

**~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:**

It was now A.D. 59, and Paul had been a Christian for 24 years. He was no stranger to travel by ship, having already endured three shipwrecks, one of which required him to stay afloat for "a night and a day in the deep" (2 Cor. 11:25). But his premonition that he was about to experience his fourth shipwreck was more than just a suspicion. The Lord was revealing it to him. Of course, Paul knew he would make it to Rome, because the Lord had already personally appeared to him and assured him of that (23:11).

Notice, however, how the Lord revealed to Paul that another shipwreck was on the horizon. Paul said, "Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives" (27:10). Jesus did not appear to him; nor did he hear an audible voice. Rather, Paul simply "perceived" what was going to occur. He had an impression in his spirit. Normally, that is how God leads us. When God chooses to lead us by more spectacular means, it is generally because He knows we will need the extra assurance that accompanies such spectacular guidance.

An example of that more spectacular guidance, given when it was very much needed, is found in today's reading. When everyone had given up hope of survival, an angel appeared to Paul and spoke to him saying, "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you." He also told Paul that, although the ship would be wrecked, there would be no loss of life, and that they would "run aground on a certain island" (27:26). I love Paul's words in 27:25: "Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God, that it will turn out exactly as I have been told." God's promises are fear extinguishers.

If God could send an angel to that storm-tossed ship to speak to Paul, and if He could preserve all 276 people on board during a shipwreck (and if He could, incidentally, create the universe), why didn't He simply stop the wind, or cause it to blow in a different direction? That is a question for which I have no answer. I do know, however, that God is obviously motivated to turn people to Himself. He was certainly trying to reach the people on that ship, and after all they had heard and seen, they had no excuse not to seek to know Paul's God.

God tried to prevent the loss of the ship and the cargo by warning everyone in advance, but they wouldn't listen. So He let them have their way to face the consequences, as He often does with stubborn people, in hopes that they will see the wisdom in following Him all the time and humble themselves. Surely at least some of those 276 people on the ship with Paul became believers.

We'll learn in the next chapter that the Lord was also interested in reaching the people of the island on which Paul and his shipwrecked companions landed. In the midst of what seemed to be purely circumstantial, God was working His plan of love to reach the unreached.

I love this entire story. Paul was taken aboard that ship as a prisoner, but in the end he was the captain! Everyone was following his orders (27:30-36). People who are filled with the Holy Spirit ought to rise to the top in every circumstance!

I always groan when I read some theologian who weighs the likelihood of whether or not Paul ever stood trial before Caesar, since the book of Acts closes without telling us. To those of us who believe the Bible, there isn't any doubt that Paul eventually proclaimed the gospel to Caesar, as the angel who appeared to him on that Alexandrian ship told Paul, "You must stand before Caesar" (27:24). That means, of course, that God would have forgiven Nero for executing his mother and kicking one of his pregnant wives to death (among his many other atrocities) if he would have repented. Amazing grace!