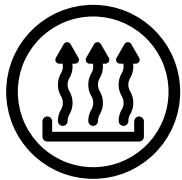




ACTS: THE STORY CONTINUES



WARM-UP

Have you ever been caught in a terrible storm? What happened?

Pray for your time together as a group.

Read out loud as a group

ACTS 27:19-26 (NIV)

19 On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. 20 When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

21 After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. 22 But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. 23 Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me 24 and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' 25 So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. 26 Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."



Why do you think Luke includes the detail that they "gave up all hope of being saved"? How does that set the stage for Paul's message?

Possible Answers: to show that all the sailors, seasoned and new, were aware of the realities of the situation. They gave up. Their hope was tied to what they experienced, saw, and controlled themselves. This sets the stage for God's work to be showcased. They know they don't have a chance and yet God will preserve them.



Why do you think God allows the ship to be destroyed while saving all the lives?

Possible Answers: This is a powerful reminder that, in this sinful world, God's path for our lives won't always be the path of least resistance. It doesn't mean that life will immediately be easier and more comfortable because we follow Jesus. BUT it does mean that God is faithful and what He says will be done. It means that God is good and sovereign even when things don't go the way we want them to.

Read out loud as a group

JONAH 1:1-12 (NIV)

1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: 2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”

3 But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.

4 Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. 5 All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.

But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. 6 The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish.”

7 Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.” They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?”

9 He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”

10 This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.)

11 The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?”

12 “Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”



Compare and contrast Acts 27:19-26 with the Jonah passage. What stands out to you?

Possible Answers:

Compare: both have cargo thrown overboard, both eventually save the people on the ship, both chosen messengers of God, both on a ship on the water.

Contrast: different causes of the storms- one is God's discipline and one isn't clearly stated but could both be a natural occurrence or an occasion for God to display His sovereignty and grace. Responses of Sailors- sailor's lose hope and despair while Jonah's sailors panic and search for a cause. Intentions of Paul and Jonah- one is obedient and one is disobedient. Grace prevails in Paul's story while justice and mercy are intertwined with Jonah's. Life- Jonah gives his life for saving and Paul trusts in the Lord for saving.



In both situations, God wanted Jonah and Paul to be in the storm. What was God's ultimate purpose for them? What does this say about the “storms” we go through in our own life?

Possible Answer: He wanted both Paul and Jonah to grow in obedience and faith in God, but ultimately the sharing of the Gospel message (to the people of Nineveh and Rome) was His greater purpose in both scenarios. In our own lives, God uses our “storms” to further the Gospel, to teach us obedience and to stretch our faith.

Paul's hardships don't stop there...

Read out loud as a group

ACTS 28:1-10 (NIV)

1 Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. 2 The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. 3 Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. 4 When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, the goddess Justice has not allowed him to live." 5 But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. 6 The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead; but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.

7 There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days. 8 His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. 9 When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. 10 They honored us in many ways; and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.



How do we see God's sovereignty in these verses?

Possible Answers: the islanders showed them unusual kindness, Paul just so happened to be the one adding to the fire, a snack just happened to be in the stack of sticks Paul picked up, Paul didn't die after being bitten, the snack bite changed the islander's opinion of Paul and created a platform for him to point to the True God.



Compare this Acts 28:3-5 with Genesis 3:15. What does the comparison show us?

Possible Answers: it echoes all of what Paul has been experiencing. Paul has experienced hardships, beating, shipwrecks, stonings, and riots while he has followed the Lord. This one moment points back to Genesis 3:15 and ultimately Jesus' death on the cross. It shows us that there is pain but ultimately the cause of that pain will be destroyed. It shows us that Jesus through pain and death, destroyed sin and death.

Leader's Note: After Paul arrives in Rome and is put on house arrest, he gathers the jews in the area to tell them the gospel.

Read out loud as a group

ACTS 28:24-31 (NIV)

24 Some (Jews) were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. 25 They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet: 26 "Go to this people and say, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving."

27 For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts

and turn, and I would heal them.'

28 "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!" [29]

30 For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. 31 He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!

Leader's Note: Paul is quoting Isaiah 6:9-10 in this passage.



How does this passage serve as a fitting conclusion for this book?

Possible Answers: This passage shows God's sovereignty, as well as other similar themes that we've seen throughout Acts, in using Paul to preach to people; as a Roman citizen, he was able to appeal to Caesar and be shipped to Rome (and allowed to continue his ministry in Rome with minimal guard), and as a respected Jewish rabbi, he is able to engage the Jewish leaders and show them both how Jesus is the fulfillment of Scripture and why the message will be expanded to the Gentiles. Despite the delays, Paul still reached Rome before any negative reports about him did. This enabled him to speak the truth freely to the Jews there, and to present a persuasive and clear argument to large numbers of people, many of which came to believe, and even those that did not were still affected. Paul had TWO YEARS to preach and share the truth of Christ, "with all boldness and without hindrance!" (vs. 31). It's a great reminder that gentiles, like you and me, are included in the promises of Jesus Christ and that He will spread the good news despite roadblocks that arise.



What is one thing that God has taught you through our study of Acts? What does it look like for you to continue living out this truth?

Possible Answers: Answers will vary.

DISCUSSION FOR ACCOUNTABILITY



- Have you gone through a “storm” in your life, where it was difficult to see God’s hand in it?
- How can we encourage each other to change our perspective in the midst of any storms or roadblocks we may currently be going through?