

**Paul Sailing for Rome; The Storm
FINAL SERMON ON THE BOOK OF ACTS
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A passenger on an ocean liner was enduring a rough Atlantic crossing. As he leaned over the rail, his face a shade of green, a steward came along and tried to encourage him: "Don't be discouraged, sir! No one's ever died of seasickness yet!" The nauseous passenger looked up at the steward with horror and said, "Don't say that! It's only the hope of dying that's kept me alive this long!"

I am the worst person on a boat. Ask any of my family members. The last time I went on a fishing boat was when our kids were really young. We wanted to take them deep sea fishing. Just so happened that on that day there were ten foot swells. I got so sick they had to turn the boat around and take me back. The ambulance had to drive out to get me on the dock.

I remember thinking – I am trapped! I can't get off . No matter what I do I am stuck on this bouncing piece of tinder they call a boat until I die. Its hopeless...

That's probably how Paul's fellow-passengers felt after two weeks of enduring the storm at sea. (2 Corinthians 11:25 – says Paul was shipwrecked 3 times in his life – this one certainly seems like the worst – very detailed account)

Not only were they sick; after not being able to see the sun or stars for many days, they had **lost all hope of being saved (27:20)**. In the same way, when people go through severe storms in life, often they lose all hope of being saved from their circumstances...

They feel trapped – it seems there is no way out. Nothing good can possibly happen....I have nothing to look forward to...these are the words of people losing hope. Darkness closes in. Enter despair...

Yet the encouraging words of Paul brings a ray of light to those crew members who have been tossed on the sea in the darkness for weeks. In verse 22, Paul urges everyone to **keep up their courage!** promising that there would be no loss of life among them.

Again in verse 25 he says, "**Therefore, keep up your courage, for I believe God, that it will turn out exactly as I have been told.**" Again in verse 33 we read that "**Paul was encouraging them to take some food.**" **The result was (27:36), "all of them were encouraged."**

Someone has said, "Be kind. The majority of people you meet are fighting a hard battle." Or I might say in the words of Scripture – Many people are walking through life feeling like the wind is against them.

Is that you today? If it is, I want you to be encouraged today.

Bo Schembechler head coach for the Michigan Football Team has a famous speech about winning the game as a team. One of the lines in that speech is that being a team means..."we are not going to criticize each other, we are not going to talk about each other behind each other's backs, WE ARE GOING TO ENCOURAGE each other."

How much more should this be the MO for the church!

Churches ought to be bastions of encouragement for everyone walking in those doors. We ought to be lifting each other up, appreciating one another, pouring into each other hope and life and joy and possibility. We ought to look forward to coming here on Sunday because when we leave we feel filled up with hope and vision and expectation.

As a church we need to recognize that Discouragement is one of Satan's greatest tools; and do everything we can to dissuade it... – discouragement hits all of us at one time or another, doesn't it?

Satan loves to use Discouragement because...

Discouragement stops us from realizing our call, the dreams God has put in our hearts.

Discouragement takes the vitality out of us and makes us feel limp and ragged– just like you do in a storm at sea – trapped – with no way out of your current misery.

Look at the word discouragement...

It is "**dis – courage**"

In other words I don't have courage to realize the call of God in my life anymore because life has beaten me down so badly I just can't get up.

The wind has been against me for too long

The future looks hopeless- the wind has tattered my sails

My courage to face it all is gone....

Now just to be clear, Paul wasn't some upbeat, positive person who never felt down. He needed God's encouragement just asa much as you and I do.

Sometimes we idealize these people in Scripture in ways that make them feel super human.

Luke's words in verse 20 imply that Paul, Aristarchus, and Luke felt the same as everyone else on board, that there was no hope of their being saved. **This is reinforced by the angel's words to Paul (27:24), "Do not be afraid."**

If Paul had not been discouraged and afraid, he would not have needed this encouraging word. But once he experienced God's encouragement, he then passed it on to others. *Before we can pass God's encouragement along to others, we must personally experience it ourselves.*

So how do we receive God's encouragement?

1. WE RECEIVE GOD'S ENCOURAGEMENT BY BEING WITH HIS PEOPLE.

As the journey to Rome began, the ship put into port at Sidon, and **the centurion allowed Paul to visit his friends and receive care (27:4)**. We often think of Paul as giving care to others, but he also needed to receive care. He taught that we all are part of the body of Christ, where each member both gives and receives from the other members in order to function properly ([1 Cor. 12:12-27](#)).

Harold Camping was an old radio preacher who started telling listeners that they should drop their church memberships, leave their congregations, and just listen to him on the radio. And many of his listeners starting doing what he said. At a conference of some 100 pastors, each one reported losing members because of Mr. Camping's teachings. As the article goes on to point out, the idea has a certain appeal. *Sleep in on Sunday, no meetings, no obligations, no messy involvement in the lives of other Christians.* But, of course, it is in direct disobedience to Scripture, which tells us not to forsake assembling together, but rather to encourage one another ([Heb. 10:25](#)).

That's why the church needs to be a place of encouragement. We are meant to receive encouragement by being with God's people. We come to church to receive hope and strength and be inspired to live life victoriously!

2. We Receive God's Encouragement by Remembering God's Presence With Us

God's angel (messenger) appeared to Paul in the midst of the storm (as in 23:11), to remind Paul that God was always with him, and was very aware of the trials that he was going through.

If you are discouraged today, God is standing next to you too. He wants you to know that he is aware of your trials and difficulties; He wants to assure you of his

presence as well. He wants you to hear his voice telling you, as he told Paul, “**Do Not Be Afraid.**”

If Paul needed this assurance in his life – so do we. He was a human being, just like you and me. The Lord knew this and continued to appear to Paul throughout his life...to encourage him – cause he got discouraged too

Paul had an experienced it when he was afraid in Corinth. The Lord appeared to him and promised, “**I am with you**” ([Acts 18:9-10](#)).

Paul also experienced God’s presence when he was in custody in Jerusalem, and the Lord stood at his side and said, “**Take courage,**” and promised that he would bear witness at Rome” ([23:11](#)).

He would later experience it at his final imprisonment, just before his execution. He told Timothy that no one supported him, but all deserted him. Then he added, “**But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me**” ([2 Tim. 4:17](#)). Each of these experiences of the Lord’s presence came at stormy times in Paul’s life – when the wind was against him. Each of these experiences encouraged Paul, and reminded him that God was with him.

We all get discouraged. We all need that shot in the arm – that reassurance that comes in many different ways – that God is with us. That he will not let us go. That there is always hope and that we are never alone.

God is with you today too.

Maybe he brought you here today to encourage you. To remind you that he is with you and despair is not a word his vocabulary

Finally

3. We Receive God’s Encouragement By Remembering that Our True Identity Is in Christ

Paul tells the men “**Last night there stood by me an angel of the God to whom I belong, and whom I worship.**”

Paul knew he belonged to God. Whatever happened to him, good or bad, he knew that his destiny was not about him; his mission and purpose was all about the God to whom he belonged. Paul knew he was a part of a bigger plan, and a bigger purpose than what he himself could fathom.

When we know who we are in Christ, everything that happens to us good or bad, pales in comparison to knowing that we belong to the Lord of life itself, who gave his life for us and calls us his own.

How many of you have been watching the Olympics? I've been trying, but they are on so late that I usually fall asleep. But I have managed to see some of the swimming, the equestrian competition and the men's synchronized diving.

David Boudia and Steele Johnson won silver medals in the men's synchronized 10 meter platform, which was Boudia's third all-time Olympic medal and Johnson's first. Boudia won a gold and a bronze in the 2012 Olympics.

He also wrote a book entitled **Greater Than Gold: From Olympic Heartbreak to Ultimate Redemption**" which chronicles how his Olympic Journey changed from one where he was seeking his own glory to one where he chose to use his athletic gifts to glorify God. (nervous if he thought about diving; peaceful when he thought about Jesus and remembered who he was in him)

SHOW CLIP

As we move into communion today, I want you to be encouraged. You are with God's people, you are in God's presence, and if you know Jesus Christ as Lord, you are God's beloved child – that is your identity. What could be better?

The wind was never so much against someone as it was against Jesus the night he went to the cross. Jesus endured the worst storm on the cross ever known to a human being.

And yet his identity as God's beloved son sustained him through the worst moments of his agony. Even Jesus needed encouragement in the garden when the angels came to strengthen him.

And he did it for you so you would be encouraged today. Encouraged to know that God loves you enough to die for you.

Friends, if the wind is against you today as you take communion rest in God's great love for you as his Beloved Child...and hope in him!

Let us pray. Kim