

# Acts 27

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please take out your copy of God's Word, which I pray is well read and treasured in your hearts. And turn with me to the book of Acts chapter 27. Yes, we are still working our way through the book of Acts, which is our habit to do verse by verse exposition, but we are nearing the end.

We have this Sunday and two more if things go to plan and we'll complete our study of the book of Acts. But before we get into today's text, I'll summarize where we are in Luke's narrative of the ascended Christ working by the agency of the Spirit in the life of the Apostle Paul.

At the beginning of chapter 21, Paul returns to Jerusalem where he is attacked at the temple and subsequently arrested by a Roman cohort. Because of the uproar of the crowd, the confusion concerning their accusations against Paul and a plot to kill him, he is detained and stands trial a number of times across the following chapters.

In chapter 25, Paul exercises his right as a Roman citizen and makes an appeal to Caesar. That is to be sent to Rome to stand trial before Caesar, which is granted to him.

And that brings us to the decision to sail for Rome in today's text. And wasn't that the most sweeping summary ever of those chapters? So before I begin reading in Acts 27, let me remind you, beloved, that this is God's word to us.

[ 1 : 39 ] It was written for his glory and our good. We would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. Now, as we read across the following chapter, I'm going to stop at some periodic places and give some brief explanation just so we know, fully wrap our minds around what's happening in this episode in Paul's life.

And then we'll give some application following it. So Acts 27, verse 1. So note first the phrase, we should sail.

I just think it's good for us to recognize that Luke is using first person plural pronouns again. So he is back on the scene, right? That means he joined Paul as he is sent to Rome.

He was likely nearby during all of those trials, but he's observing from a distance what is happening. Many have supposed that Luke served as Paul's physician for his general health as he went on all of these hazardous journeys, as well as the thorn in his flesh mentioned in 2 Corinthians.

We don't know exactly what that was, but many have supposed it was some kind of ailment that Paul carried with him. Luke serves us as a beautiful example of friendship and service as he returns and joins him on his trip to trial and imprisonment in Rome.

[ 3 : 24 ] Note also that they get on a ship of Adramidium. And it's only substantial because I think sometimes words like this become distracting to us. Like what in the world is a ship of Adramidium?

Adramidium was a place. It was the ship's home port. And the ship is likely a merchant ship carrying wheat westward, as we see in verse 38.

We find out later in the chapter that there's a massive number of people on this ship. Ships of this size in that day would have been the largest seagoing vessel.

So it was a large ship of Adramidium carrying most likely wheat. Verse 38 says, when they'd eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.

And we also see that he's accompanied by Aristarchus. And Aristarchus has served as one of Paul's travel companions for quite some time. In fact, he is one of the men seized in the Ephesian riot that we learned about back in chapter 19.

[ 4 : 26 ] So another picture, a beautiful friendship and service to Paul as he goes with him. Verse 3. The next day we put in at Sidon, and Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for.

And putting out to sea from there, we sailed under the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us. Now, if you would like, in the back of your Bible, probably there's a map of Paul's

missionary journeys.

If you have an ESV like I do, a thin line, it's the last one. So you can just very quickly turn to it and see the path that he takes. If that helps you, you can flip back and forth between the two.

Sidon from Caesarea would have just been a bit north on the coast of Israel. So they've sailed just a bit of a way. And Julius, this soldier of the Augustan cohort, allows him to go to who's likely his friends being the church there in Sidon and be cared for.

We see also in these two verses that they sail under the lee of Cyprus. Now, Luke uses the word lee twice more in this narrative. So it's important that you understand what he's referring to.

[ 5 : 40 ] And the lee is the protection of a landmass from the wind. That is to say, they sailed on the downwind side of Cyprus. They were protected from the strong winds by sailing in the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against them, Luke records.

Now, a sailing ship is most easily sailed with the wind at its stern, its backside. That's the way we think of sailing ships, right? The wind blowing it along.

But did you know that when the wind is at the bow of a ship, it can still be sailed? I had never given this any thought until the year was 1996.

And my dad and I went up to Maine, and we got to take a sailing ship out, and we took it up the coast. And I didn't think, how do we get back? We had to turn around and sail against the wind. And you do a process called tacking.

You cut across the wind, back and forth, and you make progress in that way. But it's not an easy thing to do. And so, with the wind at the bow against them, right, they can still sail, but with this difficulty.

[ 6 : 46 ] And in especially high winds, it can become quite impossible. And it became a continued problem on this voyage they're taking. Verse 5. And when we had sailed across the open sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia.

There the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy and put us on board. We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Nidus.

And as the wind did not allow us to go farther, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone.

Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fairhavens, near which was the city of Lycia.

So they were working against the wind. All this language of difficulty is what that means. So they put into a port called Fairhavens. Fairhavens still exists as a place.

It's still called Fairhavens. And it now has a small city. About 200 people live there. But it likely did not have a city in that day as Luke records that it's near this city of Lycia.

[ 7 : 54 ] But even if it did, it's a pretty poor port. It's open to the southeast, which means that it's exposed to the winter winds. And that's a problem.

So they finally make their way into this port, which gives them some temporary shelter. But it's not going to give them long-term shelter from the wind. And this sets up this issue that's before them. We'll see in verse 9. Since much time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous because even the fast was already over, Paul advised them, 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.

Now, when Luke uses the phrase, even the fast was already over, he's doing so simply to mark the date. He's referring to the last, the fast of the day of atonement, which fell in late September.

You can see why I'm filling in these details because we have no concept of much of this. For ancient vessels, any travel on the Mediterranean past mid-September was dangerous.

[ 9 : 05 ] It was dangerous to venture out past mid-September. And all travel ceased from mid-November until past February, at least until February. All travel ceased altogether.

So, they were trying to sneak this trip in. So, back at the beginning of the chapter, when it was decided for them to go, the decision was either we try to slip this trip in and get Paul to Rome now, or we wait until the spring.

So, they're sneaking it in. And with the difficulty they had experienced thus far, they're entering an even more treacherous time to continue westward. So, Paul says, and it doesn't really seem to be phrased as a prophecy in this way, but he just says, I perceive this is going to go bad for us.

Look at how difficult it's been so far. Verse 11, But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said.

And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, that's fair havens, the majority decided to put out to sea from there on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

[10:20] Now, when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete close to the shore. But soon, a tempestuous wind called the Northeaster struck down from the land.

And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. Running under the lee of a small island called Kauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the ship's boat.

After hoisting it up, they used supports to undergird the ship. Then, fearing they would run aground on the Sirtis, they lowered the gear, and thus they were driven along.

So they decide to make a run for it, right, in the hopes of wintering at Phoenix. But the winds shift. So they get this nice wind, they say, now's our chance, and they go, but the winds shift.

And a particular wind comes called the Northeaster, right, a tempestuous one, right, coming from the Northeast. If you're looking at your little map in the back of your Bible, you can see that on the south side of the island of Crete.

[11:24] And so as this wind comes across the island of Crete, not only is it a strong wind, but it becomes a turbulent wind as well. The island itself begins to break the wind up, so it's not steady any longer.

And this wind is turbulent enough, strong enough, that as they turn, it would seem they turn and try to go back and make their way back into Fairhavens again.

And they're unable to sail against it, so they have to give in to its power. Luke says that we manage with difficulty to secure the ship's boat.

So this would have been a boat used to go into shore. This was a large sailing vessel, so a boat that they could have landed on the beaches with. And they had pulled it. It would have been pulled along beside, behind the ship, so they pulled it in and secured it on board the ship.

And then he says that they used supports to undergird the ship. Some of your translations may say cables. The wind was so strong and the sea so violent at this point that they looped cables underneath the ship to help hold it together.

[12:31] That's what they're doing, right? It's already that kind of wind that they're looping rope, tying it tight up underneath the ship to hold it together, which was a common practice in such situations.

Then he says that they're concerned that they're going to run aground on the Sirdis. The Sirdis Shallows or the Sirdis Sands is an area off the coast of North Africa with many sandbars.

It's deep water, but it has a lot of sandbars in it. And it's well known as a ship graveyard. Lots of ships would run aground on these sandbars, especially these large ships that would have carried heavy loads and sat deep in the water, would get stuck and then get beat to death by the waves. So it's a common place that people would run aground. They are quite some distance from the Sirdis at this point, but it would seem that they do not know their exact location.

They're just not quite aware where they are exactly in the Mediterranean Sea. And so wishing to avoid the Sirdis altogether, they lowered the gear, which can mean either they lowered the sails or they lowered the sea anchor.

[13:44] Some of your translations may say that. Or both. It's possible that both things happen, which is what I propose with my very limited knowledge of sailing. As the winds coming from the northeast, and they desire not to be driven to the southwest, where this region, the Sirdis, was at, they drop sails, and they employ a sea anchor, which was a large bag.

It's kind of like a parachute that floats under the water that acts as a brake, orients them with the wind, and it's in this way that they're driven along.

They're driven westward, if you're looking at that little line on your map. Verse 18. Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo.

And 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 no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.

Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss.

[14:58] Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship.

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. So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told.

But we must run aground on some island. When the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight, the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms. A little farther on, they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms. And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come.

It gets intense, doesn't it? I love it. This is the Bible. So Paul sees a vision. He says, We're going to be okay, but we need to run aground. And then these sailors perceive, they think, they suspect that they're nearing land.

[16:10] And the only thing I can figure, again with my very limited seafaring knowledge, is that as experienced sailors, maybe the waves begin to change the way they're interacting with the bottom of the ocean as it shallows out.

Maybe they have the kind of experience to know that. That's the only thing I could guess. It's nighttime. They can't see that there's land coming up. But maybe. They think that they're approaching land.

And so they take a sounding. They let down a rope that was intended for this very thing with a weight tied to the end of it and used for measuring depth. And they found twenty fathoms, which is 120 feet.

And then going a bit farther, they measured 15 fathoms, which is 90 feet. So the ocean floor is approaching sea level, which means that the sea is shallowing.

They're approaching land of some kind. And so they don't want to run around a ground on rocks. So they let down four anchors from the back of the boat, right, as the boat's being driven forward to slow them down and prevent this type of accident.

[17:11] Verse 30. And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.

Right? So God made this promise that he would maintain the crew. And Paul adds to that, we've got to stay together in this. Under pretense, basically they say, hey, we're going to get out in the boat and we're going to put some more anchors out from the bow of the boat, the front of the boat. But they were lying about it. And Paul says they must stay on board. So, verse 32. Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go. They didn't let them get in it. They cut the ropes. As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, today is the 14th day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing.

Therefore, I urge you to take some food, for it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you. And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all, he broke it and began to eat.

Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. We were in all 276 persons in the ship. When they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.

[18:31] Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach on which they planned, if possible, to run the ship ashore. So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that tied the rudders, then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach.

But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf. The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape.

But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship.

And so it was that all were safely brought to land. So they see on this morning, right after the 14th night, they see an inlet with a beach, and in order to run the ship aground, they make it as light as

they possibly can.

They cut away the anchors. Loosening the ropes doesn't mean they let the rudder flop. It means that they actually cut the rudders away. So there's not no rudder on the bottom of it. It's as smooth as it can possibly be on the bottom of this thing.

[ 19 : 40 ] They hoist the mainsail, but the wind would drive them all the way in to land. But as we see, there's a reef that they get caught on, and the boat gets beat to pieces as they all abandon ship and are brought safely to the shore.

So there's our text for today. So let's make three valuable observations from, or we could say in some cases, about today's text.

As I've said to you before, preaching from historical narrative is often very difficult because my first reading through this, I really wanted to say, and this morning there's one point.

Wow, what a journey, right? What do we learn from such a text, right? Like what is there to be said to us from a text? And I do think there's some really important things after further consideration.

So observations from or about today's text as we read it together. And here they are. These are the three observations, and then we'll go through them one by one. Number one, God's words are true.

[ 20 : 48 ] God's words are true. Number two, God is in control of all things. And number three, God uses suffering to work good in the hearts of his people.

Okay, so first, God's words are true. I want to make this first point in a really general sense. This is an astoundingly accurate account of what a journey of this magnitude would have been like.

Like that's lost on us, isn't it? It was really lost on me on my first reading of it. Luke's account here has historical veracity as a record of a treacherous first century crossing of the Mediterranean Sea. In fact, Acts chapter 27 is used in lots of secular literature as a historical account of what it would have taken and what sailing looked like in this day. What would first century sailors do in the case of a tempestuous wind?

What would happen in that way? So it's a very historically voracious account. F.F. Bruce, who was a 20th century New Testament scholar, wrote a work on Acts, and he quotes in that work the 19th century British yachtsman James Smith.

[ 22 : 14 ] You're tracking that? A book within a book. James Smith wrote this book entitled *The Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul*, which is an exploration of the accuracy of Luke's account.

So James Smith, as a yachtsman, sets out to figure out how historically accurate it is. And where I found this was F.F. Bruce talking about this book.

Okay? I'm going to read this quote to you as best I can to let you track me. Smith relates how he made careful inquiries of experienced Mediterranean navigators in order to ascertain the mean rate of drift of a ship of this kind laid to in such a gale.

So he asked around navigators, right? How fast would a ship like this drift under these conditions? The conclusion which he reached was a mean drift of about 36 miles in 24 hours.

The soundings recorded in verse 28 indicate that the ship was passing Korah, a point on the west coast of Malta, on her way into what's now called St. Paul's Bay.

[ 23 : 21 ] Okay? On the island of Malta. It's now called St. Paul's Bay. But the distance from Klaudah to the point of Korah is 476.6 miles, which, at the rate deduced from the information, would take exactly 13 days, one hour, and 21 minutes.

And not only so, the coincidence of the actual bearing of St. Paul's Bay from Klaudah and the direction in which a ship must have driven in order to avoid the Cirtus is, if possible, still more striking than that of the time actually consumed and the calculated time.

Then, after carefully reckoning the direction of the ship's course from the direction of the wind, from the angle of the ship's head with the wind, and from the leeway, he goes on.

So Smith goes on to say, Hence, according to these calculations, a ship starting late in the evening from Klaudah would, by midnight on the 14th day, be less than three miles from the entrance of St. Paul's Bay.

I admit that a coincidence so very close as this is to a certain extent accidental, but it is an accident which could not have happened had there been any inaccuracy on the part of the author of the narrative.

[ 24 : 34 ] So he just does this extensive study which is to say that Luke made a very careful recording of this trip that took place.

The scripture has historical veracity. This is one wonderful example of that in our text today. Secondly, God's words are true in the text itself.

In verse 24, Paul recounts this visitation of an angel who said, Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand before Caesar and behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.

Now, in light of this kind of storm, the odds were very clearly stacked against them. This was a miserable situation to be in. Don't read past how very horrible this trip was.

They are two weeks being driven in a storm. They're not seeing the sun or the moon or the stars. They're being beaten down in this horrible winter storm for two weeks.

[ 25 : 36 ] And yet, God's word proves true. Verse 44, And so it was that all were brought safely to land. All 276 souls were spared.

Beloved, God's words are true. And this is why we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. Proverbs 30, verse 5, tells us that every word of God proves true.

He's a shield to those who take refuge in Him. And Psalm 119, 89, says, Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.

If God has said something, it will come to pass. So God's words are true. Not only are God's words true, but God is in control of all things.

So secondly, God is in control of all things. Now Luke does not express this reality directly in this passage. But as a good student of our Bibles, we can know that God sovereignly rules all things at all times.

[ 26 : 45 ] We call this God's omnipotence, right? He is all-powerful. Turn with me, if you will, to Job chapter 37. There's a lot of good flipping happening.

I like to hear it. Job chapter 37. In the midst of Job's suffering, I'm going to assume that you know about Job's suffering. I'll tell you more about it if you would like to know.

But for the sake of time, in the midst of Job's suffering, the bad advice of Job's friends is corrected by a young man named Elihu. I love Elihu.

He's a neat character in the scripture. I encourage you to study him. Listen to what he says to Job in Job 37, beginning in verse 1 and following. Elihu says, At this also my heart trembles and leaps out of its place.

Keep listening to the thunder of his voice and the rumbling that comes from his mouth. Under the whole heavens he lets it go and is lightning to the corners of the earth.

[ 28 : 13 ] After it, his voice roars. He thunders with his majestic voice and he does not restrain the lightnings when his voice is heard. God thunders wondrously with his voice. He does great things that we cannot comprehend.

For to the snow, he says, fall on the earth. Likewise to the downpour, his mighty downpour. He seals up the hand of every man that all men whom he made may know it.

Then the beasts go into their lairs and remain in their dens. From its chamber comes the whirlwind and cold from the scattering winds. By the breath of God, ice is given and the broad waters are frozen fast.

He loads the thick cloud with moisture. The clouds scatter his lightning. They turn around and around by his guidance to accomplish all that he commands them on the face of the habitable world.

Whether for correction or for his land or for love, he causes it to happen. And after further correction by God himself to Job, Job says in Job 42, verse 2, I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

[ 29 : 31 ] So, we learn from Job that God is in control of all things and certainly expressed so clearly in Job 37 by Elihu that he is in control of the weather.

In Jeremiah 32, verse 27, God says, Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?

And we know, of course, that's a rhetorical question. The answer is clear. No, nothing is too hard for the Lord, the God of all flesh.

So, God caused the shifting winds, right? When they made their run for it with the gentle south wind, he caused the wind to shift. That northeaster was sent by the Lord.

That northeaster that drives the ship that Paul is on across the sea to be broken up on a reef. Why would God do such a thing? Doesn't it seem best in our minds that Paul would just be taken safely

to Rome?

[ 30 : 33 ] Wasn't he already giving enough, sacrificing enough? Does Paul really have to go through another shipwreck? And yes, this is the fourth that we know about. Well, there's many reasons.

I think there's a multitude of reasons why this may have happened to Paul and his companion. but one that we can be sure of. We find out in chapter 28 that the island they are shipwrecked on is called Malta and they spend the winter there.

They spend three months in that place. Church tradition holds that Paul established, by God's grace, a church on that island before he left.

He's there. Chapter 28 tells us he's healing people. He is preaching the gospel as Paul does every time he's working miracles. And church history tells us that a church was established while he was there.

So, God brought the saving message of the gospel of Jesus Christ to Malta with a storm. So, God is in control of all things.

[ 31 : 37 ] We would do well to remember that and to trust him in all things. And thirdly, God uses suffering to work good in the hearts of his people.

So, God is in control of all things including our suffering. He brings about our suffering. He ordains our suffering. And he does so to work good in the hearts of his people.

God's control of all things at all times for the good of his people is called his providence. It's a precious word. God's providence extends to the suffering of his people.

If you suffer and you're not a Christian, you need to see your suffering as a judgment. Sin in the world working its effect, bringing about conviction. That's what needs to be happening in your hearts as you suffer as an unbeliever.

But if you're in Christ, suffering is ordained for your good. Can you just imagine, right, then wrap your brains back around how miserable a two-week storm must have been.

[ 32 : 46 ] I can't ride a kid's roller coaster without feeling nauseous. When I drive in the mountains around here, I feel sick. Thinking about being tossed in a boat for two weeks is absolutely horrid to me.

This is the biggest ship of the day, most likely, but it's not cutting through these waves. They are riding up and down, these massive wave trains. In fact, I think that the reason that they're not eating, they're tense, right?

There's not a lot of time to take breaks as these waves are crashing and they're having to mend lines all the time. But I imagine they just didn't feel good enough to eat. Probably even the best of sailors feel sick after a certain amount of time being tossed up and down in that way.

So Paul has to urge them to take food they haven't even eaten. You can just reduce the suffering to that. They just haven't eaten for two whole weeks.

What a miserable time of suffering that Paul and his companions are part of along with the others on that ship. What does God intend to accomplish with such a thing?

[ 33 : 58 ] In 2 Corinthians chapter 11 verses 24 through 30, you may want to join me there. I'll give you a little time if you want to. Paul writes the following, but keep in mind that this is written, the book of 2 Corinthians is written before the event that we read about this morning from Acts 27.

So this is front loaded to this journey that Paul goes on. 2 Corinthians 11 beginning in verse 24. Paul says, five times I received at the hands of the Jews the 40 lashes less one.

Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. We know that stoning, they thought he was dead, but he actually wasn't. Three times I was shipwrecked. And night and a day I was adrift at sea.

This is verse 25 if you're just joining me. So before this shipwreck, he was shipwrecked three other times. And Luke doesn't even record that for us in the book of Acts. But sometime in the Acts narrative, he's shipwrecked three times.

And one of those times he's just adrift on a plank for a night and a day in the ocean. Right? That's suffering. Just a fascinating note. Paul took between nine and twelve ocean journeys up to this time, Acts chapter 27, which means the shipwreck rate for Paul was really high.

[ 35 : 21 ] A third to twenty-five percent of the time. I don't know if that was normative in the day or not, but Paul really is suffering. Right? God's bringing about. And again, God is in control of all things.

God is putting him through these shipwrecks. Verse 26, on frequent journeys in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, dangers in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers, in toil and hardship through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

And apart from other things, all that stuff, there's the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. And he expresses that by saying, who is weak and I am not weak?

I am with them and their suffering. Who was made to fall and I am not indignant or I'm not concerned about their failure. So on top of all of that, this great love and concern for the church as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

So Paul was made to suffer, right? By the good hand of God, Paul was made to suffer. And to what end? Why?

[ 36 : 37 ] What does this produce in Paul? Look at verse 30. He says, If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

What does all this produce in Paul? Humility. It produces a great humility in his life. If God would bring about suffering in this way, then he would see his great need of God.

Let me give you another very applicable example from Mark chapter four. However, when Jesus with the apostles crossing the Sea of Galilee, they are caught in a violent storm, right?

As we study this together, the Sea of Galilee would have been much like Lake Lanier, kind of in its general size, although it's different in its shape. I fully recognize nothing's quite the shape of Lake Lanier.

water. The storms were immense. The way that winds came through the valley would kick up waves that were 10 to 20 feet high. I don't know how much time you spend at the ocean, but I don't think any of us have probably been out in waves that big.

[ 37 : 41 ] If you have, I want to talk to you after the service because that's incredible. Huge waves. They're experiencing this other great, huge, violent storm. Jesus is asleep in the stern of the boat.

The back of the boat passed out on a cushion. Mark chapter 4 tells us that the waves are crashing over the ship. They're taking on water and Jesus is asleep. Why?

Because he's the son of God and he trusts God's goodness in the situation. So the apostles, though, they frantically wake him up and then we read beginning in verse 39, and he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, peace, be still.

And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. He said to them, he turned to the apostles, why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?

So Jesus, having exercised his control over nature, turns his attention to the apostles and what is his concern? Their faith. His concern is for their belief in him as the Christ.

[ 38 : 46 ] And we see later on in the chapter, they say, who is this guy that can even talk to the storm and tell it what to do. He's concerned about bringing about good, birthing good in the hearts of his people.

Paul wrote in Romans chapter 8, verse 28, 29. We know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. For those who are called according to his purpose.

purpose. What is the good that God works all things together for? What is this good that God's effort is aimed at?

Paul doesn't leave us uninformed. Praise God. Verse 29. For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Ignore this morning, if you can, the controversial words of verse 29 and see that God is working all things so that his people will be conformed to the image of his son.

[ 39 : 52 ] This is the good that God seeks. Our sanctification, our growing perfection in Jesus Christ. Humility, faith and every other good work.

suffering is aimed at bringing that about in God's people. So, beloved Christian, take heart this morning.

Whatever figurative storm you are experiencing, none of us are experiencing quite the same storm, but whatever the figurative storm you may have been through, you are currently going through, or that you will go through, hold fast to the truth that God's words are true.

God is in control of all things, and God uses suffering to work good in the hearts of his people. Now, I'm going to close this morning with a reading of a hymn written by William Cowper entitled, God

Moves in a Mysterious Way.

People like to use that phrase a lot. That comes from this hymn. But before I read it, let me tell you a bit of the story that led him to the writing of this hymn. It's not entirely because of this event, but it's part of the events of his life that led him to the writing of this hymn.

[ 41 : 12 ] Cowper was a gifted and famous English hymn writer in the 18th century. Really well known. But he dealt with serious bouts of depression. There were at least four years-long bouts of depression in his life.

On one occasion, he sought to take his own life by drowning himself in the Thames River. Full intention to do this. So he hired a carriage that night to take him from his house to the river. But on the way there, a thick fog enveloped London, and the carriage driver was unable to find his way around the city. Couldn't see at all to get him to the Thames River.

So they're working their way around the city, trying to find the river. The driver has no idea why he wants to go there. But frustrated by the state of their disorientation, Cowper asked the driver to stop so that he could just proceed on foot.

He just said, okay, let me out. I'm going to go figure this out on foot. And upon leaving the carriage, he steps out of the carriage. Cowper found himself back at the front door of his very own house.

[ 42 : 20 ] The place that the carriage stopped was back at his front door. And he was overwhelmed by this. And he saw this as a mighty providence of God preventing him from carrying out his plan.

It was after this incident that Cowper penned the following. So hear Cowper in the midst of a storm. Hear him suffering.

And this is what he wrote. God moves in a mysterious way. His wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.

Deep and unfathomable minds of never failing skill, he treasures up his bright designs and works his sovereign will. Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take.

The clouds ye so much dread are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace.

[ 43 : 24 ] Behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face. His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour.

The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower. Blind unbelief is sure to err and scan his work in vain.

God is his own interpreter and he will make it plain. Let's pray together.