

PAUL IN THE STORM

Acts 27:1-44.

LESSON 145 -- Primary Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Be of good cheer" (Acts 27:22).

Sailing for Rome

Let us imagine there are a number of sailing ships anchored in the harbour at Cæsarea. They are moving up and down with the gentle swell of the ocean. The sun is shining and the fresh smell of salt water and seaweed is in the air.

Paul is at the harbour. He and a number of other prisoners are going to faraway Rome to come before the great ruler, Cæsar. Julius, the keeper of the prisoners, is busy seeing that everyone is there and ready to get on the ship. Perhaps a number of Paul's Christian friends are there to say goodbye. His friend, Luke, is going with Paul.

When all the passengers are on board, the sailors pull in the anchor; and as the wind catches the sails, the ship moves slowly out to sea. The next day the ship stops at Sidon. Oh, Paul knows some people here! He would like so much to see them. Paul could tell them more about Jesus, and they could sing and pray together before he goes on. Because Paul is a good man, Julius, the Roman army officer, tells him he may go ashore and stay a little while with his friends.

Another Ship

After they leave Sidon, they sail for two or three days until they come to the mouth of a river. There is a city on top of a hill a little way up the river, but perhaps they tie up in the harbour just inside the bar, and this is as far as the ship goes. Julius, the keeper, finds another ship on its way to Italy. There is a load of wheat on board this ship, but there is room for the prisoners and other people who are on their way to Rome. Perhaps each of the prisoners is chained to a soldier while they leave the first ship two by two, and Julius stands by, counting to see if they are all there. They get on the ship going to Italy and settle down for the long journey over the great ocean.

The wind is blowing against them now, so the ship goes slowly as they sail away from the harbour. Finally they come to an island, and stop at a place called the fair havens. It is almost wintertime now, and Paul does not think they should try to go any farther until sunshine and good winds come again. Perhaps Julius and the captain of the ship, and others, are standing on the deck talking about what should be done. The fair haven is not a very good place for them to stay during the winter. There is a better place not very far away on this same island. Most of them believe they could sail that short distance before the winter storms come.

The Storm

So when the south wind blows softly, they start out again. But, oh! soon the wind begins to howl, the rain comes down in sheets, and big waves of water rush over the ship. The wind is so strong that the sailors cannot steer the ship, or make it go the right way. They bind heavy ropes around the ship to help hold it together. The sails are taken down, and the ship rolls and tosses about in the wild ocean. The next day the sailors throw out whatever can be spared from the ship to make it lighter, and the third day the passengers help to throw out the tackling or perhaps some of the ropes and pulleys. The wind still howls and the rain comes beating down. The sun has not shone for many days, and the stars are not out at night. The sailors do not know where they are, and everyone thinks they will surely be drowned.

The Angel Comforts

Perhaps all of them pray, but many of them do not know the true God. No doubt Paul and his Christian friends pray hard, and God sends an angel to Paul. The angel tells Paul not to be afraid. He tells him the ship will be wrecked but all the people on board will come safely to land. How much better everyone feels when he hears the angel's message!

It is midnight — listen, do not the sailors hear ocean waves breaking against the shore? Surely they are somewhere near land. It is dark, and they do not know how to steer the ship. If the ship runs into mud or rocks in the night, it may break to pieces and they will be drowned. They lower the anchors to try to hold the ship away from land until morning. The

sailors are going to try to get into the lifeboat and leave the others to drown if the ship breaks, but Paul sees what they are trying to do, and says they must stay so that everyone can be saved.

Most of the men on the ship do not know God, and they have been so worried and troubled for fear the ship would sink and they would all be lost during the dark, stormy days and nights, that they have eaten almost nothing. Paul knows they should have some good food so they will be strong enough to save themselves when the ship is wrecked. The next morning when it begins to get light, Paul tells them all to eat. Paul thanks God for his food before he eats, just as we do today. Everyone has a good meal.

All Safe

As the morning grows brighter the sailors take up the anchors, let down the rudders -- or paddles -- that steer the ship, run up the sail, and head for land. The nose of the ship sticks fast in the mud, and the big ocean waves beat the end of the ship until it begins to fall apart. The soldiers are afraid some of their prisoner will swim to land and run away, so they want to kill them all. Julius does not want Paul to be killed, so he will not let the soldiers harm the prisoners.

Perhaps Julius holds to the railing as the ship jerks and rolls. He tells all who are able to swim to leave the ship at once and get to land; the rest, some on boards and some on broken pieces of the ship, get to the shore. So it came to pass that every one of the many people on the ship came safely to land because Paul and his friends prayed.

Jesus' Care

Jesus still takes care of His people. He took care of a mother who was in a storm something like the storm about which we have read today. One night as she and her little three-year-old daughter were alone in their country home in the mountains, a strong wind began to blow. The little girl was afraid, but the mother prayed. She put little Edith on the bed and lay down beside her, and Jesus came and put them to sleep. The big trees swayed and creaked in the howling wind, and during the night some of them fell on the house, but Edith and her mother did not wake up. Jesus was taking care of them. In the morning they found that almost all the house had been crushed; only the place where their bed was standing was safe.

QUESTIONS

1. Why was Paul going to Rome at this time? Acts 25:10.
2. Who told Julius, keeper of the prisoners, and the captain of the ship that they should not leave the fair havens harbour until after winter? Acts 27:9.
3. What happened soon after they left the fair havens? Acts 27:14.
4. Who told Paul that everyone would get safely to land? Acts 27:22-24.
5. Who saved Paul's life when the soldiers wanted to kill all the prisoners? Acts 27:43.