead, be resolved in your spirit to trust the Lord in it and allow him to do his will in and through your life, even if it means dark nights for you.

## **3. The Church is worth giving your life to.**

This Church is birthed in Acts 2. And you immediately see, people coming together for fellowship, discipleship, praying together, meeting needs in their community...it all happened in the context of the Church, the bride of Christ.

We see that in the early church, church (baptized believers together and practicing the ordinances) was a priority.

**Acts 2:42-47 – “And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all who believed were together and had all things in common. <sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”**

THIS is the Church – and listen, there is NOTHING like it! It's worth giving your life for, and it's certainly worth giving your life to.

Let the Church of Jesus Christ – and in our context, let's think local church – because that is what we see established throughout this book. You have the “Big C” and you have the “little c”.

I promise you, it's worth giving your time, attention and resources – it's worth using your spiritual gift serving others, investing in others, giving to others. The local church is worth it because it's God's ordained way of changing the world.

? – What's your commitment level to the Church?

? – Is it a priority?

? – How much time do you spend thinking about how we can more effectively reach our neighbors?

? – How much time do you spend laboring over and praying for the spiritual growth of the people you serve here/this mission God has given us?

The local church is home base for missions around the world. It should be part of the foundation for a godly marriage and helping you to raise godly children.

We need one another and we need one another to be ALL-IN. I could go on and on about the church – outside of the family unit, it's the only institution God founded and the ONLY one he died for!

#### **4. Sharing the love of Jesus vocally and showing the love of Jesus tangibly helps change the world.**

We see this over and over in Acts. People are healed, and physical needs are met...just read it in Acts 2. But combined with meeting physical needs, is sharing the love of Jesus.

This is what I love about our CMC ministry. See, we can put clothes on people. We can feed them. We can help them. But if we do that without meeting the need of their soul, we've missed the mark! LOVE getting reports of when that bell rings over there!

**Illus. Strip Center (SHOW PICS)** – Praying in Jan. of this year (see journal – 5th) – Food pantry, Clothes Closet, Immigration services, Eye care, Dental Care, After school tutoring – these are just SOME of the ministries we could put in here.

All I'm asking you to do today is pray that God would somehow let us have it!

### **5. Keep the main thing (the Gospel), the main thing.**

What we have seen in Acts...one of the most beautiful lessons we learn is the Gospel breaks barriers and builds bridges. Only the gospel could bring Jews and Gentiles together. It's amazing.

There is so much that could divide this early church...and there is much that could divide us today. We are a diverse church. And the only way we stay on mission...the only way we keep unity...the only way we stay as one...

? – Are you kidding me? We ALL have different passions...we all have different aspects of life and ministry that we think is most important. We all have different views regarding some of what is taking place in our culture and in the political circles of the day. We focus on all that, it's the quickest way to divide and exactly what Satan wants.

We focus on the gospel though...keeping the main thing, the main thing. We'll work through any sideways energy showing love and giving deference to one another.

Let's commit today that we are always going to keep the main thing, the main thing. And speaking of keeping the gospel the main thing. This leads to a next lesson we learn:

### **6. Be aggressive in spreading the message of the Gospel.**

This is the book of Acts. It's all about the Church aggressively spreading the message of the gospel. There was a sense of urgency.

We've seen in Paul's missionary journeys this happened predominately through frontier missions (going where there was no gospel presence) and then winning converts, making disciples and ultimately planting churches.

There was a "let's do whatever it takes" to get the message of Christ to people who need to hear it.

**J. Oswald Sanders – "No one has the right to hear the gospel twice, while there remains someone who has not heard it once."**

Listen, this is why we do missions. It's the heart behind the CF Connect. We want to be aggressive in spreading the message of Christ especially to people who have never heard or don't have a strong evangelical church near them.

Speaking of being aggressive in spreading the gospel. I told you a few weeks ago we were looking into new forms of media to help get the message of Christ in places that we may never go, send people or plant churches.

**Illus. Flying over Romania** – SWBTS – “sun doesn't set on Southwestern” – and I thought, that's what I want for our church...for the sun to NEVER set on our ministry. How can we most effectively spread the message of Christ.

A few months ago we were approached by a ministry called pray.com. And I'm pumped about this – talk about the sun never setting on the ministry of Champion Forest.

Beginning today you can download the app. 12 million users from 185 countries – ready for this? We're their featured ministry today. **(SHOW IMAGE)**

Who knows how God is going to use this? The sermons that are preached right here from Champion Forest each week can be listened to and easily accessed from all over the world. *FORWARD* doesn't really end today because we are going on pray.com, this will be the name of our new media ministry.

As you can tell, I like the word, FORWARD – it says so much! We all need to move forward in our Christian walk!

God has given us media and I say let's use whatever platform God gives us to aggressively spread the message of Christ as far and as wide as we can, to as many people as we can.

## **7. Friendships with people and faithfulness to Jesus is what matters most in life.**

This was the main point of the message a few weeks back when we studied Acts 20.

You see the power of relationships...friendships...even in today's passage Paul was strengthened by those relationships and friendships he developed. And then we see this – faithfulness to Jesus. It was all about standing strong in him.

Paul said to the elders in Ephesus. **Acts 20:24** – “**But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.**”

There's a lot more lessons, I'm sure, but this is all I have time for today. Just because we are closing out our FORWARD series, does not mean we stop moving FORWARD.

Let's keep going FORWARD in the name of Jesus, Champion Forest. For the souls of men and for the glory of God. Amen!

Let's pray.

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