Whispers – Part 3

# In the Storm (Acts 27:1-25)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. We’re so glad to have you here with us today. We’re in part three of a four-part message series called Whispers. And what we’ve been talking about is the presence of God, and so what I want to talk to you about today is about Whispers – In the Storm. Now, this is super practical because it’s been said that you’re either coming out of a storm, you’re in the middle of a storm, or there’s a storm raging up ahead. And though we don’t like to hear that, the reality is that life can be really difficult, and so we’re going to look at the presence of God in the midst of the storms of life.

Now, it seems to me as if we’ve become way too familiar with storms. In fact, in just the past two years countless people have had their lives turned upside down by storms. So many people in Houston, Florida, and even all the way up into the Carolinas, not to mention the US territories have lost everything they own. We’ve discovered that it doesn’t matter how secure we are, how much we think we have our lives together, because in a moment everything we’ve treasured and hoped for can suddenly spin in the chaos of an unrelenting storm.

Unfortunately, some of you today are experiencing storms in Emmitsburg and the surrounding areas on a more personal level. As a matter of fact, right now it may be blowing through your marriage, your family, your business, or your job. And when this happens, it indiscriminately affects you in countless ways, all of which are beyond your control, but today I want to encourage you to stand strong, to put your faith in God, because he is with us. And so, no matter what storm you went through yesterday, are experiencing today, or will face tomorrow, nothing should cause you to doubt the presence of God, and therefore nothing should cause you to give up hope.

I want to illustrate this in a story from the life of the apostle Paul. If you’re familiar with Paul, you know that he’s a man who has gone through his share of storms. In fact, in second Corinthians chapter 11, the Bible tells us that he had,

“I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm” (2 Corinthians 11:23-27, NLT).

And so, the apostle Paul was one who was familiar with God’s whispers in the storms of life. And I want to share with you this account from his life so that we can learn to stand strong, to put our faith in God, and never give up hope. You see, in Acts chapter 27, Paul found himself on a boat in the middle of this massive, intense, destructive storm, and yet while everyone else around him was panicking, Paul was confident, he had peace, and he was able to stand firm in the midst of this crazy storm. And so, let’s look at this story and see how we can apply these truths to our lives today.

As we begin in verse one, Paul’s life was already quite a bit stormy. If you’re not familiar with the context of the story, Paul was on his way to Rome, in Italy, to stand trial before Caesar where he would likely be sentenced to death. Now, like many of the storms that you and I face in our lives, this storm wasn’t Paul’s fault either. He’d simply been telling others about Jesus, doing what God had called him to do, and so this storm was simply the result of Paul living in obedience to God. Let’s begin at verse one,

“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” (Acts 27:1-2).

Verse three tells us,

“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. There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board” (Acts 27:3-6).

Having boarded this final ship, things quickly went from bad to worse for Paul, because this ship which contained 276 people, plus cargo, ran into some bad weather. Continuing in verse seven, Luke tells us,

“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” (Acts 27:7-9).

In other words, it was so late in the fall that the weather made it dangerous for sea travel. And so, the first thing I want to draw your attention to when things get stormy is that you have no control over the storms in your life.

## 1. You Have No Control

In other words, you may find yourself having great difficulty, progressing slowly, struggling along, never seeming to be able to get ahead, and the bottom line is that you can’t control the storm and neither can you count on others to do it for you. You see, the problem with storms is that they rarely go away until they’ve run their course. In fact, once you encounter a storm it usually gets much worse before it gets better, because things fundamentally go from order to disorder. And so, our problems, the storms in our lives, once they start howling and blowing things around, typically go from bad to worse, and that’s what we see here as the ship sailed into the storm.

Now, maybe the captain was hoping that the storm wouldn’t do what it had the potential to do, but I assume the crew quickly recognized that they were at the point of no return, because even though they needed a plan, they needed to take action, they were unwilling to do it. And so, as the ship was blown along, Paul spoke to the ship’s officers about it, warning them in verse 10,

"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” (Acts 27:10).

And so, Paul urged them to stop, he warned them to put on the brakes, to throw out an anchor, anything, just wait out the storm. He suggested they spend the winter where they were because the waters were considered impassable in the late fall and early winter months. But Luke writes that the centurion, in verse 11,

“Instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbor in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest” (Acts 27:11-12).

I wonder how many times you’ve been in that same situation, where you just keep losing time, you know, you take one step forward and three steps back, and then there’s the added pressure of commitments and schedules so you make a decision based upon your feelings. In other words, you’re not seeing clearly, you’re not considering things from the proper perspective, and therefore you’re not making the best decisions. They’d already lost much time and so the Centurion instead of listening to Paul followed the advice of the pilot and the owner of the ship. Luke tells us in verse 13,

“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” (Acts 27:13-15).

They thought they’d obtained what they wanted, but suddenly this storm came upon them and no sooner did the wind catch their sails, then they realized that they had no control over the ship, they were in the clutches of the storm and they just gave up. They surrendered to the storm, just like we often do when we’re in the same situation. You know when we give up, we give way to the problem, and let it drive us along, because we’re too tired to fight back, to discouraged to resist, and we just let that situation drive us along. And so, number two, let’s consider when you’re just driven along by the storm.

## 2. You’re Just Driven Along

Now, I want you to think with me for a moment, you know, here’s Paul, a prisoner on the ship, he offers them his advice, they choose to ignore him and now they find themselves in a storm. And so, they’re in that storm because they made a poor choice, they chose to set sail when it was risky, they made a bad decision, and it was their fault. In the same way, sometimes when we find ourselves being driven along by a storm it’s our own fault too, but other times like Paul, we’re just captive to our circumstances, and it’s not our fault. Luke tells us, in verse 16,

“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” (Acts 27:16-17).

And so, things are getting worse, they’re being driven along, but now they're taking drastic measures, now they’ve got the brakes on, they’re dragging an anchor, and they’re wrapping ropes around the boat to hold it together. They’ve got themselves in a mess and they should’ve listened to Paul’s warning. Maybe some of you are tempted to elbow the person next to you because you’re in a similar situation? You know, maybe this morning you’re in the middle of the storm, you’re caught, you’re being driven along, because you didn’t listen to what somebody told you, what they warned you about. And so, this storm is your fault, because you spent too much money, you said something you shouldn’t have, you procrastinated, you put it off, it’s your fault. You know, if you’d just listened, and maybe that’s why the captain gave up so easily? Maybe that’s why they surrendered to fear, surrendering to the storm, and allowed themselves to be driven along, because they knew it was their own fault. Luke tells us in verse 18,

“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 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” (Acts 27:18-20).

And so, here we see that the crew is terrified, they actually believe this is it, “this is the storm we’ll never survive” and Luke said, "We gave up all hope." You know, we’re never going to be able to conceive, I’m going to be alone forever, there’s no way to beat this cancer, I’ll never overcome this debt, he or she’s never going to change, the storm continues to rage, and we give up all hope. Verse 21 tells us,

“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” (Acts 27:21).

“But now” Paul says in verse 22, “Now” he says,

“I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed” (Acts 27:22).

And so, Paul does what a lot of us do, you know, when we’re right, we like to tell people what? “I told you so” right? But he wasn’t boasting, he was simply hoping that they would listen to him now because he wanted to encourage them. And maybe some of you can relate, because you’re in the middle of a storm right now, you’re in a place you didn’t want to be, and it wasn’t your fault, but the captain said “Go.”

You know, maybe someone gave you their word and you thought you could trust them, but they didn’t follow through. Or your employer made some bad decisions and had to downsize. Or your parents for one reason or another couldn’t get it right and ended up divorcing. And so, suddenly you find yourself in a place that you never wanted to be, you’re in the middle of a storm, but it wasn’t your fault. And it’s so easy when you’re being driven along by the storm to just give up hope, but Paul encourages them to keep up their courage, number three, because God is the redeemer of the storms.

## 3. God Is the Redeemer

This is important for us to understand, because whatever storms you may be going through, God’s not the author of that storm with all of its chaos and destruction. He’s a Redeemer of the storms in your life, his perfect love drives out fear, and like those storms in Texas, Florida, Georgia, into the Carolinas and the Caribbean, they’re merely the effects of a fallen sinful world in which we live. God’s not the author of evil, he doesn’t create chaos, but he’s here, he’s with us, and he’s able to redeem the situation. God’s a Redeemer of the storm and Paul knew that firsthand because in verse 23 he testifies,

“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” (Acts 27:23-24).

And so, we’re reminded that regardless of how things appear on the surface, that God is in control. When things are at their very worst, we need to remember that what we see with our eyes is not all there is; that there is a spiritual world that is so much greater than what we can see, a world that goes far beyond what we have the ability to comprehend, and that the very real presence of God is with us in this moment. This is something that Paul was well aware of, something that he’d experienced, and something that he was confident of. As a matter of fact, this is what he told the pastor of the church in Ephesus. Speaking of a stormy time, a low point in his life, he said,

“Everyone deserted me… but the Lord… the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength...” (2 Timothy 4:16-17).

And so, I want to reassure you, no matter what storms you’re facing, no matter how hard the wind is blowing, the boat is rocking, no matter how much water you’re taking on, no matter what dangers lie below the surface, that God is with you and he’s your redeemer. He said, “You will know at last that I, the Lord, am your Savior and your Redeemer” (Isaiah 60:16, NLT). And that’s why Job in the midst of his storm could say with such confidence,

“But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives…. I will see God, I will see him for myself. Yes, I will see him with my own eyes” (Job 19:25-27, NLT).

Today, if you’re a follower of Christ, his Spirit lives inside of you, and he goes before you, because God is already in tomorrow. He’s not bound by time, he hears your prayers, he comforts you in your hurts, he directs you when you’re lost, because he’s your Redeemer, he’s with you in the storm, and that’s what Paul was saying,

“The Lord stood at my side and gave me strength” (2 Timothy 4:17).

There are some of you hearing this who need to realize that whatever it is that you’re going through right now, whatever storm you’re facing, that God hasn’t left you, he hasn’t abandoned you. Your Redeemer lives, he’s still at your side, he’s giving you strength, and that’s why David could say, “I will have no fear” (Psalm 118:6). As a matter of fact, he said,

“I know the Lord is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me” (Psalms 16:8, NLT).

And that’s comforting in the storms of life, because it’s all about who’s beside you, who’s with you and in you, that changes your perspective, builds your faith, and gives you the courage to ride out the storm. You see, even though you’re in the presence of a storm, it’s all about who’s in the boat with you that really matters. Because we live by faith and not by sight, and so our peace isn’t in the absence of a storm, peace isn’t found in a wrinkle free life, peace is found in the presence of Jesus. And so, you don’t need to be afraid, you can stand firm, because he’s with you, he’s right beside you, he’ll never leave you and he’ll never forsake you.

The ship was going down, but Paul wasn’t going down, because God had more for him to do. And in the same way, God has more for you to do, he’s not finished with you yet; he has more people for you to love, more opportunities for you to serve and to be a blessing. You’re not going down in the storm. The ship may go down, but the storm’s not going to take you out. In fact, God just may use that storm to do something in you, working in you to increase your faith, building your character, and strengthening you so that like Paul you can help somebody else through their storm. Here’s what Paul said in verse 25,

“So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me” (Acts 27:25).

In other words, God’s got this, he’s still in control. And so, when you’re in the midst of a storm, when you’re being driven along, and the storm continues to rage, like Paul you can say, “I have faith in God” because our faith is in God and not in what we see. Our faith is in what God says will come to pass. And therefore, our faith isn’t in the boat, but our faith is in the one who whispers over the wind and the waves. Our faith is in the one they call,

"Immanuel"—which means, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23).

And so, our faith is in God. That’s what he said will come to pass, and it will happen. Because he is Immanuel. He is God with us. He’s our Redeemer, our shelter in the middle of the storm, our hiding place, our refuge and our strength. That’s what the Bible tells us,

“God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble” (Psalms 46:1).

Because he’s with us, he’s by our side, and that’s so important, because you can’t control when a storm is going to blow in, you can’t control the severity of it, you can’t control how long it’s going to last, you can’t control what people say about you, you can’t control what people do to you, but you can control what you believe and you can control where you put your faith. And so, you can be confident that God will see you through because you know that God is in control and he whispers, “I am with you.”

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