

In the Storms of Life, God is our Refuge!

I. Storms impact our lives

II. God and his promises give us hope

13 When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. 14 Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the Northeaster, swept down from the island. 15 The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. 16 As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure, 17 so the men hoisted it aboard. Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Because they were afraid they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor[a] and let the ship be driven along. 18 We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. 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."

I expect it's happened to all of us at one time or another. A time when we thought it would be nice weather, when all of a sudden we were caught in a nasty storm. For me, it happened just last week. I was out fishing with my brothers in Minnesota, a gentle breeze was blowing, when just like that, the wind shifted and suddenly there are white caps on the water, the rain is coming down in sheets and by the time we got back to the dock we were absolutely drenched. I expect you all have your own story about a time you got caught in a storm, maybe even a storm that put your life in danger. Whether it was from a tree being blown over by the wind or a tornado tearing the roof off your house or waves swamping in your boat, storms can bring a great deal of stress into our lives. They can fill our hearts with fear. And leave us craving a shelter from the storm.

Well, you realize, that's true not only regarding the physical storms we encounter in life. It's also true regarding the emotional storms we encounter in life. Times when kind of out of the blue, something unexpected happens. Your employer decides to go a different direction and suddenly you're without a job. The person you thought was in love with you now says he or she is not. The person you spent your entire married life with has now passed on. All these things can create spiritual and emotional storms in our lives. They can leave us feeling battered and beaten down. They can leave us feeling lost and afraid and alone. And most of all, they can leave us craving some shelter from the storm, craving a place where we can find peace and rest and

hope.

My friends, in our study of God's word today, we're going to draw some parallels between a physical storm that the Apostle Paul found himself caught in, and the emotional storms that we sometimes have to go through in life. We'll discover that in the end, there is only one person who can give us true shelter from the storms we face in life. Our theme for today is simply this:

In the Storms of Life, God is our Refuge.

We'll see that I. Storms impact our lives

And yet, II. God and his promises give us hope.

The account that we have before us in the second to the last chapter of the book of Acts. The Apostle Paul has completed three missionary journeys and is now in the custody of the Roman government for the crime of preaching the good news of Jesus. He's being transported by ship from Jerusalem to Rome to stand trial before the Roman emperor. But on the way across the Mediterranean Sea, the ship runs into some major problems. St. Luke, who was the author of the book of Acts and who accompanied Paul on this journey offers this eye witness account of the sailor's actions. 13 When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. 14 Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the Northeaster, swept down from the island. 15 The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. 16 As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure, 17 so the men hoisted it aboard. Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. (The ship was literally "coming apart at the seams") Because they were afraid they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor (that was like a canvass funnel they pulled through the water to slow the ship down). and let the ship be driven along. 18 We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. 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.

Obviously, that was a violent storm. The question is, are there any parallels between that storm on the Mediterranean and the storms that sometimes arise in our lives? I think there are.

1. That storm came up very unexpectedly. The day started with a gentle breeze, but it ended with a hurricane. Kind of like when you go to the doctor for what you thought was a routine exam, and you come out with a diagnosis of stage 4 cancer. Or you thought your finances were in good shape, until the collection agency calls to inform you that your spouse has run up \$30,000 of credit card debt. Sometimes the storms in life come up seemingly out of nowhere.

And when they do, our first reaction is often, "I'll handle this myself." Again, kind of like those sailors. "We've got this under control. We know the tricks of the trade. We'll batten down the lifeboat. We'll rope the ship together. This storm isn't going to get the best of us." Kind of like when we face a storm in life and we say, "I can handle this one myself. As long as I eat right, get enough sleep and do my meditation, I'll get through this." But what happens if, in spite of all you do, the storm doesn't stop? What happens if it the storm goes on for days, or months or years? What happens, if like the sailors, you start to lose your bearings; you don't know where you are, or where you're going. Well, I'll tell you what happens to a lot of people. They lose hope. They do exactly what the people on the boat with St. Paul did. Luke tells us "We finally gave up all hope of being saved."

The question is, what will keep that from happening to you? When the storms come up in

your life, and they certainly will, when they rage longer and harder than you ever expect it, when your world is turned completely upside down, when from a human perspective, things look really bleak—what’s going to keep you from losing hope? The answer is the very same thing that kept the Apostle Paul from losing hope in the middle of the storm raging all around him. The answer is: God and the promises he’s made to you. While it’s certainly true that I. Storms impact our lives, the fact is, II. God and His Promises give us hope.

Isn’t that what made the difference in Paul’s life? I mean, Paul is in the same situation that everyone else was in, the same boat, the same storm, the same seemingly dire straits. So what made the difference? Why was Paul the one person who was saying, “Take courage,” when everyone else was losing hope? The answer is, because Paul was clinging to the promises that God had made to him. What does Paul say to his fellow passengers? “I urge you to keep up your courage because not one of you will be lost.” Now how could Paul know that? How could Paul be sure that not one of them would be lost? Well, Paul answers that question when he goes on to explain to his fellow passengers, “Last night an angel of the God who I am and who I serve stood beside me 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.’” (Acts 27:23-24)

In other words, God had made a specific promise to Paul. God promised that Paul was going to stand trial before Caesar in Rome. That means that Paul couldn’t die in the storm, because God had made him a date with the Emperor. It was that promise that gave Paul hope and courage in the face of a storm.

Now contrast Paul’s attitude with the attitude of the disciples in our Gospel reading today. When the disciples were caught in a ferocious storm on the Sea of Galilee, they were terrified. They were sure they were going to drown. What’s worse, they were sure that Jesus didn’t care that they were about to drown. But after Jesus rebuked the wind and stilled the storm, what does he say to them? “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” With those words, Jesus was not accusing them of not believing in him as their Savior from sin. No, he was chiding them for not believing all the other promises he had made to them. For example, Jesus had already promised them that he was going to make them fishers of men. Well, if they had thought about that promise, they would have realized, “Wait a minute. It’s going to be pretty hard for Jesus to make us fishers of men if we all drown in the Sea of Galilee. That promise gives us hope that our lives will be spared. That promise is what gives us courage, even in the midst of a storm.”

If you think about it, isn’t the same thing true for you and me today? God has made us number of promises that enable us to weather the storms of life. No, God didn’t send an angel to tell us that we’ve got a date with Emperor, and therefore our life is going to be spared. But he still made us plenty of promises. And he recorded them right here in his word. Promises that give us hope even in the middle of the emotional storms of this world.

For example, God promises in Hebrews 13 v.5, “Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you.” Even if your spouse decides to walk away from the marriage, you can be sure that God won’t abandon you. God guarantees that he’s walking with you every step of the way. In His Word, God promises that in all things he works for the good of those who love him. (Romans 8:28) That means that even if we lose our job, our health, our loved one, God can still use those trials to serve a good purpose, as we learn to trust God and thank you for what we have, not what we don’t have. And even when the trials we face are truly painful, we have God’s promise that “suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope. And hope does not disappoint because God has poured out his love into our hearts.” (Romans 5:3-5)

There’s the key, isn’t it? God continues to pour his love into our hearts. Even when we

face storms in life. Even when those storms in life are created by our own sins. When our own stubbornness to have the last word is what keeps the storm brewing and the pot stirred. When our refusal to be a peacemaker creates tension on the job, when our inability to let God handle what we can't handle, when our determination to worry about things we can't control, when all those things create these storms in our minds, well, even then God loves us. He forgives us. He assures us that we are his children in Christ. How does St. John put it? How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are. (1 John 3:1)

Isn't that what, ultimately, gives us shelter from the storms of life? Just knowing that, for Jesus' sake, we're all right with God. We are in God's good hands. In fact, isn't that the truth that Paul confesses here in our text? Did you catch it? When Paul tells the men about the message he received from God, what does he say? "Last night an angel of the God whose I am. (Acts 27:23). Isn't that a beautiful confession of faith? Paul is confessing that he belongs to God. Even though Paul knows that throughout the course of his life, he had done plenty of things to separate himself from God, still Paul knows that God has redeemed him, that is, he bought him back with the blood of Jesus. He made Paul his own.

My friends, isn't the same thing true for you and me? In spite of our sins and failings, God has made us right in his eyes, for the sake of Jesus. And that's what puts our hearts at rest. That's what give us shelter from the emotional storms of life. There may be storms raging all around us as the world becomes more and more hostile to God and His will for our lives. There may be storms raging inside of us as our Old Man wages war against our New Man. But in spite of all this turmoil, we can take refuge in God's unbreakable promise of his unconditional love for us in Christ. How does God put it in Isaiah 54:10? "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my Covenant of peace be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you."

The bottom line is this. God never promised to spare you and me from the physical storms in life. It may still rain on our picnic today. A tree limb may still come crashing down on your car tomorrow. And God never promised to spare us from every emotional storm of life either. Scripture says "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God. (Acts 14:22) What God did promise you, what you can build your faith on, what you can hold onto in life and death, is the fact that, in Jesus, your sins are paid in full. By God's grace, you are a child of God and God will cause all things to serve your eternal good. In those rock solid promises of God, you will find your ultimate refuge in life—on both sides of the grave. God grant it, for Jesus' sake. Amen.