

Bad, bad road trip

Everything that could have gone wrong, went wrong it seemed.

Intro

After such a long delay, years in prison and being used as a political piece of leverage, Paul is finally on his way.

But, unsurprisingly at this point in the life of Paul, things don't go that smoothly, at least from a human perspective.

As we are going to see, this road trip is anything but a rip-roaring good time.

We're going to look at the whole of chapter 27 today but don't worry, I'll paraphrase a lot of it.

I don't know if you have ever had that experience where your travel details get all thrown out of whack. That is what we find here, but like next level problems, along with the opportunity to see how Paul responds in the middle of it all.

So here is where we start:

Trip Details:

- Luke is with them, as he is writing in the first person again.
- Paul is apparently with a few friends and is in the care of a centurion named Julius who plays a fairly big role in all of this.
- The first bit of the journey described in verses 1-8 is relatively calm.
- Make a few stops, progress is good and notably he gets to stop to see some of his friends.

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. (Acts 27:3)

- After that they are off again, make it a little further, and trade ships. Julius finds a grain ship headed to Rome and secures his soldiers and prisoners spots on this ship. So so far it was kind of like the crew was on a regional flight, now they are getting on the long haul flight. This was a large ship, larger crew, and was beelining it for Rome.

- But it's not too long before they start to run into problems.
- Verses 6,7, and 8 show us that it was pretty slow going. They were sailing against the wind, not making great progress but eventually do make it to a place referred to as Fair Havens.
- Now the trip is not going super smoothly at this point, it's getting late into the sailing season when it was the most safe and predictable, so the people in charge are trying to figure out what to do.
- We read in verse 10 that Paul spoke up in the situation.

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." 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, 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. (Acts 27:9b-12)

- Paul warns them this is a bad idea
- He isn't speaking prophetically here, like God told me this will happen if we go.
- But he has done a fair share of sea travel, and already been shipwrecked before, so he is saying, "I might know a few things."
- But they ignore him, and they head out. For a brief moment it looks like it just might work, then everything goes sideways. A huge wind catches them off guard and pushes the boat way off course and out into the sea. They are concerned with a series of sand bars where the ship could run aground and the weather getting worse and worse and things just keep deteriorating.
- We see them haul up the life boats.
- They have to fortify the ship because it's getting thrown around so much.
- They throw a lot of stuff overboard, supplies, cargo, gear, all kinds of things.
- It tells us in verse 20, after days of not seeing the stars or the sun, they pretty much lose hope.
- This is where Paul steps in again.
- He sees that no one has eaten for a long time and chooses to say this:

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. 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." (Acts 27:21-26)

- So Paul gives them this combo “I told you so/encouragement/my God is real/we are going to crash” speech. And I don’t know if that have them some semblance of hope, but apparently not enough because after 14 days Luke says they think they are nearing land and the crew tries to make a break for it.
- They keep taking measurements and seeing it getting more and more shallow and they are afraid they will crash so they try to take the lifeboat and bolt.
- Paul becomes aware of this and fills Julius in. He most likely knows that if these guys bail, the soldiers can’t do what needs to be done, so he tells them that unless these guys stay, you won’t make it.
- The soldiers cut the boats away, and everyone stays on the boat.
- Morning dawns, and Paul looks around and essentially says, you all need a snack. I’m not joking. Here is what Luke writes:

As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth 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.) And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea. (Acts 27:33-38)

- So they all get a little bit of a second wind, they have some food in their bellies, and finally, they spot land. They don’t recognize it, but they see a bay that the ship could maybe run ashore on. Literally just run it right up onto the beach. They make the preparations and fully go for it. It plays like a movie a bit. They cast off the anchors, leaving them behind in the ocean, they unfurl the sail and catch the wind and head for the beach. They are going, they might just make it, could it be?
- And verse 41 tells us, they run right smack dab into a reef, absolutely destroying the ship.
- What happened was the front of the ship got stuck, and the waves just kept hitting the backside of the ship and breaking it apart. Things go crazy and people just start making choices.
- The crew of the ship, not the soldiers, but just the crew, try to kill Paul and the other prisoners.
- Julius finds out about it, and for whatever reason, we don’t know, maybe a paycheck, maybe some sense of duty, maybe Paul had endeared himself to him, maybe the Holy Spirit was working in him we don’t know, but he puts a stop to it, orders everyone off the boat and to the island, people who could swim first, and anyone else on whatever they could find that would float.

- And get this, EVERYONE made it just like Paul said. Awkward next interaction I'm sure. Remember how we were about to kill you like 20 minutes ago, sorry about that. But let's be real, that surely wouldn't have been the first time Paul had run into that.
- They all wash ashore, and their wild ride comes to at least a momentary end.
- Whew, what a wild ride huh?

As I read this a few times, it kind of reads like one of those buddy roadtrip movies where just wacky thing after wacky thing happens.

This is much higher stakes, but it's got all the same stereotypes:

- Detours
- Delays
- Bad choices
- I told you so's
- Broken down vehicles
- Twists and turns
- Drama over snacks

It's got it all, I'm telling you!

And Luke includes so many details here. Details about the ship and what they did, where they went and stopped along the way, weather details.

Possible reasons why: legitimacy of his authorship, drawing comparison between Jesus and Paul, trying to show that no force could hinder God's plan for Paul to get to Rome

All valid and a lot to be gleaned and learned from all these details.

Today, though I want to point to some specific details that I think are worth our time and attention.

And that is the details of the people Paul interacted with.

In the middle of all this craziness, we see Paul prioritize people, speak truth to people, and encourage and care for people.

In a narrative that could have just been about getting from A to B, as poorly as they seemed to, it sure seems to come back down to people.

Reminds me that if you are here today, and are a follower of Jesus, we serve a King Who is always prioritizing people. We carry a Gospel, a message in our words and actions that, when it comes down to it, is about people.

That might seem simplistic but man how many times is it easy for us to lose that priority? How easy is it to get caught up in proving a point, or completing a task, or reaching some kind of goal, or just surviving the moment and forgetting about the people that frankly God loves, whom Jesus died for that are important to Him. We are supposed to be reflections of Him to them.

I think our passage today both serves as a challenge to us to make sure that we are seeing people the way Jesus would have us see them and treat them like He would. And maybe even be honest with ourselves where we are not. AND I think it serves as an encouragement to us that it is possible, regardless of what is going on, because we see Paul do it! And do it really well.

So let's look at how Paul prioritized people in the middle of this mess.

First thing I want to point to is this:

1. Paul prioritizes people regardless of circumstance.

We see in this story how things just kept falling apart more and more, but Paul's commitment to represent Jesus well by how he treated the people he was with never wavers.

This is not a small thing, let's be honest! Surely every one of us has been in a situation where as the circumstances become less favorable, our attitude, our patience, our kindness, our selflessness become worse and worse.

Makes my mind jump to another form of travel where this is so obviously seen.

Air travel. Airports are crazy places. Where else in the world is it completely acceptable to get drinks at like 9 in the morning at a bar, pass out (because you're tired, not because you have been drinking, although maybe both possibilities are valid?) on the floor of a public travel space that has had thousands of people's shoes on it, and no one bats an eye. People are willing to pay like \$8 for a bag of chips.

They are also just powder kegs waiting to explode.

It's like society has these rules that everyone agrees with, until they get in that building, and their plans get disrupted, then everything breaks apart.

Full grown adults throwing temper tantrums.

Everyone becomes like a shark, thinking they can negotiate or wheel some kind of deal to get what they want.

EVERYONE acting so entitled.

And something that I have experienced in these situations, and I would be lying if I said I hadn't seen it in myself, is that the more and more the situation deteriorated, the less and less care for people was observed. All of a sudden staff don't count as people, just problems to overcome, other passengers aren't people, just competition to beat out for a spot on the next plane out.

People just turn into monsters.

2. Paul prioritizes people while fulfilling his assignment.

Language about assignment and calling

Story: Dean Dodd- shower shuttle

Our assignment can never be divorced from the people that it involves.

Paul, very very focused, still cared for and prioritized people.

This is the truth: we could feed every person in Modesto who is hungry, clothe everyone, settle every refugee family because that is what God told us to do, and not care about them as people.

We could take to Facebook, or our city council meeting, or our school board, or whatever and make sure that everyone we know has HEARD the truth, about things that have been distorted or ignored, because God values the truth. and not really prioritize people in the process.

We could run all our services and systems and programs the best they have ever been, and dare I say have crowds like we have never seen. And still not care for them or each other as people. Just numbers or goals to be met.

We could do all this good stuff, even stuff God says to do, and still miss the point.

3. Paul prioritized people Regardless of who they were to him

We see him interact with a few different categories of people here.

His friends

His enemies

His nobodies – people who meant nothing to him, and he meant nothing to.

I don't know what you walk out of this building and into.

Circumstances that are great or terrible

What following your assignment will lead to or who you will encounter along the way.

It ultimately only matters if you prioritize people. The people whom God loves.