

<sup>27</sup> But when the fourteenth night came, as we were being driven about in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors *began* to surmise that they were approaching some land<sup>a</sup>. <sup>28</sup> They took soundings and found *it to be* twenty fathoms; and a little farther on they took another sounding and found *it to be* fifteen fathoms<sup>b</sup>. <sup>29</sup> Fearing that we might run aground somewhere on the rocks, they cast four anchors from the stern and wished for daybreak<sup>c</sup>. <sup>30</sup> But as the sailors were trying to escape from the ship and had let down the *ship's* boat into the sea, on the pretense of intending to lay out anchors from the bow<sup>d</sup>, <sup>31</sup> Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, "Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved<sup>e</sup>." <sup>32</sup> Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the *ship's* boat and let it fall away.

<sup>33</sup> Until the day was about to dawn, Paul was encouraging them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have been constantly watching and going without eating, having taken nothing. <sup>34</sup> Therefore I encourage you to take some food, for this is for your preservation, for not a hair from the head of any of you will perish<sup>f</sup>." <sup>35</sup> Having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to eat<sup>g</sup>. <sup>36</sup> All of

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<sup>a</sup> 27:27 **But when the fourteenth night came, as we were being driven about in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors *began* to surmise that they were approaching some land.**

This was not the part of the Adriatic that sits between Greece and Italy but that part which extended down into the Mediterranean.

<sup>b</sup> 27:28 **They took soundings and found *it to be* twenty fathoms; and a little farther on they took another sounding and found *it to be* fifteen fathoms.** The water was getting increasingly shallow, an indication that they were either closing in on land or rocks.

<sup>c</sup> 27:29 **Fearing that we might run aground somewhere on the rocks, they cast four anchors from the stern and wished for daybreak.** The sea anchor already dropped, these additional anchors dropped from the stern (back) of the boat could now reach the bottom, further slowing the vessel's approach to any rocks or sandbars.

Created in the image of God for worship, but marred by the fall, these men prayed and wished toward anything outside themselves to rescue them. Living through this dangerous object lesson with them and recognizing an opportunity to show them what they were missing, Paul pointed them toward their only hope.

<sup>d</sup> 27:30 **But as the sailors were trying to escape from the ship and had let down the *ship's* boat into the sea, on the pretense of intending to lay out anchors from the bow.** The sailors knew an imminent shipwreck when they saw it. They became actors, pretending to let down more anchors from the front of the ship so they could get away in the lifeboat. They obviously knew that 276 people could not fit on the lifeboat, but that a group of sailors could. Paul saw through their ruse and informed the centurion, who foiled the plot.

How very much like the men of this world were those sailors. They had a word from God on how they could be saved, but instead chose to pursue salvation their own way.

<sup>e</sup> 27:31 **Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, "Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved."** Here you see the sovereignty of God meet the responsibility of man. Paul had assured his shipmates (verse 25) that he trusted God to keep his promise and in the end spare everyone on the ship. Paul also knew that God's means of sparing the ship was to keep the sneaky sailors on board. They were subject to the sovereign decrees of God, but were also accountable to behave responsibly.

Likewise, we acknowledge that those who will be saved are foreknown and predestined, but none of them will be saved without hearing the gospel and repenting. God planned all the *ends* of the universe, but He has also ordained that much of His plan will be accomplished through *means*—when His people do His will and pray for it "on earth as it is in heaven."

<sup>f</sup> 27:34 **Therefore I encourage you to take some food, for this is for your preservation, for not a hair from the head of any of you will perish.** Such a long fast would likely have produced devastating physical effects as well as hallucinations.

<sup>g</sup> 27:35 **Having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to eat.** Paul was unashamed to bless God for the food even though

them were encouraged and they themselves also took food. <sup>37</sup> All of us in the ship were two hundred and seventy-six persons. <sup>38</sup> When they had eaten enough, they *began* to lighten the ship by throwing out the wheat into the sea<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> When day came, they could not recognize the land; but they did observe a bay with a beach, and they resolved to drive the ship onto it if they could. <sup>40</sup> And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea while at the same time they were loosening the ropes of the rudders; and hoisting the foresail to the wind, they were heading for the beach. <sup>41</sup> But striking a reef where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern *began* to be broken up by the force of *the waves*. <sup>42</sup> The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none of *them* would swim away and escape; <sup>43</sup> but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land<sup>b</sup>, <sup>44</sup> and the rest *should follow*, some on planks, and others on various things from the ship. And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land<sup>c, d</sup>.

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circumstances left men feeling anything but thankful. Paul was an instrument of hope, an ambassador of Jesus Christ carrying news that more than one type of deliverance was available. God's people should remember during good times that hard times are often the best times to be bold and show Jesus to people in darkness.

<sup>a</sup> 27:38 **When they had eaten enough, they *began* to lighten the ship by throwing out the wheat into the sea.** Ballast was no longer an issue in a ship about to run aground. Throwing the valuable grain overboard allowed the ship to sit higher in the water to get it closer to shore before becoming stuck. As is often the case in life, that which promises to enrich us in the short term only serves to endanger us in the long term.

<sup>b</sup> 27:42-43 **The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none of *them* would swim away and escape; but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land.** In the same way as the plot of the scheming sailors was overturned, the centurion thwarted a mass execution by his men. We are not told just how Julius prevented the soldiers from carrying out the executions, but have already learned what motivated him to do so. God placed Paul in the favor of this centurion and God's man was the means of sparing all the other prisoners. As Abraham discovered before the destruction of Sodom (Genesis 18:23-33), God's hand of judgment on sinners is often restrained by the presence of His own in their midst.

<sup>c</sup> 27:44 **and the rest *should follow*, some on planks, and others on various things from the ship. And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land.** "So it happened." God kept his word.

<sup>d</sup> 27:27-44 The Westminster Shorter Catechism communicates the way God's sovereignty and man's responsibility play out in time. The rule of God takes on particular significance when we describe how the Bible says the world turns and how people come to saving faith.

Q. 11. What is God's providence?

A. God's providence is His completely holy, wise, and powerful will, preserving and governing every creature and every action.

Q. 20. Did God leave all mankind to die in sin and misery?

A. From all eternity and merely because it pleased Him, God chose some, out of grace, to have everlasting life. These He freed from sin and misery by a covenant of grace and brought them to salvation by a redeemer.

Joseph, for instance, lived a roller coaster life from being a victim to being a ruler, but God sent him to the most strategic place for kingdom usefulness. Joseph recognized that human plots in the little picture play into the master plan in the *biggest* picture. Here are his words to the men who bullied him, plotted his death, and sold him into slavery.

As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. Genesis 50:20

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King Nebuchadnezzar once thought that he was the king of the world. After God's judgment of humbling the proud king for seven years, Nebuchadnezzar confessed that God keeps His plans no matter what happens in the world of men:

All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,  
But He does according to His will in the host of heaven  
And *among* the inhabitants of earth;  
And no one can ward off His hand  
Or say to Him, "What have You done?" Daniel 4:35

Corrie ten Boom lived through some horrific storms after her family was found to be harboring Jews in Hitler-era Holland. She wrote a poem that illustrates God's good design even in all the grief:

My life is but a weaving  
Between my God and me.  
I cannot choose the colors  
He weaveth steadily.  
Oft' times He weaveth sorrow;  
And I in foolish pride  
Forget He sees the upper  
And I the underside.  
Not 'til the loom is silent  
And the shuttles cease to fly  
Will God unroll the canvas  
And reveal the reason why.  
The dark threads are as needful  
In the weaver's skillful hand  
As the threads of gold and silver  
In the pattern He has planned  
He knows, He loves, He cares;  
Nothing this truth can dim.  
He gives the very best to those  
Who leave the choice to Him.

A storm at sea was a living illustration of the doctrines of grace that Paul delivered in his epistles. Some have attempted to reconcile the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man by illustrating each with a rail of a train track. The two parallel lines, they say, never meet.

Unfortunately such an illustration comes up short because it creates a contradiction in Scripture that can never be resolved. It also fails to acknowledge that man's "freedom" must bow to God's freedom. Better to illustrate it as an unseen artist skillfully using his tools to create a masterpiece that often appears disorderly until it is finished. Note the work of the Master Artist revealing these vital truths during a storm at sea:

1. God's plan will be accomplished. God told Paul that he and the every passenger would survive the shipwreck. God has a sovereign plan for this world that will be accomplished.
2. God will use human means to achieve his end. Paul reminded the soldiers that God's plan for their survival included the skill of sailors. Likewise, God will save his people but they will not be saved apart from hearing the message and believing it.
3. Men should not despair that God's plan is unmerciful. Paul encouraged the hopeless with news of God's control. We have no right to refuse the sincere offer of hope to lost people.
4. Men should not presume that God's wrath is undeserved. Paul was not afraid to warn people of the potential to be lost. Ultimately, eternal punishment will fall only upon those who have rejected salvation in Christ.

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