

Enduring Life's Storms "in Christ"

Acts 27

Main Idea: *Like Paul, believers can endure the tests and storms of life by activating their own union with Christ.*

Introduction: Please open your bibles and turn to Acts 27...

Orienting the Text: Where we are in the story

I want to spend a few minutes catching us up in the narrative and where we currently are. Keep in mind that what Luke is doing is showing us how the political world of the first century intersects with Paul's ministry and mission. While most of these figures probably don't mean much to most of you (unless you happen to geek out on ancient history!), but if you were a first century resident, then this would be like Paul meeting with the US Senate, the supreme court and making a bid to stand in front of the president himself!

- A) Paul returns to Jerusalem to bring an aid package to suffering Christians and is arrested on trumped up charges of starting a disturbance in the temple courts and bringing Gentiles into forbidden spaces.
- B) Next Paul goes before the Sanhedrin where he is put on trial. Here Paul divides the assembly against itself by focusing on the resurrection (dividing Jews and Sadducees).
- C) Next Paul is moved to Cesarea and faces the governor of Judea, Felix, and his (illegitimate) wife Drusilla, whom he witnesses to about faith in Christ. Felix hopes that Paul will make him a bribe, and when he doesn't he is left in prison for another 2 years.
- D) However, Paul's enemies still have not forgotten about him! They return and plead with the new governor, Festus, to move Paul back to Jerusalem, where they hope to put him to death. In seeking to do them a favor, Festus brings Paul out to give his own defense (which he is due, according to Roman law). As usual, Paul directs the attention from himself and comes back to Jesus. He has broken no laws, been faithful Israelite his whole life – the only difference being that he has found in Jesus the one true Messiah, and the promised resurrection/restoration of the nation of Israel, which begins with Jesus and will conclude with the literal resurrection of all of His followers at the end of history when he returns again to consummate His coming kingdom.
- E) However, Paul turns the tables and, in accordance with the legal privileges afforded him by his Roman citizenship, Paul appeals to the highest court and governance of the land, by demanding an audience with Caesar himself. Shocked and unsure what to do, Festus grants this request (thus favoring Paul over the Jews).

- F) Last week, we saw how King Agrippa the 2nd and his sister, Bernice, visit Festus, who shares this dilemma he has and what to do with this odd, little Jew named Paul (who also happens to be a Roman citizen!).

Significance of the sea in Acts 27: Surviving the “tests” of the gods

Today, Paul and Luke embark on a harrowing journey to Rome. Luke describes in vivid detail the adventure on the sea. It’s one of the longest chapters in the whole book, and Luke goes into great detail about the journey. Now, at first glance you might wonder why this account is there, with all the detail and length. However, in the first century – particularly in Greco-Roman culture – the sea was the stage by which the gods displayed their power and judgement. To survive the sea (the power of the gods) was almost like a rite of passage, a test of courage, of manhood (for male sailors), and only the truly righteous could do so. In the Old Testament, from a Jewish perspective, the sea symbolized chaos – the untamed creation that was at God’s disposal to use for judgement (think of Noah, think of Jonah, Pharoah’s army) or salvation (again, think of Noah, think of Jonah, think of Moses).

Paul survives his “sea-test” by activating his union/fellowship with Christ

So, today, Christ’s appointed servant, Paul, too is going to be tested by the sea! Will he prove to be courageous, righteous, and endure – or will he, like many others before him, succumb to his fear, compromise, and be swept away. What I want us to see today as we study Luke’s account is how Paul endures his “sea-test” (and every test he encounters in Acts!) by activating and leaning into his union with Christ; his identity in Christ; his relationship with Christ. What we will see is that through Christ’s strength, wisdom, and power, Paul is able to overcome, and the tragedy of the seas becomes an opportunity to worship God and point others to Him.

What does it mean to be “in Christ”?

Lots of debate about this of course, but many scholars suggest that there is a locative, location about the way Paul talks about being in *Christ as a new location, with a new identity, privileges, and responsibilities, symbolized by baptism*. Vos: “[in Christ] there has been created a totally new environment, or, more accurately speaking: a totally new world, in which [the believer] is an inhabitant and participator.” – Geerhardus Vos

New location “in Christ”: 2 Corinthians 5:17

New identity “in Christ”: Galatians 2:20

New privileges and responsibilities “in Christ”: Romans 6:1-4

New purpose for life “in Christ”: 2 Cor. 5:14-15, Phil. 1:19-21

Summary: To be “in Christ” means being in the: “Paul understood his life in terms of living in a sacred union with the Lord Jesus through the Spirit (salvation, eternal life, fellowship), and was therefore under His care, influence, and control.”

Put simply: “Paul’s life was (literally!) in the hands of Jesus.”

This story, viewed from the vantage point of being in Christ, provides us a picture for how Paul practically lived out his union with Jesus, fellowship with Jesus, and helped guide these sailors to safety. Let's begin...

Exposition of Acts 27 - *Paul finds favor with Julius* - Acts 27:1-3

Paul, joined by Luke (firsthand account) and Aristarchus, plus some other rabble, are under the care of Julius, a centurion of the Caesar's cohort (leader of 100 men, tough, seasoned soldier), and yet he gives favor to Paul (?). How can this be? Friends, don't pass over this too quickly, but somehow after only being in custody for ONE day, somehow Paul had earned this man's trust – that he wouldn't escape or do anything to jeopardize his life/responsibilities as a soldier.

Paul (in Christ) earns the trust/respect of others by looking out for their best interests (Phil. 2:1-3), Sailors refuse Paul's advice - Acts 27:4-12

Paul (in Christ) displays practical wisdom (1 Cor. 2:16), The ship crashes, all hope is lost - Acts 27:13-20

Paul encourages the sailors with a message from God - Acts 27:21-26

Paul (in Christ) views circumstances from a divine perspective (2 Cor. 1-2), Paul leads the sailors in giving thanks to God - Acts 27:27-38

Paul (in Christ) glorifies God and points others to Him (2 Cor. 5:14-15), Acts 27:39-44

Paul's life (in Christ) is in the hands of God

Main Idea: *Like Paul, believers can endure the tests and storms of life by activating their own union with Christ*

Application: How do we “activate” our union with Christ?

Remember your union with Christ (Rom. 6:11)

Trust in your union with Christ (Phil. 4:19)

Act in accordance of your union with Christ (Col. 2:6-7)

Put on your Jesus shoes...

Discussion for Small Groups:

- 1) What does it mean to be “in Christ”? (hint: Gal. 2:20; Rom. 6:1-4; 2 Cor. 5:17)
- 2) What do sea-storms often symbolize in the ancient world and the Old Testament?
- 3) In what ways does Paul “activate” his union with Christ in Acts 27?
- 4) How might God be calling you to endure “storms” in your life by “activating” your own union with Christ? What might this look like for you practically?