

The Life of Faith

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Now let us turn together in the Word of God to the book of Acts and chapter 27. And I shall read in your hearing the first 25 verses, a portion of the Word of God, no doubt, familiar to many of you. But I have been reminded in recent days in some of our membership interviews that not everyone comes from a Christian home and the nurture of a church where the Word of God has had its due prominence. And I trust that those of you who are stronger in knowledge will bear with the weaker and never grow weary of hearing read in your ears those familiar stories and portions of the Word of God. Here in Acts 27, we have Luke's Spirit-inspired account of the beginnings of Paul's journey from Jerusalem to Rome, where he will appear before Caesar in defense of his own person and labors, having been constantly falsely accused by the Jews. His life placed in jeopardy again and again, he appeals to Caesar, the rights of his Roman citizenship for a proper trial. And Luke now records that journey from Jerusalem to Rome:

"And when it was determined that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners to a centurion named Julius, of the Augustan band. And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail unto the places on the coast of Asia, we put to sea, Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us. And the next day we touched at Sidon: and Julius treated Paul kindly, and gave him leave to go unto his friends and refresh himself. And putting to sea from thence, we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. And when we had sailed across the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy; and he put us therein. And when we had sailed slowly many days, and were come with difficulty over against Cnidus, the wind not [c]further suffering us, we sailed under the lee of Crete, over against Salmone; and with difficulty coasting along it we came unto a certain place called Fair Havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea. And when much time was spent, and the voyage was now dangerous, because the Fast was now already gone by [it was well into autumn or fall, and the more difficult winter months would be soon be upon them], Paul admonished them, and said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the lading and the ship, but also of our lives. But the centurion gave more heed to the master and to the owner of the ship, than to those things which were spoken by Paul. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to put to sea from thence, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, and winter there; which is a haven of Crete, looking north-east and south-east. And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close in shore. But after no long time there beat down from it a tempestuous wind, which is called Euraquilo: and when the ship was caught, and could not face the wind, we gave way to it, and were driven. And running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were able, with difficulty, to secure the boat [this was like a large lifeboat that was towed behind the main ship. And because the

sea became tempestuous, they didn't want to lose their lifeboat, so they sought to secure it]: and when they had hoisted it up, they used helps, under-girding the ship; and, fearing lest they should be cast upon the Syrtis [sandbars in that area], they lowered the gear, and so were driven. And as we labored exceedingly with the storm, the next day they began to throw the freight overboard; and the third day they cast out with their own hands the tackling of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars shone upon us for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was now taken away. And when they had been long without food, then Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have set sail from Crete, and have gotten this injury and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God whose I am, whom also I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must stand before Caesar: and lo, God hath granted thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even so as it hath been spoken unto me."

Most of us have heard, and perhaps heard many times, the familiar proverb or aphorism that one picture is worth a thousand words. And if I were to ask you children to explain that little aphorism or proverb, I think most of you could do it. It tries to capture the fact that there are some things that are more clearly perceived by seeing and observing than by hearing elaborate descriptions about them. If we were trying to explain to someone who had never seen a brilliant Southern Florida sunset, it would be far easier to take a wide-angled photograph of one such sunset and say, "Here is what I'm talking about", than to attempt page after page to put into verbal symbols, into written vocables what such a sunset is like. And it is for this very reason that the Bible is given in many many areas to history and to biography, because it is in the stuff of real people in real circumstances facing real difficulties with real interventions of the true and living God that God both enforces, illustrates, and confirms the doctrines and duties taught in His Word. And this morning we're going to look at such a passage, which better than a thousand words sets before us some very vital principles concerning the life of faith. And our focus is going to be upon verse 25 in this passage, the words of the Apostle Paul: "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even so as it hath been spoken unto me."

In opening up this passage, I want you to consider with me, first of all, what I am calling this startling exhortation. These words of the Apostle Paul are nothing less than a startling exhortation. Consider with me briefly the substance of the exhortation and why we do well to regard it as a startling exhortation. The substance of the exhortation is basically this: Paul speaks to those on the ship with him and particularly to the men. You may have a translation that says "Sirs", but the Greek word is that standard word to address the male gender. And he speaks in the plural and says to the men on that ship to take heart, to be of good cheer. He uses a word that is found earlier in this very passage, verse 22: "And now I exhort you to be of good cheer...." And the only other use of this verb in the New Testament is found in James 5:13, where James says, "Is any cheerful [or in a state of good heart and of good courage]?" So Paul is exhorting these men no longer to be downcast, no longer to be despairing, dispirited, and dejected. In the midst of all of the realism of those circumstances which he shared with the other 275 who were on that ship, he gives this exhortation immediately to cease from being downcast, despairing, dispirited, and dejected, and to be of a cheerful heart. He is exhorting them to take heart, to be men of courage, to be men of strength in their spirits. That's the substance of his exhortation.

Now why was it startling? Well, it was startling, first of all, in the light of the preceding circumstances. What began as a very ordinary and pleasant journey across the sea (v. 14) suddenly was tremendously disrupted and turned into a horrible nightmare. We read in verse 14: "But after no long time there beat down from it a tempestuous wind, which is called Euraquilo." These would be winds of hurricane or cyclonic force. And with them would come (what many of us have seen on our televisions in recent days with hurricane Bertha that moved up the coast) tremendous turbulence in the seas. And from the quiet, tranquil seas, supposing they were going to have a very uneventful journey, suddenly, these unusual winds come down upon them, and the ship is caught. No longer can the helmsman plot his course and set his sails, but they are driven by the wind. And we read that things begin to get so bad that they not only had to take their large lifeboat that was dragging behind them in tow and bring it on board, but they had to begin to place thick ropes (cables) around the very heart of the ship to keep the planking from tearing apart and becoming nothing but a pile of flotsam in the midst of the turbulent sea. Furthermore, the ship was not only about to be torn apart; they recognized that they had to lighten the load of the ship so that, rather than being dashed and buried by the waves and the turbulence, as it was sitting lower in the water, they wanted, as it were, to float more upon the crest of the turbulent waves. And so they begin to throw out some of the very furniture that is in the ship. This goes on for several days, and we read in verse 20 that the heavens were so thick with the clouds that they saw neither sun nor stars for many days. The mariners lost their ability to get their bearings from the stars by night, their position from the shining of the sun by day. They are shrouded in the midst of this inky darkness of the night. And during the day, the dark, cloud-covered skies forbid them from finding even the direction in which they were going. And we read "...and no small tempest lay on us."

Try to get something of the feel of this situation: the tempestuous sea, the turbulence all around, the panic that runs like an electric current through all who are on board. The heavens are shrouded in darkness. They don't know where they are, where they are going until the very zenith of that despair is recorded in verse 20: "All hope that we should be saved was now taken away." Everyone was now in a state of absolute despair. No longer was there a hope that there will be a little break in the clouds, perhaps another vessel will come by, perhaps there will be some quieting in the seas, and they can begin to pull things together and find out where they are and how they're going to get to where they want to go. No, Luke says, "All hope that we should be saved was now taken away."

Now do you see why I call this a startling exhortation? In the midst of that situation, Paul says, "Buck up! Be of good cheer! Get rid of your universal gloom upon your faces." That's a startling exhortation in the light of the preceding circumstances. Furthermore, it was startling in the light of the predicted circumstances that were yet to come. Two circumstances are predicted. Look at verse 22: "And now I exhort you to be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship." He now predicts that the ship is going to be lost. The ship is going to go down to Davy Jones' locker. That's not a very encouraging thing. And then he says in verse 26 that they must be shipped wrecked upon an island. Knowing then that the ship is going to be lost, that they're going to be ship wrecked on an island, yet in the midst of that, he says, "Be of good cheer. [Take heart, don't be dispirited, don't be discouraged.]" I'd say that's a startling exhortation not only in the light of the preceding circumstances, but of the predicted circumstances. And furthermore, it was startling because of the subsequent events. When Paul said, "Be of good cheer," he

uses a tense of the verb which means, "Begin now to be of good cheer. Let all discouragement and all attitudes of being dispirited and disheartened be banished. And begin and continue to be of good cheer. Begin and continue to be of good heart." And I say that's startling in light of the subsequent events. After speaking these things, the circumstances got worse. The storm did not calm down. It continued for two whole weeks. Verse 27: "But when the fourteenth night was come...." Verse 33: "This day is the fourteenth day that ye wait and continue fasting, having taken nothing." Verse 41: "But lighting upon a place where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground; and the foreship struck and remained unmoveable, but the stern began to break up by the violence of the waves."

Can you imagine what some of them might have thought, when in such circumstances, the words of Paul's exhortation are ringing in their ears, "Be of good cheer [take heart]," when they see the planking from the stern of the ship being torn apart by the violent fingers of a turbulent sea, when they don't know where they are, and all is raging around them. I say, this was startling exhortation. Yet amidst of all this disaster, all of this danger and even devastation, the exhortation of Paul rings out above the roar of an angry sea, above the shriek and whistle of the wind, through the rigging of that ship, above the moans and fear and cries of despair, the words of verse 25 ring loud and clear: "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even so as it hath been spoken unto me."

Well, we've considered the startling exhortation--and I hope you agree with my terminology, it is a startling exhortation. Consider with me in the second place, the satisfying explanation. Though it's a startling exhortation, the Apostle gives what I trust to you is a satisfactory explanation of that exhortation. We could ask the question, "What explanation can be given for Paul's exhortation?" Given the preceding circumstances, the predicted events, and the subsequent events, what explanation can be given for such an exhortation? Was Paul what we commonly call the eternal optimist? You know what an optimist is. That's the one who wakes up in the morning and there's not a hole in the cloudy, thick, murky skies; it's raining cats and dogs. And he says to his wife, "I'm so glad it's raining early in the morning--the sun will be out by noon." The pessimist gets up and there's not a patch of cloud in the blue sky from horizon to horizon, and someone says, "What a beautiful day. This will be one of the ten best of '96." He says, "It will be raining by 11:00." That's the eternal pessimist. Well, was Paul just the eternal optimist, waking up anytime there were clouds and rain and smiling and saying, "It will be brilliant sunshine by noon"? No, he was not an eternal optimist. Well, was he a Robert Schuller born before his time? You know who Robert Schuller is? The man with the plastic smile who says, "Cheer up. Think positive thoughts. Life is beautiful; life is rosy. No matter what you face, it's a matter of mind over circumstance. Buck up, be cheerful, it's a wonderful world." No, well, was he some "name it and claim it" miracle worker who figured he could speak to the turbulent seas at will, and in the name of Jesus claim deliverance from the demons of tempestuous winds and waves. No, none of those things is a satisfactory explanation for this exhortation. He gives us the explanation. Let's listen to his words: "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even so as it hath been spoken unto me." I want you to note with me the content of that word from God and the response of Paul to that word, for his explanation simply stated is this: "I have had a word of reassurance from my God that all will be well with us, and I believe Him." That's the satisfying explanation for his startling exhortation.

Let's look, then, at the content of that word from God in verses 23 and 24 and then the response of Paul to that word in verse 25. What was the content of that word from God? Verses 23 and 24: "For there stood by me this night an angel of the God whose I am, whom also I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must stand before Caesar: and lo, God hath granted thee all them that sail with thee." Now the content of this word from God mediated by an angel of God was very simple and straightforward. He began first of all by saying, "Paul, you must not be afraid." Now one could read into the form of the verb that Paul had already begun to be afraid, and God was calling him to cease from his being afraid. But I think that would be pressing the issue beyond what the context and the general knowledge we have of the Apostle. But this much is clear, that Paul was vulnerable to all of the fears to which the others were vulnerable is indeed warranted by the text, otherwise the words mean nothing. If Paul was such a giant in the faith that fear never dogged his steps, that fear was never an emotion with which he had to wrestle, why is God's first word to him "Don't be afraid." This is the very man who spoke of fightings without and fears within. He was unashamed to say to the Corinthians, "I was with you in much trembling and fear." No, he was no stranger to the emotion of fear. And so the word that God brings to him is one that prohibits him giving way to and coming under the horrible paralyzing grip of carnal fear. "Do not be afraid, Paul, you must be brought before Caesar."

God is reiterating something He had already revealed to Paul in chapter 23 and verse 11: "And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer: for as thou hast testified concerning Me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." He had had a previous word from God that no matter what the Jews may have plotted, no matter what the Roman soldiers assigned to keep him may have thought about him or attempted to do with him, regardless of the circumstances that God in His providential ordering of the winds and waves of the sea, whatever these would be, Paul had a sure and a certain word from God. He will bear witness to his Lord in the face of Caesar. He will get safely to Rome. Now this word that comes from God through the angel reaffirms that fact. God says to him through the angel that he must be brought before Caesar.

And furthermore, God says that in the process, all on board with him will be spared. Now these words "God hath granted thee all them that sail with thee", is the Lord saying that they are granted you in terms of the success of your witness and Gospel endeavors? That may be true, but in the context, what is clear is Paul understood this, that there would be no loss of life among the 275 who were on that ship in addition to himself, for look at verse 22: "And now I exhort you to be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship." How did he know that? When he was assessing from his knowledge of that part of the world from his many travels, based not upon divine revelation, but upon an ordinary observation, he had earlier said, seeking to dissuade them from leaving when they left (v. 10), "I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the lading and the ship, but also of our lives." Now that wasn't a revelation from God. That was the assessment of a seasoned traveler upon the seas and one who was knowledgeable of that part of the world and the patterns of the winds and the different times of the year. And he said there's no way we're going to make this journey across that part of the open waters at this time of the year without tremendous loss both to the ship and to our lives. But now God had come with a word of direct revelation and had said to him, "Paul, not only will you be brought before Caesar, but I have granted you all those who sail with you. For your sake and for whatever secret, saving purposes I

may have in their lives, I will spare them as I protect and preserve you." That's the content of the word from God.

And what was Paul's response to that word? Well, obviously it was one of implicit, unwavering trust. Look at the language: "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even so as it hath been spoken unto me." What is Paul saying? This is what he is saying:

"What is to happen to me and to all of you here on this ship is not going to be determined by the wind, by the waves, by the ordinary patterns of the weather and the sea at this time of the year. No, what is going to happen to me and to you is not going to be dictated by turbulent seas and shrouded heavens. Rather, the God of heaven and earth who purposes and executes His plan, that God has determined what will happen to all of us. And He has made it known that I will not perish in the seas, neither will you perish as well."

His response to that word from God was a response of implicit, unwavering trust that what God's word determines as the revelation of His purpose will infallibly come to pass. No wonder now, without sticking his head, as it were, under the folds of his robe and imaging a very quiet, peaceful, calm sea and opened heavens and the sun. No, looking out into the heaving sea, hearing the creaking of the planking on that ship, seeing every single visible sign of imminent danger, he raises his voice (and I cannot conceive of him doing it without a raised hand, though it's not in the text), "Sirs, be of good cheer...." Crack, bang, creak, heave--maybe some were hanging over the gunnels losing whatever food they had attempted to take, though most of them, it says, were fasting for days. Get the picture. And in the midst of that, he says, "Be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even so as it hath been spoken unto me." Now at that moment, did the seas stop? No. Did the heavens open up? No. Everything was even more turbulent and more desperate, yet the Apostle said, "Be of good cheer: for I believe God...." Reality is not determined by what you see and what you think will be. But reality is determined by what God says will be. "And I believe God."

Well, we've looked at what I've called the startling exhortation and then the satisfying explanation that lay behind it. Now as time permits, I want us to consider several practical applications of this passage. And the first is this: I want you to behold with me the vivid illustration of what it means to walk by faith. Here, last Lord's Day evening at the table of the Lord, when we received four new members, Pastor Barker gave a text to those who were being received into membership (2 Corinthians 5:7), where the Apostle says, "We walk by faith and not by sight." He exhorted those coming into the membership never to forget that the walk of a Christian is a walk of faith. And the opposite of faith in that setting is sight. We do not frame our lives by what we see, though what we see is real. And what we see is not a mirage or a figment of our imagination. But there is an unseen world of spiritual reality which is to frame the way we walk, the way we pattern our lives. And I began by saying one picture is worth a thousand words. And so in this passage, we have a marvelous picture of what it means to walk by faith. What's it mean in the nitty gritty, day by day experience of the Christian life to walk by faith? It means to walk the way Paul walked in this set of circumstances.

Notice with me several vital elements of the walk of faith illustrated in this passage. First, the soul, the unrivaled object of our faith. Look at our text, verse 25:

"Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God," not "I believe in faith," or "I believe in myself." He says, "I believe God. There is a person who is the soul object of my faith. It is that God who sent His angel to speak His word into my ears last night. And that God who spoke is the God who is." He is the God who has made the world and all things therein. He is the God of whom the prophet speaks when he says, "He has His way in the whirlwind, and the clouds are the dust of His feet." He is the God who manifested in Jesus Christ can say to turbulent seas, "Be still," and they become as glass. He is the God who has said that He can do all that He purposes to do, and none can stay His hand or say unto Him, "What are You doing?" And the Apostle very simply illustrates and affirms what it meant for him to walk by faith. It meant that he had a soul object of his faith:

"I believe God, God the Father who has spoken through His angel, God the Son whom I serve in the Gospel, God the Holy Spirit who has transformed me and enabled me to behold the very glory of the Godhead in the face of Jesus Christ, God the blessed one in three and three in one. He is the soul object of my faith. I believe God."

Now few things are more elementary to the life of faith than that. "Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is", not that He was and shall be, that He's the great I was and the great I shall be. No, that name by which God reveals something of the mystery of His own essence and being is Yahweh: "I am that I am. I will be that I will be." We must believe that He is. And the soul object of faith is God Himself.

But then notice secondly, in the life of faith for the Apostle, there was a solid foundation for faith. If the soul object is God Himself ("I believe God"), what was the solid foundation of that faith? It was the spoken word of God. Look again at the text: "I believe God [not in some nebulous, mystical, indefinable way]." No, "I believe God, that it shall be even so as it hath been spoken unto me." Capture something of the perfect tense:

"God has spoken, and what He has spoken abides as a living present word from God. And I'm convinced that all that shall be in the hours and days to come will be but an exegesis of that which God has said. God has told me I am going to be brought before Caesar. 'I have given you all on the ship.' I don't care if the waves become twenty times higher, the storms become twenty times more fierce, and the skies intensify in their darkness, and every plank on this ship is smashed to splinters. I believe God. It shall be just as it was spoken."

What was the foundation of his faith? It was the sure, the certain, the immoveable word of the Living God. Ah, but you say, "Pastor, that was an angel speaking the very word of God. If God would speak through an angel, then I could begin to walk by faith. How could I ever forget an angel's word?" My friend, if you've got the silly word that an angel's word is better than the word of God written, spoken, put down in printer's ink and abiding, you're ignorant of your own heart, and you're ignorant of your Bible. Peter who heard the very voice of God without the mediation of an angel on the mount of transfiguration, referring to that very incident in his second letter in the first chapter, said, "Yes, we heard the voice on the holy mount, but we have the word of prophecy made more sure." There's something more sure than hearing the voice of God in the midst of shekinah glory on a mountain in Palestine? Yes, it is that word which has been given to us in Scripture as holy men of God were carried along

by the Holy Spirit. You remember what Jesus said in His parable or in His story of the rich man and Lazarus? The rich man says, "I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house; for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment." Jesus said, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead." So there's no question after the angel goes what was said. No, we have record in Scripture of even holy people who heard holy angels and they didn't believe. Remember John the Baptist's father? The angel Gabriel appeared to him and he didn't believe him. God said, "I'll strike you dumb for your unbelief."

If you've got any notion you'd believe if only an angel would speak to you, you don't know your Bible, and you don't know your own heart. The foundation of faith is the Word of God revealed in the way God chooses to reveal it to us. And that way here and now is in this blessed book. If anyone adds to the words this book, God says the plagues will be added to him. The foundation of faith is the spoken word of God, which for us is that word in holy Scripture. And as God Himself is the soul object of our faith in the walk of faith, so the solid foundation of our faith is the Word of God, not our feelings, not our experiences, not our sense of what ought to be, or our groaning and moaning on what we hope things would be, but the confidence that it shall be even as it has been spoken. And everything God has said concerning us who are in Christ is but the prefiguration of what we shall in our experience be. Everything that the Scripture says concerning our present possessions in Christ, our future prospects as the people of God and those in union with Christ, that "the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4), that "as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Corinthians 15:49), that "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6), and on and on we can go. But the life of faith is the life that builds on the solid foundation of the spoken word of God, particularly that word as it is couched in the promises.

But then thirdly, notice, as we behold this vivid illustration of what it means to walk by faith, not only the soul object of faith, "I believe God", the solid foundation of faith, "It shall be even so as it hath been spoken unto me", but the simple essence of faith. What is the simple essence of that faith by which we walk? Look at the words of the text: "It shall be even so as it hath been spoken unto me." Very simple, isn't it. Look at verse 34: "Wherefore I beseech you to take some food: for this is for your safety: for there shall not a hair perish from the head of any of you." The seas were still turbulent, the skies were still shrouded in darkness, the planks were still creaking, and he says, "There shall not a hair perish from the head of any of you." Why? Because it shall be even as it was spoken. "God has said He will not only spare me to appear before Caesar, but He has given me all of you on this ship to be spared with me--at least that much the word from God meant. And if God says it, I credit it. That's the end of the discussion." We like to make the life of faith so complicated because then we can excuse our instability, our unbelief, and all the other sins that grow out of those twins--horrible things. It wasn't very complicated for Paul. The simple essence of the faith by which he walked was that internal conviction and commitment to this principle: it shall be just as it has been spoken.

But then notice in his walk of faith what I'm calling the constant companion of faith. And what is it? That faith which has God as its soul object, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; its solid foundation, the Word of God; its simple essence, crediting what God has said, believing that what He has said will frame all that is true of us. But

there was a constant companion. And what was that companion? Well, let me state it, and then we'll see it in three or four places in this setting. It is the proper use of God-ordained means. That is always the constant companion of the life of faith when that life of faith is framed by the Word of God. And where do we see that in the passage?

We see it first of all, when up in verse 10, Paul believes he has a responsibility to put in his opinion about this purposed journey at this particular time in that particular part of the world. He said, "Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the lading and the ship, but also of our lives." Hadn't God said to him earlier as we saw in chapter 23 and verse 11, "You will appear before Caesar. You must bear witness in Rome"? Couldn't Paul assume, then, that he's invincible until he gets to Rome? And when he hears of the plans to set out to sea at a difficult time of the year with the very real possibility of this cyclonic and hurricane-type winds coming, he could have just said, "Well, fellows, I think it's a stupid idea, but I'm invincible until I get to Rome. God's told me I'm going to appear before Caesar." No, no, the walk of faith that is Biblical is a faith that uses all legitimate means. And here Paul is using his nautical knowledge, his geological knowledge, and his knowledge of the winds and all of the patterns. He's using this means, realizing that if he's to be preserved to get to Rome, he doesn't become a fanatic who doesn't use the legitimate means for his preservation. The handmaid of his life of faith was the proper use of means.

Look at verse 31 (we see it again): "Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." Some of them under the guise of wanting to put anchors in that lifeboat and carry them out in front of the ship and set down the anchors, they wanted to escape from the ship. And Paul says, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." Wait a minute, I thought God gave him a promise: "I've given you all that are with you." He could have said, "Okay, fellows, jump in the ship; do what you want. The Lord's going to spare you. I have a word from Him." No, he recognized that the handmaiden of faith was the use of means. And God's preserving of all 275 companions was contingent upon this means of their abiding in the ship. And Paul insisted on it.

Look further in verse 38. They had been fasting; Paul stands in the midst, gives thanks to God and eats. And we read, "And when they had eaten enough...." They all ate to be strengthened, but then they didn't say, "O well, we've eaten and we've gotten some encouragement that we're going to be spared, so now we can be utterly careless." No, "they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea." They used means to make their situation as much as possible one that would be conducive to their preservation.

Then in verse 44, when it came time for them to go to shore, what did they do? Paul didn't say, "Alright, everyone, whether you can swim or not, God has promised He's going to spare us all. Jump in the sea, and God will send dolphins to carry you to shore, piggy backing you." No, no, look what the text says, "...and the rest, some on planks, and some on other things from the ship. And so it came to pass, that they all escaped safe to the land." Who were the rest? Look at verse 43: "But the centurion, desiring to save Paul, stayed them from their purpose; and commanded that they who could swim should cast themselves overboard, and get first to the land; and the rest [those of you who can't swim, trust the Lord. No, grab a plank or you'll drown.]" Now do you see the point? In the midst of this amazing display of confidence in God

with the darkened heavens, the heaving seas, the creaking planks of the ship, "I believe God." But he says, "I also believe every means at my disposal must be used for my preservation." And you must use every means at your disposal for your preservation.

You see, psychological faith believes in man and disregards God, so it doesn't say, "I believe God." Psychological faith is "I believe in me, and I believe in my faith." Fanatical faith believes when there's no word from God. That's the essence of the fallacy of the faith healing movement. There is no word from God that says earnest believing, Godly Christians can be and ought to be delivered from all physical maladies in this life. And when people try to get other to muster up faith that they can be healed, it's a fanatical faith, for it has no word from God to which it can align itself and say it shall be even as it has been spoken. Can I say of this body with the seeds so death in it, with the passing of the years, more and more of those seeds germinate, and we become conscious in this way and in that way that indeed our outward man is decaying and heading for the grave. When we look into the cold earth, standing by a plot of ground that we may have already purchased as our burial place and say,

"If the Lord Jesus tarries, this body will be in a box buried in the earth, and maybe there long enough for the worms to eat it and for the bones to disintegrate. But this I know that a moment is coming in human history when the voice of the Archangel and the trump of God will sound, and I with all of my redeemed companions shall rise first."

Can I say that? Yes. Why? Because I have a sure word from God. "Wherefore, comfort one another with these words" were from the Living God.

When you're committed to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, you make personal, domestic, career decisions in the interest of truth and righteousness and the advancement of the Gospel. And sometimes you must do so at the expense of the numbers that appear in your savings account in your checkbook. They are not foolish, irresponsible decisions. They are principled, well-thought-out decisions. Can you plan your feet on God's promise and say,

"Lord, you have said. You know my need for food. You know my need for shelter. You know my need and the needs of my family for clothing. And You have said I am not to be anxious. And if I seek first Your kingdom and Your righteousness, all these things shall be added unto me. And I plant my feet on that promise and claim God's fulfillment. I believe God, that it shall be even as it has been spoken."

A fanatical faith is a faith that has no word from God. Psychological faith is trust in yourself. And then a presumptive faith is a faith that doesn't use appropriate means. It says, "O, God has said it. He can bring it to pass regardless of what I do." Paul did not take that position. "I believe God, that it shall be even so as it hath been spoken unto me. [Stay in the ship or you can't be saved. Grab a plank and paddle to shore. Eat some food; throw the rest overboard. Don't set out to sea. It will be with loss of ship and of life.]" The life of faith is not a life of psychologically induced feelings, nor is it a life of fanaticism, nor is it a life of presumption. The life of faith is precisely what we see it to be here in this passage, set out not in philosophical terms, but in the living character of a living man in the midst of a heaving sea and the creaking planks of a ship breaking up and the look of despair and hopelessness upon the face of men

who have been fasting and are hungry. In the midst of all of that, here is a man who says, "Be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even so as it hath been spoken unto me." That to me is the great lesson of this passage.

But may I presume to take just a few more minutes to underscore a second lesson far more briefly. And it is this: behold in this text the powerful example of the extensive influence of one man of faith. As I have read and reread this passage in preparation for the message this morning, I've had to smile inwardly again and again. The man who went on board as a prisoner whose knowledge of the seas and the winds and the seasons of the year was disregarded by the experts. By the end of the chapter, that despised, disregarded religious fanatic becomes the captain of the ship, the ship's nutritionist, the ship's chaplain. I mean he takes charge of everything. And how did he do it? Not by dragging out four or five degrees to prove his credentials-- Doctor of Ministry in Nutrition and Doctor of Ministry in Psychology. No, no, Here's a man who walked with God. And in a situation where an entire company of men is held in the paralyzing grip of fear and dread, one man of faith stands forth and takes charge of the whole situation, not with carnal pushiness, not with braggadocio, not with fleshly bombast. But when people are in the midst of the turbulent seas that are about to swallow them up, never are they more ready to see if there is somebody who's got a perspective on things that's better than theirs. They didn't need anyone to stand forth and say, "We're in bad shape. The prospects are bleak." They all knew it. But they needed a man who could say, "I believe God." And reality is not what you're assuming it will be in light of the heaving seas, in light of the storm clouds above us, in light of the creaking planks. No, no, reality is determined by the word of God and by the God who speaks that word.

And what an influence this man had. I've let my imagination run a bit wild and wondered what happened to these other 275 after this incident. How many of them lived to be old men and women if there were women. He says men; it may have been all men. But do you think they could ever forget this incident, when a despised religious fanatic, as they thought him to be when he entered that ship, became the very instrument in hands of God by which their lives were spared, hopefully by which many of them came to eternal salvation and will forever bless God in heaven that they were put on the ship with a man who believed God?

Now you see the application. What does your family need more than anything else, dear Mom and dear Dad? Not big name, big position, big bucks. You know what your kids need more than anything else? You husbands, you know what your wives need more than anything else? You wives, you know what your husbands and your children need more than anything else? They need a man or a woman who believes God. And he says reality is framed by the Word of God, not by current opinions, the reality of who we are, the reality of who you my son are, what you my daughter are, the reality of what you my wife are. That reality is determined by the Word of God. Our sexual identity, our specific roles and responsibilities, they are determined by God. Take all the current opinions of sociologists and feminists and wimped-out males that have capitulated to all of this nonsense, and let it be swallowed up in that very turbulent sea. Let God be true and every man a liar. That's why men and women of faith are such a pestilence in the eyes of the world, because you can't cajole them, you can't bribe them, you can't frighten them into giving up their moorings because they are rooted in the Word which lives and abides forever.

I think of you dear young people, as God has been gracious to deal with a number of you in recent days. As you think of your life spread out before you, if God is pleased to spare you, you wonder, "What should I pray as my dominant goals in life?" May I add to whatever list you now have this prayer: "O God, make me a man, make me a woman who will have the influence of a man or woman of faith." And as you go back this year into that school, into that college, your life will be framed, not by what you see and others see, but by what God has said. You will manifest the walk of faith that Paul manifested in which God Himself (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is the soul object of your faith, the Word of God the sure foundation of that faith. The essence of that faith is the conviction that what God says is, and what God says shall be will be, while all the while remembering the handmaiden of faith, that inevitable accompaniment of faith, using every legitimate means in every pursuit that is according to the will of God. What is needed more than anything else in this place in the leadership of this church, surely it is this: men and women of faith, men and women prepared to take the promises of God that are yes and amen in Christ and to believe that it shall be even as it has been spoken.

As we think of these endeavors in the very bastions of immorality and wickedness in Newark and in Manhattan, surely people could look at us and say, "You're fools to think any good can ever come out of those settings." But what is all the sin and unbelief and the materialism and all the other things that plague the souls of men in Newark and in Manhattan-- what are these things to the mighty God who planted His truth in such a cesspool of iniquity as Corinth, who planted His truth in the bastion of the pagan worship of Diana, god of the Ephesians, there in Ephesus, and from that place sent out the Word into all of Asia Minor? I say, in this passage we must behold the powerful example of the extensive influence of one man of faith.

Let us look at verses 34 to 36 for a moment:

"Wherefore I beseech you to take some food: for this is for your safety: for there shall not a hair perish from the head of any of you. And when he had said this, and had taken bread, he gave thanks to God in the presence of all; and he brake it, and began to eat. Then were they all of good cheer, and themselves also took food."

They watched this guy in the midst of the storm, and I wonder how he held on while he gave thanks. Your imagination just goes in a number of directions. The ship is heaving, the planks are creaking, and the rigging is whistling, and in the midst of it, a voice is raised giving thanks to God. And however he hung on with his arm around one part of the rigging or one of the masts, I don't know. But he brakes the food and begins to eat. And when people say, "This man's not just indulging in pious talk. He believes what he has been talking to us about. This man is embodying in the very concrete, visible, manifestation of breaking bread and eating it his confidence. And it says at this point (and there's no indication up until now that they were anything other than scared out of their wits), they took courage. They took heart because of a man of faith in the midst. May I say it reverently, though there is a contagion of unbelief (we read that in the book of Joshua), there is also a contagion of faith. And I trust that your family, your spouse, your children know something about that.

But then I close with this sober word: behold in this text a vivid description about how one becomes a man of faith who walks by faith. How did Paul get to be such a man? Well, he tells us in verse 23: "There stood by me this night an angel of the God whose I am, whom also I serve." At one time Paul was not a man of faith. He was a

man of unbelief; his unbelief took him to such an extent that he was committing himself to capturing and murdering Christians. He said, "I did it ignorantly in unbelief." His heart was dead set against Christ. He was a child of wrath by nature according to his own testimony in Ephesians 2. But what happened? He said, "Something happened whereby this God became the God to whom I gave myself, the God to whom I belong. And He became the God to whom I render service." And when did that happen? It happened on the Damascus road when that God revealed Himself and His glory in the face of Jesus Christ. And when Paul, stricken down by the blinding light, cried out, "Who are You, Lord? Surely this is a divine manifestation, the Shekinah glory shining brighter than the noonday sun." He cries out, "Identify Yourself, Lord." The voice comes back saying, "I am Jesus." And in an instance of time, the Apostle beheld the glory of God in the face of Christ. And what were the first words that came out of his mouth? "What will you have me to do, Lord [the God whose I am and whom I serve]?" That's how he became a man of faith.

And my dear friend, young or old, that's the only way you'll become a man or woman of faith, to live by faith and to enjoy the consummate blessings of the life of faith when in the light of resurrection glory, faith will be turned to sight; you'll behold the Lamb in His glory amidst all His redeemed host. You too must become the possession of God and the servant of God. As long as you think your life is yours to live for yourself according to your standards, to your own ends, to your own purposes, my friend, you know nothing of the life of faith. You're in a state of unbelief, and in that state of unbelief, you're under the wrath and curse of Almighty God. But God graciously comes to you in the Gospel and says, "Look, stack arms, you know in your heart of hearts, you were not made to live the way you're living. And you know in your heart of hearts, you can't look forward to death and to the age to come." Turn from your sin; throw yourself upon the mercy of God in Jesus Christ who died for sinners, who lives in the mercy and promise of the Gospel and invites you to come, and assures you that in coming, you'll be received. That's when you begin to be the man or woman of faith when you say, "I believe God. It shall be to me even as it has been spoken." What's been spoken? Christ says, "Him that comes to me, I will in nowise cast out." What is faith? It's laying hold of Christ in the word and promise of the Gospel and saying, "Lord Jesus, in spite of all my felt unworthiness, in spite of all my sense that I don't deserve anything, You have said if I come, You will not cast me out. I believe You, Lord, that it shall be to me even as it has been spoken."

God's word and promise to you in the Gospel is not a revelation of whether or not you're elect. It's not a revelation of decrees with respect to you or anyone else. It is a word that calls to you as a plain old sinner, and it says in a marvelous word of promise, "The is a faithful saying worthy of all acceptance, Christ Jesus came into the world sinners to save." So as a sinner, you come. As a sinner, you're welcome. As a sinner, you can say, "I believe God. It shall be to me even as it has been spoken, that believing, all my sins will be pardoned. I will be credited with a perfect righteousness in the court of heaven all for the sake of the perfect life and the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus." That's how Paul became a man of faith who walked by faith and could say amidst the turbulence of the storm, "I believe God. It shall be even as it has been spoken."